

**CONTESTING NARRATIVES: CONSTRUCTIONS OF THE SELF AND  
THE NATION IN ZIMBABWEAN POLITICAL AUTO/BIOGRAPHY**

by

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**Submitted in accordance with the requirements**

**for the Degree of**

**DOCTOR OF LITERATURE AND PHILOSOPHY**

**In the subject of**

**ENGLISH**

**At the**

**UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA**

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**SEPTEMBER 2011**

## **DECLARATION**

**I, Tasiyana Dzikai Javangwe, Registration number 4494-152-8,** hereby declare that this thesis is my own original work, has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other university, and that the sources I have used have been fully acknowledged by complete references. This thesis is submitted in fulfilment of the Doctor of Literature and Philosophy Degree in the Department of English at the University of South Africa.

Signature.....Date.....

## SUMMARY

This study is an interpretive analysis of Zimbabwean political auto/biographical narratives in contexts of changing culture, race, ethnicity and gender identity images of the self and nation. I used eclectic theories of postcolonialism to explore the fractured nature of both the processes of identity construction and narration, and the contradictions inherent in identity categories of nation and self. The problem of using autobiographical memory to recall the momentous events that formed the contradictory identities of self and nation in the creative imagination of the lives of Ian Smith, Maurice Nyagumbo, Abel Muzorewa, Joshua Nkomo, Doris Lessing, Fay Chung, Judith Garfield Todd, Tendai Westerhof and Lutanga Shaba have been highlighted. The study concluded that there are narrative and ideological disjunctures between experiencing life and narrating those experiences to create approximations of coherent identities of individual selves and those of the nation. The study argued that each of the stories analyzed in this study contributed a version of the multiple Zimbabwean narratives that no one story could ever tell without being contested by others. Thus the study explores how white Rhodesian auto/biographies depend on the imperial repertoire to construct varying, even contradicting, images of white identities and the Rhodesian nation, which are also contested by black nationalist life narratives. The narratives by women writers, both white and black, introduced further instabilities to the male authored narratives by moving beyond the conventional understanding of what is 'political' in political auto/biographies. The HIV and AIDS narratives by black women thrust into the public sphere personalized versions of self so that the political consequence of their inclusion was not only to image Zimbabwe as a diseased society, but one desperately in need of political solutions to confront the different pathologies inherited from colonialism and which also have continued in the post-independence period.

## **KEY TERMS**

- Political auto/biography,
- self identity,
- nation,
- representation,
- autre-biography,
- postcolonial,
- subjectivity,
- social constructionism,
- imagined community,
- dis/eased identities,
- marginality

## **ACRONYMS**

ANC- African National Congress

OAU- Organization of African Unity

ZANU PF- Zimbabwe African National Unity- Patriotic Front

PF-ZAPU- Patriotic Front- Zimbabwe African People's Union

RF- Rhodesian Front

UFP- United Federal Party

UDI- Unilateral Declaration of Independence

USA- United States America

ZANLA- Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army

ZIPRA- Zimbabwe People's Liberation Army

PCC- People's Caretaker Council

FRROLIZI- Front for the Liberation of Zimbabwe

NDP- National Democratic Party

UANC-United African National Council

CIA Central Intelligence Agency

ZUM- Zimbabwe Unity Movement

MDC- Movement for Democratic Change

ZPT-Zimbabwe Project Trust

HIV/AIDS- Human Immuno-Deficiency Virus/ Acquired Immuno-Deficiency Syndrome

STI- Sexually Transmitted Infection

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

This study was made possible through the financial support generously extended to me by the UNISA Financial Aid Bureau. I am greatly indebted to them for the assistance. I am also very grateful to my supervisor, Professor M.T. Vambe for the inspiration, intellectual mentorship and encouragement that made the completion of this study possible. To Dr. Nhamo Mhiripiri, I say thank you for the honest criticism, inspirational support and for availing your intellectual resources to my disposal. My gratitude also goes to the Executive Dean of the Faculty of Arts at Midlands State University, Professor Charles Pfukwa, whose moral and professional support enabled me to pursue my studies and attend to work obligations without conflict. I also thank colleagues in the Department of English and Communication at Midlands State University, namely Hazel Ngoshi, Elda Hungwe, Terrence Musanga, Francis Mungana, Cuthbert Tagwirei and Ernest Jakaza, for standing in for me whenever study duty called. To the Midlands University Library staff in general and Mr. A. Makandwa in particular, I convey my sincere thanks for the assistance. Finally, to my wife, Elenia, I say you are the fountain from which I continue to replenish my zeal for more knowledge.

I also dedicate this work in memory of my departed father, Dzikai Javangwe, who passed on in the midst of this intellectual endeavor.

To Tatenda, Tivonge and Takudzwa, shandai nesimba

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I declare that **CONTESTING NARRATIVES: CONSTRUCTIONS OF THE SELF AND THE NATION IN ZIMBABWEAN POLITICAL AUTO/BIOGRAPHY** is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

  
SIGNATURE  
(Mr TD Javangwe )

27-07-2011  
DATE

## ABSTRACT

This study is an interpretive analysis of Zimbabwean political auto/biographical narratives in contexts of changing culture, race, ethnicity and gender identity images of the self and nation. I used eclectic theories of postcolonialism to explore the fractured nature of both the processes of identity construction and narration, and the contradictions inherent in identity categories of nation and self. The problem of using autobiographical memory to recall the momentous events that formed the contradictory identities of self and nation in the creative imagination of the lives of Ian Smith, Maurice Nyagumbo, Abel Muzorewa, Joshua Nkomo, Doris Lessing, Fay Chung, Judith Garfield Todd, Tendai Westerhof and Lutanga Shaba have been highlighted. The study concluded that there are narrative and ideological disjunctures between experiencing life and narrating those experiences to create approximations of coherent identities of individual selves and those of the nation. The study argued that each of the stories analyzed in this study contributed a version of the multiple Zimbabwean narratives that no one story could ever tell without being contested by others. Thus the study explores how white Rhodesian auto/biographies depend on the imperial repertoire to construct varying, even contradicting, images of white identities and the Rhodesian nation, which are also contested by black nationalist life narratives. The narratives by women writers, both white and black, introduced further instabilities to the male authored narratives by moving beyond the conventional understanding of what is 'political' in political auto/biographies. The HIV and AIDS narratives by black women thrust into the public sphere personalized versions of self so that the political consequence of their inclusion was not only to image Zimbabwe as a diseased society, but one desperately in need of political solutions to confront the different pathologies inherited from colonialism and which also have continued in the post-independence period.

## **Chapter One: Introduction**

### **1.0 Background to the study**

Zimbabwe gained independence from Britain in 1980 following intense military struggle and diplomatic efforts. The birth of the Zimbabwean nation, just like any other nation, was accompanied by conscious political and cultural efforts to consolidate its existence. Subsequently, on the cultural platform, there was the need to further consolidate that independence through rewriting the history of the liberation struggle and the nation. Vambe's (1976) quasi-biography of the Chishawasha people explores the cultural and political strains that colonial occupation visited upon the Zimbabwean people. It suggests the disappearance of the Africans' autonomy in the wake of settler occupation that needed to be recovered through resistance. The historian T.O. Ranger (1967, 1970, and 1985) provides the early context for writing the emergency of the new nation by exploring the development of nationalism from the early years of settler occupation. His works are concerned with a history that is in "the service of nationalism" (Ranger, 2005:217) at a time when contestation is marked in binary terms of settler occupation versus African nationalism. Beyond the incipient teething problems that characterize the nationalist movement, such a historical narrative fails to expose the myriad fault-lines that will come to typify nationalism once the desired independence is attained. Bhebe (1999) also advances this nationalistic historiography by focusing on the military aspects of the participating African forces as well as the involvement of the church in the struggle for the liberation of Zimbabwe. The focus of both historians on African nationalism as a largely coherent movement also has the shortcoming of depicting Rhodesian colonialism as somewhat stable and without internal contradictions of its own. The political life narrative of White Rhodesians, on the contrary, betrays a penchant for revealing a complex, multi-layered conception and construction of self identity and the Rhodesian nation that has eluded the attention of history.

On the other extreme end, David Martin and Phyllis Johnson's (1981) do not only provide a counter discourse to the Rhodesian narrative of self and nation, but construct the Zimbabwean nation in a way that thrusts ZANU-PF at the centre of the nation. Other key political players such as PF-ZAPU are relegated to marginal roles, or at worst excluded, in the narrative of the new nation. The result is an oversimplification of the discursive and physical processes that undergird the construction of both nation and self identity. Their version[s] of history leaves gaps where

political auto/biography, which employs subjective renditions of participants in the struggle to liberate Zimbabwe, can contest the narrative monopoly of ZANU-PF. Martin and Johnson's thrust is somewhat replicated on the literary scene where a new fiction emerged that also sought to counter Rhodesian myth of invincibility as well as provide a therapeutic balm to the war-injured-psyches of the former colonial subjects. Chipamunga's (1983) *A Fighter for Freedom* and Mutasa's (1985) *The Contact* are an attempt to re-evaluate and rewrite the balance of power between the settler war machinery and nationalist guerrillas. Their approaches are critically important for propping up the foundations of the new nation as well as cultivating new ground for cultural renewal. Nevertheless, there is a tendency in such fiction to gloss over the serious disparities and contradictions inherent in the consciousness of different individuals participating in the liberation struggle as well as in the struggle itself. Fiction in this way misses the subjective element of experience that the auto/biographical form, by privileging the subjective "I" as the centre of apprehending reality, is able to render. Thus this study will approach the subject of self identity and nation from the angle of political auto/biography by both white and black political players.

This study will provide an overview of the chosen area of study, as well as justify it. Under area of study an attempt will be made to explore the possible political meaning(s) that the genre of auto/biography can subsume. This section will also explain the context in which political auto/biography in Zimbabwe has become such a critical tool for reading and understanding identity politics both at the level of the self and nation. Because political auto/biography highlights as well as interrogates the individual's conception of self and of nation, it exposes the contradictions within these categories as well as their contestedness. In the case of Zimbabwe, the question of nation is embedded in "the politics of the past" (Fontein, 2006:11) where early Eurocentric historiography contested the indigenous status of Great Zimbabwe, the symbolic heritage that inspires the construction of the modern Zimbabwean nation. Fontein (ibid. p.10) cites the emergency in the 1960s of revisionist "exotic/foreign origins theories in direct confrontation to African nationalist use of Great Zimbabwe as an example of past achievement." Such a contestation had as its objective the preparation of a historical and moral legitimacy for colonization and hence laying the groundwork for settler Rhodesia. On the other hand, Ranger (1987) registers that the symbolic heritage of Great Zimbabwe also began to assume a "disproportionate significance to black nationalists" in response to white settler attempts to claim

the heritage as their own. In the post independence era this trend manifests itself in what Ranger (2005:220) has called “patriotic history.” Patriotic history is a form of representation that is narrower than nationalistic historiography in that it “resents the ‘disloyal’ questions raised by historians of nationalism” (ibid.). This is how the dominant ZANU-PF party has sought to represent the nation to the exclusion of any other contesting narratives. But its approach cannot totally contain the subversions spelt out by alternative voices or narratives on the construction of nation and self.

The recent flux in auto/biographical writing in the country is a testimony to the quest for more subjective interpretations of experience, especially after the political and socio-economic crisis that Zimbabwe went through in the last decade. It came about as an attempt to interpret personal experience in the wake of aggressive attempts to define nation made by the state through the then ruling part of the day, ZANU PF, (Hammar et al, 2003) as well as by civic groups and individuals keen to mark their own narrative and ultimately ideological spaces. This upsurge of interest justifies the need for a scholarly scrutiny of why political auto/biography is central to identity construction processes. Its claims to stable identity and authentic experience, though fraught with internal contradictions, give the auto/biographical form an edge over fiction that solely relies on metaphor to represent the complex concepts of self and nation. The theories used to interpret fiction in Zimbabwe have also tended to privilege formalistic matters and sociological themes at the expense of subjective exploration of the categories of self and nation.

### **1.1 Statement of the Problem**

Despite claiming to authorize an authentic account of self and nation, the form of auto/biography is partial. It is riven with its own contradictions that derive from mediations of memory and ideological and cultural biases that tend to promote the agenda of the individual subject. Thus life narratives from different individuals, even if they belong to the same cultural group, will apprehend and interpret experience differently. Rhodesian white narratives vary in their understanding and definition of the Rhodesian cause. For instance, whereas some narratives construct Rhodesia as an offshoot of the British Empire (Smith, 1997; Godwin, 1996), Hodder-Williams (1983:3) contends that White settlement in Southern Rhodesia “was originally fired not by any sense of imperial mission, but by the prospect of a second Rand.” There are also marked departures in how black nationalists’ auto/biographies interpret their experiences in relation to



the Zimbabwean nation. They authorize different versions of self and nation, often seeking to exclude competing narratives. Alexander, McGregor and Ranger (2000:1) observe that the Zimbabwean political elite's "version of nationalist history was decidedly partial." Such partiality does not only exclude perceived political rivals, but also the ordinary people whose subjective experience is not rendered into auto/biographical narrative. There is an elitist tenor in the writing of Zimbabwean political auto/biography, which makes the understanding of what is 'political' in these narratives narrow, and self-serving. It fails to anticipate that both the self and the nation that they seek to represent as cohesive is always shifting, fractured and that this is a condition of possibility for creating new identities.

In this study I want to demonstrate how the 'political' in auto/biographical works impinges on processes of constructing the self and nation. This will be done through analyzing the cultural symbols that the phenomenon of autobiographical narratives is constructed from to qualify as a product of a contested history and culture themselves capable of further recreating continual moments of contestable emergent historical identities of the self and nation in Zimbabwe. The auto/biographies that fit this description in Zimbabwe are Ian Douglas Smith's *Bitter Harvest: The Great Betrayal and the Dreadful Aftermath* (1987), Peter Godwin, *Mukiwa: A White Boy in Africa* (1996), Maurice Nyagumbo, *With the People: An Autobiography From the Zimbabwean Struggle* (1980), Abel Muzorewa, *Rise Up and Walk*, Joshua Nkomo, *Nkomo- The Story of My Life* (1984), Edgar Tekere, *A Lifetime of Struggle* (2007), Doris Lessing, *Under My Skin, Volume One of My Autobiography up to 1949* (1994), Fay Chung, *Re-Living the Second Chimurenga* (2006), Judith Garfield Todd, *Through The Darkness: A Life In Zimbabwe* (2007), Tendayi Westerhorf's *Unlucky in Love* (2005) and Lutanga Shaba's *Secrets of a Woman's Soul*(2005). As is inherent to the genre of auto/biography, these narratives all perform "several rhetorical acts: justifying their own perceptions, upholding their reputations, disputing the accounts of others, settling scores, conveying cultural information and inventing desirable futures among others" (Smith and Watson, op cit. p.10).

## **1.2 Key Questions Upon Which Study is Based**

In this study, the following key questions shall form the basis of investigation:

- What are the specific forms of identities of self and nation that are depicted in the Zimbabwean political auto/biography?
- Why, and in what ways does the political auto/biographical form conceive, construct and destabilize identities of the self and the nation?
- In what ways do the constructions of self and nation depicted in the auto/biography deepen the Zimbabwean society's quest for lasting democratic institutions?

To answer these questions one must use auto/biography to confront, challenge and contest a coercive official ZANU PF narrative of 'patriotic history' (Ranger 2005: 220). This narrative insists that there can only be a single identity for all Zimbabweans. This absolute narrative is captured in the ruling ZANU PF campaign statement, which is that the 'Land is the economy, the economy is the Land' (Mugabe 2001). Such a construction strives to reduce all struggles to struggles against an imagined imperialist force. It is a narrative, according to Ranger (2005: 220), that is "more narrow than old nationalist historiography which celebrated aspiration and modernization as well as resistance." This reading of the Zimbabwean experience regards as irrelevant any history which is not political and it is explicitly antagonistic to academic historiography. The uncritical attitude that 'old nationalist historiographical' narrative is not hegemonic, and that it celebrates 'aspiration and modernization' is another coercive narrative. It will also be interrogated because it takes for granted that modernity is out there and cannot be problematised.

Furthermore, coercive narratives also exist within the emerging political parties and these narratives manifest in the insistence that in post independence Zimbabwe the ruling party is responsible for all the misfortunes of the country. Oppositional political discourses have also been entrapped because they have started taking on the values, complexion and authoritarian tendencies of the very same political movements they purport to fight. Some white Rhodesian narratives that promote unequal access to resources in post independence Zimbabwe are still very much alive. Thus, 'patriotic history' whether authorized by white writers, ZANU PF, or contained in the literary auto/biographies by black men and women should be questioned because it not only resents "the 'disloyal' questions" (ibid) but also in some ways essentializes identity narratives of self and nation.

The process of writing an alternative identity of the self does imply a preliminary critique of the very same identities that are being constructed. Political auto/biography from Zimbabwe is unique not only because it emerges from black, white, male and female writers, but also because, in Berryman's (1999:75) words, it recreates past experience, and invokes narrative concerns such as "point of view, selection of detail and concept of audience." This is important in Zimbabwe given its recent history which shows tendencies towards "intensified assertions of sovereignty, increasing violent modes of rule, deepening forms of authoritarian nationalism, and narrowing spaces of citizenship." (Hammar et al, 2003:2) This "mutating millennium crisis" (ibid) has triggered responses from erstwhile and current political players as well as those who inhabit the margins in the form of political auto/biographies. The common thread is the way in which the writers considered in this study delineate both individual and national space in an environment that seeks to exclude the other in its definition of the self. This is both true of the Rhodesian situation and the post-independence dispensation.

The reliance on memory introduces a clear problematique in the study of political auto/biography as it implies recreating the past events, experiences, history and perspectives from it. Memory has its inherent politics of deliberate or inadvertent omissions and commissions, falsifications and reconstructions to suit present circumstances. All this means that sources in auto/biography writing are only useful to the extent to which they coincide with the act of the writer's remembering, or preferred memories. The narrator is at the center of the writing, and is writing the self into existence and persuading the readers to his/her version of experience. As Smith and Watson (2001:5) argue, writers of auto/biography write about their own lives and do so from externalized and internal points of view. In other words the auto/biographer writes his subjectivity as well as address the public self that is known to others, that is the social, historical self with achievements, personal appearance and social relationships. This study therefore seeks to critically contest the assumption that auto/biography provides 'stable' identities of the self. Offsetting the interpretive strategies within auto/biographies against 'patriotic history' and against other auto/biography produces several versions of the self (Coetzee, 2006) and nation out of the many potential identities which acts of narration can render possible. The focus on the political self in auto/biography invokes heavily nuanced interpretations of the self as an identity

category that has its political dimension. The politics of the self involve constant negotiation for space and influence in various relationships, either at the individual or national level. The study invariably interrogates the assumption that political auto/biography calls for open rebellion or aggression against a perceived other.

This research will focus on Zimbabwean political auto/biographies that are evidently in the realm of public politics and also the subtle types where individuals strive to make meaning of their identities in complex networks of relationships. The study will further interrogate what is distinctly 'political' in this genre. This involves exploring auto/biographies whose thematic canvas is not limited to palpable 'political' movements. Furthermore the study equally questions the notion of the 'content of form' (White 1987), an important aspect that relates to how authors use certain styles and techniques in narrating their lives and how they place these techniques in the auto/biography as strategic literary ways that force the auto/biography to refuse to be read or interpreted in a single direction. Such a definition is flexible enough to accommodate not only the publicly political, but auto/biographies whose thrust is to justify individual perceptions or ideals, convey cultural information and settling scores.

### **1.3 Research Objectives**

By the end of the study it is hoped that

- Autobiography is defined
- The 'political' nuances in Zimbabwean political auto/biography are identified and explained
- Analysis of white-authored political auto/biographies in relation to self and nation is done
- Analysis of black authored political auto/biographies in relation to self and nation is done
- Comparative evaluation of black political life narratives and white political life narratives is done.
- Recommendation on the significance of political auto/biography to the understanding of identities is given

In order to accomplish these tasks convincingly, we need to understand the nature of autobiography.

#### **1.4 Understanding Autobiography**

Scholarly opinion concurs that the term autobiography covers “the many different accounts that authors make of their experiences.”(Berryman (1999:72). As such, this study will prefer to use the demarcated term “auto/biography” in an attempt to accommodate the various accounts that can qualify under this loose assemblage. The term is a derivation from Greek with “auto” meaning “self”, “bios” –“life” and “graphe”- writing. In this etymological sense autobiography thus refers to self life- writing (Smith and Watson, 2001:1). Memoirs are included in the scope of this study as in the not too strict a sense they qualify as auto/biography. McArthur (1992:650) defines memoir as a “written record of people or events as experienced by the author; a form of autobiography that gives particular attention to matters of contemporary interest not closely affecting the author’s inner life.” There are obvious connotations into generally accepted auto/biography, and strong ties to political auto/biography emanating from the memoir’s attention to contemporary matters. These descriptions of the genre of auto/biography are useful to this study because they suggest a rejection of essentialized definitions of the genre. As early as the 18<sup>th</sup> century the auto/biographical genre in the Western world had generated considerable interest in the reading public (Smith and Watson (2001). Interestingly, right into the contemporary day the genre has continued to defy neat containment under one definition.

Gusdorf (2001) situates the genre of auto/biography in the literary tradition. In this study, auto/biography will be repatriated into the specific field of literary study though its links with other disciplines such as history will be acknowledged. The creative element in auto/biography, which stems from mediations of memory, is noted by many scholars (Smith and Watson, 2001, Lessing, 1994), and from this derives its claims to literariness. This also accounts for its generic complexity as the auto/biographical form makes claims to factualness. This study will also contest the idea that auto/biography is an amalgam of fact and fiction (Vambe 2008a). I will argue that the factual and the fictional in auto/biography are not binaries; they are constitutive of the auto/biographical genre. As a genre auto/biography cannot exist without either of the elements of fact or fiction. However, the study will explore the constant interrogations that exist between the ‘facticity’ of historical facts and ‘facts’ produced by fictional narration in the genre

of auto/biography. The contention here is that fiction cannot be limited to abstract creations that have no bearing on reality. Fiction has the critical capacity to apprehend cultural reality. Thus the interface between fact and fiction in political auto/biography will be scrutinized because the unstable relations of the factual and the fictional are what give auto/biography its distinct form. This formulation is important because political auto/biography constructs itself as stabilized whereas its language is already contaminated and refract different experiences of the self in shifting notions.

The study will further seek to argue that the understanding of the self and national identity has much to benefit from the subjective rendition of experience that is entailed in the life-story. The development and thriving of auto/biography is also critically situated within the culture of a specific society. This essentially means that “autobiography is not to be found outside our cultural area” (Gusdorf, 2001:.29). In the scope of this study it will be argued that auto/biography is a useful entry point in understanding not only individual identities, but the culture of the communities from which it emanates. Its existence in a particular culture is an important signifier of the dynamic processes of both individual and group conception in that society. In fact it is evidence of the movement from a strict communal conception of identity to a situation where the individual is placed at the centre of existence. In this sense the existence of auto/biography in a particular culture reflects the level of progression from modes of collective identities in that society. Yet it will be maintained that this disentanglement from the collective can never be total as the individual remains intrinsically part of the group.

The shift from the communal conception of identity to the individual is what Gusdorf (2001) terms the metaphysical precondition for the existence of auto/biography. This precondition is defined as the “realization or awareness of more difference than of similarities in life” (p.30). When such a consciousness is achieved then it becomes imperative to guard against “the possibility of disappearance by fixing an own image” (ibid). Gusdorf also argues that the “conscious awareness of the singularity of each individual life is the late product of a specific civilization” (ibid). The validity of this position is hinged on the recognition that specific civilizations and historical conditions author certain ways of perceiving oneself in relation to society. In the context of this study, it will be posited that a delicate balance is maintained in the cultivation of a self conscious identity and its location within the bigger group. In essence the

argument is that political auto/biography is an intricate narrative that at one level constructs the individual as a distinct existence from the rest, and at another allows the same individual to be subsumed within the group as the embodiment of its core values. In the case of Zimbabwe, the history of colonial subjugation, anti-colonial struggle and patriarchal traditions account for complex conceptions of identity at both the levels of the self and the group in which the self identity is typically indexed.

### **1.5 Defining ‘Political’ Auto/biography**

All writing is political (Ngugi wa Thiong’o, 1981). However, this study deliberately explores the values that underpin the different meanings of what political means. Jameson (1991) argues that in fiction as symbolical narrative we should search for the ‘political unconscious’. This suggests what is political is not only the visible political, organized movements; the political is not only the themes openly relating to power or powerlessness between social classes. To the extent that auto/biography is authorized from a certain perspective, it is given power to speak for or as the author. Its themes and very form must certainly suggest something else other than simply reflecting on political themes.

The subject of this study therefore is Zimbabwean political auto/biography, in a broadened sense which from the onset opens itself up to assumptions that there are certain political meaning(s) that are subsumed in the auto/biographical works under study. Such political meaning(s), it will be argued, will range in scope from the overtly political to the more subtle and nuanced versions that are normally regarded as residing in the private and individual domains. To define political auto/biography in its less nuanced form where the self is directly involved with nationalistic movements, Boyers’ (1985) exegesis of the political novel is of critical value. Two fundamental points with regards the political novel that also can help define political auto/biography are identified. First Boyers posits that in the political novel characters “regard their personal fates as intimately bound up with social and political arrangements” (1985:9) that are determined at a much higher level of society. Applied to political auto/biography, this idea would suggest that the subject narrator’s experiences are directly implicated, affected as well as affect, and shaped by as well as shape nationalistic political destinies.

Political auto/biography can therefore be defined as life writing that places the political self at the center, both as the observing and observed subject. As Weintraub, (1978) asserts, the life of the subject is presented as inextricably linked to national fate in one way or the other. This conception of political auto/biography does locate the individual more critically at the centre of nationalistic politics. Auto/biography then performs the narrative function of capturing the individual's lives that are both congruous and dissonant with the cultural fictions encouraged and imagined through the nation as an imagined community (Anderson, 1983). This study recognizes the fact that self writing can provide contestatory narratives that are authored from diverse ideological perspectives. This is so because the political self is "at the centre of a given historical period or process" (Tekere, 2007:1). More so, to recount oneself in a political life narrative is not a disinterested engagement, it is to search for oneself "through history" and to make an attempt at "personal justification" (Gusdorf, 1980: 39).

Such an understanding of political auto/biography benefits from Boyers' second significant point where he asserts that the political in a narrative will "attempt to project a common world that is more than a series of isolated tableaux, images or emblems" (ibid). In this sense, political auto/biography consists of those life narratives that conceive of, construct and project identity images, not only in individual terms, but in group terms. In this study, this definition will encompass life narratives that are set within the matrix of Rhodesian and Zimbabwean nationalisms. However, to limit the idea of the political to narratives "in which certain positions are taken or in which private experience is necessarily seen as subordinate to political activity" as Boyers (1985:4) aptly suggests, cannot satisfy the demand for extended enquiry of how the self and nation are constructed in Zimbabwean political auto/biography.

This study will further submit that the genre of auto/biography is in itself imbued with a politics of its own. In the first instance, auto/biography aspires to construct the identity of the subject in authentic terms. The inherent politics of the genre arises from its insistence on the "authority of presence" (Chennells, 2009) that implies factual presentation of experience and events. The emphasis is on the truth that can only be apprehended by the one who experiences the event and not transmutable in equal measure to those who are not present on the scene of the event. To some extent, this claim is justifiable since some of the things alluded to in auto/biographical narratives are verifiable through cross-referencing or even in archival and historical records.



However, for auto/biography to make such a claim is political as this forecloses other interpretive voices on those particular experiences and events in the subject narrator's life. It is also within the nature of the genre of auto/biography to make demands of its own on the narrator, thus complicating the claim to represent the self and reality in authentic terms. These innate contradictions of the auto/biographical genre deny it the absolute narrative authority that Chennells implies, and allows it to be characterized as a "meta-narrative [that] critiques... the process of narration and the implicit authority that events are endowed with through this act" (Levin and Taitz, 1999:163). The process by which facts and experiences are woven into a story also constitutes a political statement. For instance, Brockfield (2008:97) questions how much credence we can "give to an account of events written by the chief actor in those events." Further complicating this perception is Vambe's (2008b:186) declaration that the very language of auto/biography is "not neutral but is politically contaminated such that it becomes a polemical text serving a particular political agenda." Political auto/biography thus intrinsically defines itself through its contradictory claims that seek to distance it from the realms of fiction when in actual fact it is thoroughly implicated with it. This point brings in a third level meaning of political auto/biography where it is embroiled in the politics of narration.

Onega and Landa (1996) provide a very powerful working definition of narrative that unshrouds the hidden contradictions in the claims of auto/biographical narrative. They define narrative as "the semiotic representation of a series of events meaningfully connected in a temporal and causal way" (Onega, Landa: 3). The emphasis of this definition is not on the "series of events" but on the "representation of a series of events" (p.5), a fact that undermines any pretensions to truth as the definitive hallmark of the auto/biographical narrative. The further injunction that "any representation involves a point of view, a selection, a perspective on the represented object, criteria of relevance, and arguably, an implicit theory of reality" *ibid*, p.3) reveals that auto/biography attains its political elements from the very process of narrating the self and its experience(s) as this involves imposing worldviews and the privileging of certain aspects of the narrator's experience at the expense of others. Bourdieu (2000:300) views the auto/biographical narrative's "inclination toward making oneself the ideologist of one's own life, through the selection of a few significant events with a view to elucidating an overall purpose" as a political act. The narrator exercises authority over the subject matter, scaffolding his own image, authorizing excisions, omissions, interpretations and preferred views through the process of

narration. This process clearly bestows political dimensions on auto/biography as it yields a partial version of events and/or experiences. It is in this context that White (1987:10) contends that “every narrative, however seemingly ‘full’ is constructed on the basis of a set of events that might have been included but were left out.”

White (1978) also exposes what he refers to as the “fictions of factual representation” both in historiographical writings as well as in all other forms of narrative by stating that “facts do not speak for themselves” (1978:25). It is the narrator (or the historian as White would argue) who renders fact into voice, into narrative, and thereby enabling certain preferred meanings of the event or experience. Alternatively put in Barthesian notion, narrative can be read as ceaselessly substituting “meaning for the straightforward copy of the events recounted” (White, 1987:2). This means meaning is constructed through the process of narrating, and events and experiences on their own do not carry meanings. Critical in these characterizations of the act of narration is the subtle insinuation that it is the narrator who constructs both his/her private and public image(s) consciously or unconsciously selected from the available experiences. The self in this regard becomes its own diplomat, projecting spruced up self images and burying those that are deemed undesirable. This inherent selectivity in the life narrative exposes the fissures within the genre that warn of its intrinsic instability. As much as it is the self giving a narrative rendition of itself, it suffers from slippages of memory, some deliberate and some unintended, of interpretation, and of manipulations of vocabulary which may privilege certain meanings and not others, both of which introduce the fictive element in auto/biography. It is on this score that this study will interrogate the assumption of stable identities in Zimbabwean political auto/biographies.

The understanding of political auto/biography in the scope of this study will be stretched beyond the politics of liberation movements, genre and narrativity to include definitions that seek to read contestations that are located in the minutiae of ordinary experience. There is always a search of alternative modes of life and survival outside the parameters of nationalism in those texts that dwell on the mundane. Such narratives will pretend to be politically “unconscious” (Jameson, 1981), yet the way the quotidian is apprehended or experienced, diagnosed and interpreted using different grids from organized political frameworks is what defines such life narratives as political auto/biography. The possibility of such a definition of political auto/biography can

begin with, to borrow from Jameson (1981:20), the “recognition that there is nothing that is not social and historical- indeed, that everything is in the final analysis political.” Politics inheres in the ways in which the powerless, the poor, the sick, in short the marginalized, imagine and are made to imagine their own identities. When these people from the margins narrate their experiences they articulate a politics that both confirms and refuses certain projections of their own identities.

The HIV/AIDS life-narrative that contests both gender stereotypes and the constructions of the identities of the HIV/AIDS sufferer falls within this category of political auto/biography. It is a type of political auto/biography that often generates and relies on its own localized symbols, not the national ones such as the Great Zimbabwe monuments, Nehanda, Kaguvi and so forth. Where it borrows from these dominant symbols, it does so in order to subvert and use them to its own ends. By qualifying the HIV/AIDS narrative as political auto/biography we, as Mule (2006:96) would posit, “extend generic boundaries in order to reveal the complex negotiation between the self and the social.” More important in Mule’s conception of the political in the disguised or fictionalized women’s life narrative from the margins is the identification of a “seamless fusion of the self and the social” that amounts to “the radical and ideological politicization of African women’s narratives” (ibid, 97). Using the same logic, it can be argued that HIV/AIDS narrative in Zimbabwe also “mobilizes the politics of identity... through the paradigm of self referentiality in order to challenge the strictures placed on all women in their societies” (ibid, 94). Auto/biography, in which ever form it comes therefore cannot be politically innocent but rather can be considered, in Gready’s formulation (1994:165), as “the door through which the marginalized enter into the house of a no-familiar tradition of culture, often irreparably modifying it in combination with other cultural forms.”

## **1.6 The Self in Auto/biography**

The centrality of the self as an identity category in the genre of auto/biography is also a significant aspect in the understanding of the genre. It thus becomes imperative to explore the meaning of that “self” in relation to itself, its surroundings and also its constructions in auto/biographical narrative. The first step in that direction is to underscore the fact that “self identity as a coherent phenomenon presumes a narrative” (Giddens, 1991:76). What this means is that the self as a category does not exist of its own, it is not an essence. In the absence of a

narrative there is no self to talk about. Self identity is born out of and nourished through sustained narrative which gives it form and content at different times and contexts. The auto/biographical genre thus is a critical mode for establishing an integrated sense of the “self.” The genre becomes particularly important given the historical background of ancient cultures which did not prize the individual (Giddens 1991). That integrated sense of the self also becomes critical in a new world order that threatens and sacrifices the individual at the expense of powerful institutional interests. These institutional interests or forces range from industrial capital, technology, slavery, race, imperialism, the state, the global village, the community group, the family and patriarchy. The individual under these circumstances is faced with perennial existential questions such as who am I, who do I want to be, what should I do and how must I relate to the powerful institutions? It is just as Giddens (1991:33) validly observes that in this new order of modernity “the self has to be explored and constructed as part of a reflexive process of connecting personal and social change.” The process is necessary in minimizing the impact spelt out by the discordant forces of a radically revolutionizing modernity on the individual. Also implied in this process is the fact that every day of the individual’s life is characterized by conscious negotiation for space for the self.

Giddens (1991:75) further contends that the self is “a reflexive project for which the individual is responsible.” What is critical in the conception of the self is the understanding that “we are not what we are, but what we make ourselves” (ibid). The process of “making ourselves” in auto/biography is an ongoing process and only faces closure with the death of the subject narrator. At every turn the individual strives to construct, and reconstruct, a rewarding and self fulfilling sense of identity. This way of reading self identity characterizes Western thought on how auto/biography constructs the self. This study will pay particular attention to this way of reading auto/biography as it guards against naturalizing identity categories and allows them to stand as creations or constructions.

The ideal self is a product of both the past and the future. Critical experience is recovered from the past to inform on the present self as well as the desired self in future (Giddens, ibid). This means that the singularity of the individual’s identity is in actual fact a complex amalgam of selected and desired characteristics from past, present and future experience. In other words, the individual “appropriates his past by sifting through it in the light of what is anticipated for the

future” (ibid, p.75) Auto/biography in this sense is read as a medium that attempts to plot, according to the subject narrator, the significant moments of the individual’s life in a trajectory that stretches from time of birth to time of death. The “significant moments” are a result of the selective process, and it is important to underscore the fact that what the self considers significant in its life may not necessarily be considered so by others. Thus the public may construct a completely different image of the particular self in question. Nevertheless, auto/biography uses its selectivity license to visit the past and make a “corrective intervention” that must yield desired images of self. This takes the form of an “interpretive self-history” that “nourishes the child that was” (ibid, 72). The effect can be therapeutic as it reconciles the past to the present and future. It is this quality of the auto/biographical genre that places it at “the core of self identity in modern social life” (ibid, p. 76.)

In the process of writing, the critical elements of the self are explored, and these are the selves that are seen by others, and also the selves that are only experienced by that individual right from inside (Smith and Watson: 2001). Yet underneath all this, the auto/biographical form’s claims to representing the self and national sentiment is rocked by the selective process of memory, mediations of ideology, culture, and demands of present circumstance. This carries the implication that projections of both self and nation coming from individuals located variously in their different cultures, ethnic environments, race, gender, class, nation and epochs constitute complex narratives whose usefulness in understanding both concepts of nation and self demands scholarly study.

### **1.7 Justification of the Study**

Until the second half of the twentieth century, auto/biography “suffered from benign neglect” in the West (Berryman, 1999: 73). In Southern Africa, the genre eluded critical attention in literary scholarship as both the literary arts and history did not accept it as a serious field of study that could contribute to knowledge. Scholars have regretted that though in the region auto/biographical narratives are an age old and thriving practice, they have only “recently become a recognized area of inquiry, and scholarship about it is dispersed” (Coullie, Meyer, Ngwenya and Olver, 2006:62). They also observe that even then, critical attention is biased towards those texts that have “acquired canonical status”, and arguably, the “actual extent of the practice and the various studies of [auto/biography] remain under-reflected”(ibid.) Critical

neglect is very much more pronounced as more attention was given to works of fiction. The novel readily answered to the tasks of providing a counter discourse as well as creating and consolidating cultural tropes that would act as models for creating nationalist discourses answering to Europe's cultural arrogance. In the African context, Chinua Achebe's early fiction (*Things Fall Apart*(1959 ), *No Longer at Ease*(1960) *Arrow of God*(1964 ), and critical essays *Morning Yet on Creation Day*(1975), *Hopes and Impediments*(1994), as well as Ngugi WaThiongo's early novels *Weep Not Child*(1964) (*The River Between*(1965), *A Grain of Wheat*(1967), and critical essays ( *Writers in Politics*(1981),and *Decolonizing the Mind*(1986), are typical examples from Anglophone Africa of the deployment of fiction and its criticism to engage the colonial legacy. In Francophone Africa, writers such as Sembene Ousmane (*God's Bits of Wood* (1960), Alexander Biyidi (better known as Mongo Beti) (*Mission to Kala* (1957), *The Poor Christ of Bomba* (1956), and Ferdinand Oyono (*House boy* (1956), *The Old Man and the Medal* (1969), fed into the canon of African literature with their fiction that sought to deconstruct colonialism. In Zimbabwe, writers such as Geoffrey Ndhlala's *Jikinya* (1979), Charles Mungoshi's *Coming of the Dry Season* (1972), *Some Kinds Of Wounds* (1980), *Waiting For the Rain* (1975 ), Musaemura Zimunya's poetry (*Country Dawns and City Lights*, 1985), and Chenjerai Hove (*Bones* (1988) focus on the cultural conflict triggered by the coming in of the settlers in Zimbabwe. This fiction was received and analyzed through several critical essays and texts.

The expansive form of the novel was thought to be able to carry several themes, from the cultural to the political, the sociological to the historical, and even the personal, hence its obvious attractions over the auto/biographical form whose emphasis is on the subject "I". Political auto/biography was viewed with so much suspicion that its value as a possible discipline that could enlighten on critical issues of self and national identity, history and society, was doubted. Definitions of the self and the nation were left very much in the preserve of fiction, history and political studies. Chennells (2005) points to the existence of 18<sup>th</sup> century auto/biographical works and/or memoirs by early white missionaries and hunters that generally fall into the category of the imperial romance stories. These works served to prepare the Western mindset, and justify the need for the imperial project. Critical essays on written auto/biographical works by Africans in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and on earlier unwritten oral forms of autobiography, hardly existed, a

situation that owed much to the definition of the genre of auto/biography as low art. Those that emerged in the later half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century scantily received any critical attention. This study will argue that what then is missing in Zimbabwean literary criticism is the exploration and critical analysis of the subjective rendition of experience, analysis and interpretation of events by individuals whose public and private lives helped shape the course and destiny of Zimbabwe. Auto/biography, let alone political auto/biography, has not received adequate scrutiny as to how the individual self defines itself in relationship to its other selves, others around it, the national image and historical processes. The research thus endeavors to interrogate the concepts of the self and the nation, how these have been conceived of and constructed through the medium of political auto/biography in Zimbabwe.

Chennells' (2005) essay on self representation and national memory in white autobiographies in Zimbabwe, and Ashleigh Harris' (2005) intervention on inscriptions and descriptions of belonging in white Zimbabwean memoir-autobiography both focus on white writings. The essays provide important information on the evolution of the auto/biographical genre in Rhodesia. However, there is little that has been done to explore black authored auto/biographies. This study therefore seeks to interrogate formations of identities of the self and nation in black and white, male and female auto/biographical writings in Zimbabwe. This comparative dimension is important for readers to have access to versions of the selves and those of the nations that have been authored by writers occupying not only different cultural backgrounds, but who are also committed to different ideological projects in relationship to the self and nation of Zimbabwe. It will make it possible for the study to critique individual projects of the self and nation as captured in the writings.

Political auto/biography is chosen over the conventional self life-writings because of its wider implications that bring personal destiny into the realm of the nation. The construction and projection of the self is allowed to merge and even become the symbol of the bigger group, the nation, thus unraveling the complex process through which identities are forged. The extent to which the shifting nature of self-identity is allowed to impinge on group or national identity is a gray area which can only be probed through political auto/biography. The chosen auto/biographies are representative of race, gender, and different cultural backgrounds. More

importantly, the auto/biographical writings chosen are sometimes part of the authoritarian narrative of patriotic history, which in other spaces of the same auto/biographies, they critique. The chosen auto/biographical writings demonstrate their authors' commitment to certain values which this study interrogates because the values limit what can be known and experienced as positive in the lives of Zimbabweans.

### **1.8 Theoretical framework upon which research is based.**

This study will use an eclectic approach that will harness as many relevant theories as possible in its endeavour to understand political auto/biography. However, postcolonial theory will be privileged as an overarching theoretical framework within which to read political auto/biography. This is because postcolonial theory derives from, and makes use of insights from, other theories that makes it pertinent to include other theories to make a thorough investigation of the area under study. I will adopt an approach that differentiates between strands within postcolonial theories. For instance, Parry (1996:67) argues that postcolonial theory facilitates “an understanding of colonialism and its legacies different from the narratives handed down either by colonialism or by anti -colonialist movements, and thus throwing the claims of both official and dissident historiographies into disarray.” Using this understanding of postcolonial theory on Zimbabwean political auto/biographies will enable me to question identities of self and nation promoted in official narratives whether these are from Rhodesian perspectives or the Black nationalist movements. Ashcroft et al (1995) introduce a different dimension to the use of postcolonial theory when they encourage critics to contest individual ‘experience of ...migration, slavery, suppression, resistance, representation, difference, race, gender, place, and responses to the influential master discourses of imperial Europe, by which all these come into being.”

I will thus rely on selected postcolonial theories to read “the autonomous individual and the universalizing life story”, or better still, “the sovereign self” (Smith and Watson, op.cit. p.3) in Zimbabwean political auto/biography. Postcolonial theory problematises various concepts of identity such as race, tribe, self, nation and gender, because of the strands in it that refute the idea of according lived experience, past experiences, memory and cultural myths any single meaning. Postcolonial theory treats the narrative of the nation as one of those grand discourses that overrides the smaller groupings and their interests. The nation subsumes those in conditions of



subalternity, those who occupy the space physically but are not given the opportunity to represent themselves, and yet presents itself as an arrangement for the common good of everyone within its borders. On the contrary, and according to Gopal (2004:154) the nation should be conceived as a “contract between individuals based on the purely rational calculation of advantages.” In this process some groups are pushed to the periphery. Gopal (ibid.) also argues that the national project makes use of “narrative contracts where stories about the nation define who belongs to it and how.” Thus I will attempt to read Zimbabwean political auto/biography as a national “narrative contract” that is trying to define the nation, as well as who belongs to it, and who is at its periphery.

For Slemon (2001: 100) postcolonial theory “is riven with disciplinary self doubt and mutual suspicion.” This insight will be used in this study to interrogate political auto/biography and its self-assuredness in creating identities of self and nation. ‘Self doubt’ and ‘mutual suspicion’ occupy an important place in self-life writing because the very act of ‘writing the self’ implies conscious and sometimes unconscious processes of selecting and ordering certain materials at the expense of that which is silenced in the act of auto/biographical writing. Coetzee (in Coullie et al, 2006) complicates the notion of auto/biographical writing by suggesting that the literariness of autobiography is in its propensity towards the fictions of a ‘tale’ and the contingent nature inherent in its contestable facticity. This exposes auto/biography to infinite revisions of its meanings in the light of new interpretations and more sophisticated reconceptualization of the fictions of what White (1987:121) describes as the “literature of fact”. Auto/biographies or accounts of the self are also “*autre*-biography [or] an account of another self” (Coetzee 2006: 1). This study will explore these accounts of ‘other sel[ves]’ that can manifest themselves in auto/biography, through what the story teller has not included, or what the readers understand based on specific interpretive horizons of expectations.

Kwame Anthony Appiah (2001) emphasizes the disruptive potential in constructions of assumed stable identity categories of race and tribe and nation. Yet he acknowledges the paradox that these identities continue to thrive despite their being grounded in no firmer basis than myth and false consciousness. Questions of race, tribe, and nation are of immediate interest in Zimbabwean political auto/biography, given its attempt to construct and capture identities from the perspectives of race, ethnic belonging, and also gender. Appiah disrupts these constructions,

positing that “every human identity is constructed and historical” and that every identity has its share of “false presuppositions, of the errors and inaccuracies that courtesy calls “myths”, religion, “heresy” and science “magic” (Appiah 2001:223). This study borrows from Appiah and critiques the nature of “invented histories, invented biologies, invented cultural affinities” (ibid.) within Zimbabwean political auto/biography. Appiah’s thesis dismisses both race and national history as “falsehoods... useless falsehoods at best or- at worst- dangerous ones” (ibid, 224). He argues that these categories disable us because they propose “as a basis for common action the illusion that black (and white and yellow) people are fundamentally allied by nature and, thus, without effort, leaves us unprepared, therefore, to handle the intra-racial conflicts that arise from the very different situations of black (and white and yellow) people in different parts of the economy and of the world” (ibid. p.225). Borrowing from this thesis, I will be able to penetrate the facades of unitary identities to probe the heterogeneous compositions of perceived identities such as nation, race, tribe, and even the self. The study will make use of Appiah’s perspective and strand of postcolonial understanding of writing the self and nation because it is a shift that goes beyond Said’s (1978) deterministic thesis on ‘Orientalism’ in that it unsettles generally accepted categories of identity.

The terms of nation and nationhood themselves are inherently monolithic ones, and they conceal important differences between constituent groups within the postcolonial nation. The homogenizing nomenclatures of race, class, gender, nation, sexual orientation, native, settler, black and white conceal not only divisions within groups, but also conceal intersection lines and cross-over points between groups. If Gikandi (1992) imagines that during colonialism acts of nation and narration went hand in hand, what was narrated were not always moments of affirmation of the relations between self and nation. Put differently, what was affirmed were the conflicting relations of the discourses of the selves contesting themselves in relation to the larger discourses of a nation at war with its self. This nuanced understanding of the individual involved in acts of narrating the self within the nation recognizes the existence of interstitial spaces between perceived nations, tribes and races and gender identities. This study emphasizes this position of the untidiness of boundaries around the self and nation because it enables the researcher to question individual as well as national subjectivities given expression in Zimbabwean political auto/biography.

Social constructionism will be extensively referred to for its contention that all “key categories of human existence such as gender, race, class, community and generation can be shown to be socially constructed” (Day and Thompson, 2004:85, also Burr, 1995). In discussing the nation and the self, I will thus steer away from the naturalizing discourses which seek to perceive the nation or any other identity categories as self evident in themselves, and therefore primordial. Social constructionism, which according to Burr (1995) underpins all these other newer approaches including postcolonial theory, is critically useful in this study for its recognition of human beings as more or less “active, conscious agents engaged in the construction of a shared social reality” (Day and Thompson, *ibid.*). The study will argue that the acts of writing the nation and the self are conscious ones, and that both processes have the creation of a common perception or reality as their objective. The theoretical framework of social constructionism will therefore be used in conjunction with the various strands of postcolonial theory.

### **1.9 Research Methods and Methodologies.**

This study is interpretive and relies on textual analysis. Secondary materials will also be used in the analysis of the primary sources. The research methodology will be of a qualitative nature. The preference for the qualitative approach is justifiable given the nature of auto/biographical writing, which explores life and experiences from the subject’s point of view. Denzin and Lincoln (2000:3) define qualitative research as involving “the studied use and collection of a variety of empirical materials- case study, personal experience, introspection, life-story, interviews, artifacts, cultural texts and production,...and visual texts –that describe routine and problematic moments and meanings in individuals’ lives.” Auto/biography privileges individuality and multiple ways of understanding reality. Flick (2002:2) posits that qualitative research “is of specific relevance to the study of social relations owing to the pluralization of life worlds.” Plurality implies movement away from the unitary and dominant narratives of history and reality. Beck (quoted in Flick, *ibid.*) significantly contributes to this line of thought by observing that pluralization of life worlds is evident in the “growing individualization of ways of living and biographical patterns.” Thus the study of life patterns, perceptions, experiences, relationships and identity constructions requires “a new sensitivity” (*ibid.*) that acknowledges diversity. Qualitative research has obvious advantages since, as Flick (2002:7) argues, it is not based on “a unified theoretical and methodological concept.” It has its niche in postmodernist

thinking where the call is to move toward “locally, temporally and situationally limited narratives” (ibid.).

The qualitative approach will also be used specifically for its privileging of reflexive interaction during the research process. The researcher’s response to, and communication with, the subject(s) under investigation is considered “an explicit part of knowledge production” and “not excluded as a possible intervening variable” (Flick, *ibid.*, p6). In the study of auto/biography, this allows me to make comments, observations and judgments that are informed by my own experiences, both physical and literary (intellectual), and other historical sources. The method also allows me the entry into texts from a theoretical base, and then to proceed from the text to theoretical formulation. I will not therefore be imprisoned in some form of rigid schema of procedure. To use Denzin and Lincoln’s (2000:3) argument, the researcher is enabled to “deploy a wide range of interconnected interpretive practices, hoping always to get a better understanding of the subject matter at hand.”

In using the qualitative method, I am however aware that the method encompasses various research approaches which all entail different theoretical assumptions. According to Flick (2002), the basic approaches include the tradition of symbolic interactionism, which focuses on studying subjective meanings and individual ascriptions of meaning. The other approaches are ethnomethodology which is interested in routines of everyday life and their production, and structuralist or psychoanalytic approaches which start from the processes of psychological or social unconscious.

To complement the interpretive and qualitative approaches adopted in this study will be the use of the symbolic interactionism approach which prioritizes the subjective meaning. The strength of this approach in auto/biographical research can best be summed by Flick’s (2002:17) observation that the approach’s starting point is “the subjective meaning individuals attribute to their activities and their environments.” Political auto/biography particularly focuses on the political self, its actions, ideals, aspirations, and its larger social environment that shapes the self and that the self seeks to shape. Blumer H. (quoted in Flick, 2002:2) also brings the relevance of this approach home by identifying three premises on which symbolic interactionism is built. The first premise is that human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them, and secondly that the meanings of such things is derived from, or arises out of,

the social interaction that one has with one's fellows; and lastly that these meanings are handled as, and modified through, an interpretive process used by the person in dealing with the things he or she encounters. The point of interest to be noted in relation to Blumer's postulation is that, in self-life writing, the subject is in the process of constructing an own identity and/or reality amidst a labyrinth of relationships or interactions with fellow human beings and the environment in general. The meaning of being for the writer is not derived from a relational vacuum, hence the need to employ a multi-routed approach to construct the reality of the self and its environment. This also takes into cognizance the fact that different individuals invest different events, objects and experiences with different meanings, hence the rationale for studying auto/biographical writings from diverse cultures, historical backgrounds, ethnicities, races and gender as a way of trying to understand the Zimbabwean reality.

### **1.10 Chapter Delineation**

Chapter one of this study is introductory and it gives a general overview of the area of study, defines political autobiography, justifies it, discusses theoretical framework, indicates the methods used in analyzing data and chapter organization.

Chapter two, titled Literature Review, critically explores related literature as a way of giving context to the study. It historicizes the evolution of the auto/biographical genre as well as explore theoretical issues in auto/biography and existing conceptions of the genre in the West, Southern Africa and in Zimbabwe. The Chapter also goes on to question how the auto/biographical form conceives of, constructs and also destabilizes concepts of self identity and nation. More importantly the chapter considers auto/biography and how it is contested by other narratives such as orature, history and the novelistic tradition. These will be discussed within the wider theoretical framework that relate to literary study. In this way, matters of language use, imagery and symbolic meaning, myth-making, literary and historical interpretation in auto/biography will be focused on.

Chapter Three, titled Rhodesia: the Self and Nation, will focus on Ian Douglass Smith's narrative of the self and the Rhodesian nation in *Bitter Harvest: The Great Betrayal and the Dreadful Aftermath* (1987) and Peter Godwin's *Mukiwa: A white Boy in Africa* (1996). While Smith's text contests the black nationalist 'patriotic history', it has also authorized versions of self and nation

that are contested because they are exclusive of other social groups in Zimbabwe and Rhodesia. Smith's conception and construction of self-identity and the Rhodesian nation is first and foremost projected through a deliberate emphasis of the traditional European mytho-forms that were the hallmark of the age of the empire. To borrow Marimba Ani's (1994:238) argument, at the level of the self, white auto/biographical narratives invoke a "form of cultural ego" that functioned meaningfully to support European normative, sanctioned behaviour". The whole auto/biographical project is premised on the need to cultivate a "culturally visible self image" that is transmutable into a core of community values for those who share the same origins with the author. The chapter will interrogate the assumption in Smith's autobiography that white self is obviously in a better position to make decisions and choices based on reason, and to manipulate the less rational other- the black man. Peter Godwin's *Mukiwa: A white Boy in Africa* (1996) is in the form of memoir that nevertheless have obvious slippages into the auto/biographical form. It creates images of whitehood from childhood, which however, are shattered and destabilized by historical circumstances that seem to emphasize alternative "selfhoods" and "nationhoods" from those experienced earlier on in life. Godwin's memoirs contest the alternative versions of self and nation that are presented in both the auto/biography of Smith and those of black nationalists that will be the focus of the subsequent chapter. His narrative will be used to go beyond Smith's self assuredness, which is only deflated by Britain's indecision on the question of Rhodesian independence, South Africa's lack of support for UDI, and the Rhodesian's faltering on the question of nationhood, to focus on the internal convections that characterize the process of identity formation at both the individual and the national level. The chapter interrogates whether or not white auto/biography can claim a single subjectivity which only whites can have access to. It will also question the language of difference indexed in terms of "us", "we", "humanity", "mankind" and other universalistic terms made so as to mask race, ethnic, gender and even historical differences in the narratives.

Chapter Four, titled Zimbabwe: The Self and Nation will focus on the identity construction processes from the perspective of the African nationalists' political auto/biographies. It will focus on Maurice Nyagumbo's *With the People: An Autobiography From the Zimbabwean Struggle* (1980), Abel Muzorewa's *Rise Up and Walk*, Joshua Nkomo's *Nkomo- The Story of My Life* (2001), and Edgar Tekere's *A Lifetime of Struggle*(1997). The Chapter will explore how these life narratives attempt to construct alternative histories to the dominant Rhodesian

narrative. The narratives are an act of writing back to history. It is as Chennells, 2005: 133) argues that:

the dominant version of history was authorized by whites, and a black person, in the act of writing, established him-or-herself as an authorizing subject subverting a presupposition of white history that there were no alternative and valid black perspectives which whites did not command.

In this way the single and dominant historiography of the settlers is undermined, while at the same time the notion of a single black Zimbabwean identity is disrupted. This is so because although all these texts attempt to construct self identities within the broad parameters of black nationalism, they do so from varying ideological and conceptual perspectives. Nyagumbo's narrative hardly goes beyond the oppositional frameworks of the oppressor and the oppressed, while Muzorewa's attempts an articulation of a self and national identity that is anchored in spiritual humanism. Nkomo's narrative speaks of victimhood at the hands of erstwhile fellow liberators to the point where it becomes the story of his life as well as the story of the lives of his opponents. On the other hand, that of Tekere adopts self propping strategies that seek to construct the self by undermining most of the figures around him.

Chapter Five titled "Contradictions in White Rhodesian/Zimbabwean Autobiographies" will focus on the narratives of Doris Lessing's *Under My Skin*, Fay Chung's *Reliving the Second Chimurenga*, and Judith Todd's *Through The Darkness: A Life in Zimbabwe*. The thrust of this chapter is to focus on alternative ways of seeing/reading and interpreting images of both self and nation within groups that are generally perceived as homogenous and sharing the same destiny. The Chapter will therefore focus on the divergent views of nation and self that are situated in the interstitial spaces of gender, minority racial group or simply outside the dominant historical movement. These narratives under discussion are important in providing a critical intervention to the dominant narratives and tropes that have defined both the white self and the African self, as well as both the Rhodesian nation and the Zimbabwean nation.

Chapter six, titled "Diseased Identities", focuses on Tendai Westerhof and Lutanga Shaba's disguised auto/biographies, *Unlucky in Love* and *Secrets of a Woman's Soul* respectively. Taken both as metonym and metaphor, the question of HIV/AIDS raises significant problems relating to

whether or not attempts to locate the self and the nation are not ultimately 'diseased' in the sense that quests for identities have often ended up creating absolute essentialisms. If the preceding chapter focuses on white female auto/biographies, this chapter complicates the picture because it introduces life narratives from female black authors. If the political auto/biography is identified or characterized by open forms of rebellion from the grand narrative of 'patriotic history', Westerhof and Shaba sidestep this narrow definition of the political. Their rendering of the political concerns modes of survival for the self and nation in the context of HIV/AIDS. The chapter interrogates how this thematic concern imagines a different conception of the self and nation. A discourse of contami/nation is introduced and contests any pretension that there is an easy way out in constructing images of the selves and nations.

Chapter Seven of this thesis is the Conclusion. It will present the findings of the preceding chapters. The chapter will also assess and evaluate the status of the auto/biographical genre, and related theories, with specific reference to Zimbabwean political auto/biography, in contesting, corroborating, or undermining dominant discourses and images on and about the self and nation. An attempt will also be made to evaluate how language use, stylistics and thematic focuses employed in the narratives and memoirs explore or fail to explore the processes of identity construction in auto/biography. The researcher will also make recommendations based on the findings of the research.

## **1.11 Conclusion**

This introductory chapter has attempted a broad overview of the subject matter that this study is going to focus on. It has provided the critical definitions that will inform the analysis of the selected auto/biographical works as well as delineate the structure that this study is going to take. The next chapter will further expand the issues identified so far by way of providing an extended literature review. This literature review will focus on the evolution of auto/biography, theoretical issues of auto/biography, Western and Southern African conceptions of self and auto/biography, as well as critical scholarship on Zimbabwean auto/biography. It will conclude by exploring the concept(s) of nation and how they are grasped in the context of auto/biographical writing.



## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

### **2.1 Introduction**

Chapter One of this thesis broadly defined the area of political auto/biography. It posited that life narratives can subsume the political by locating the lives of their subjects within the context of nationalist political movements or organizations. This provides the most direct and less complex definition of political auto/biography. The chapter thus further defined political auto/biography by arguing that the processes of narration themselves are implicated in acts of selection, ordering, omissions and choosing vocabulary which are all subtly political. Furthermore, it was argued that the genre of auto/biography itself imposed its own politics on the narrator in that it places certain genre-specific dictates that cannot be deviated from. Thus narrativity in life writing is not a free enterprise as there is need to satisfy truth-claims that are the definitive characteristic of life narrative. On another level, it was further submitted that the political also inheres in what ordinarily would pass as the mundane in life narratives. As such, there is room for accommodation in political auto/biography for those narratives that are not necessarily steeped in nationalist politics. The chapter went further to provide a justification of study, theoretical framework upon which the study is based, research methodologies and chapter delineation. This current chapter intends to provide an extended literature review in order to properly contextualize the study of political auto/biography in this thesis.

The thrust of this chapter is to further review literature related to issues of the conception and construction of both the self and nation in Zimbabwean political auto/biography and how these identities are negotiated through the narrative process. The discussion will take cognizance of the fact that auto/biography can be read from cultural, sociological, historical as well as literary perspectives. However, this study will largely privilege the literary perspective. The literature review will concentrate on analysing written literature on (1) the evolution of auto/biography, (2) theoretical issues of auto/biography, (3) European conception of auto/biography, (4) African conception of auto/biography, (5) critical scholarship on Zimbabwean auto/biography, and (6) conceptions of nation, and how these are mediated upon by memory, myth and history. Much of the literature will be drawn from the discourse as it obtains in Western scholarship for the very reason that the writing and theorizing of auto/biography as a subject was a later day occasion in

Africa. Nevertheless, significant voices from Africa have commented on auto/biography and its evolution and these will also be reviewed.

## **2.2 The Evolution of Autobiography**

The subject of this research study is political auto/biography with specific reference to Zimbabwean life narratives. From the very onset it is imperative to acknowledge the diverse nature of this field in terms of definitional parameters as well as its historical development into a recognized canon. The study therefore prefers the use of the demarcated term '*auto/ biography*' so as to accommodate the various narratives that deal with life experiences from Zimbabwe. There is also need to acknowledge that the growth of auto/biography in different cultures took place at different periods of time and under different circumstances. Auto/biography as a genre evolved in response to certain and specific conditions over a period of time. The general consensus among scholars is that the auto/biographical narrative that is centred on the individual is a product of late modernity. Modernity refers to the eighteenth century movement spawned by the Industrial Revolution in Britain and later spreading on to Western Europe and North America (Lewis, 2007:11). This movement spelt a profound transformation in human modes of life with its disruption of diurnal and seasonal dependency on land, and introduced new life rhythms dictated by the factory and its new technologies. As such, modernity radically rearranged social relations between the individual and society as it thrust new uncertainties as well as possibilities in the life of subjects.

Giddens, (1991:33) argues that modernity “breaks down the protective framework of the small community of tradition, replacing it with much larger impersonal organization.” The point here is that through arms of science and technology and other forces of enlightenment, modernity pushes boundaries asunder, opens up uncharted spaces, both physical and experiential, and exposes the individual to hitherto unprecedented risks. Giddens succinctly captures this in his observation that the individual “feels bereft and alone in a world in which she or he lacks psychological supports and the sense of security provided by more traditional settings” (ibid). Thus confronted with the serious existential questions of how to respond to the unprecedented challenges the individual turns into herself or himself to define who he is to become and what to do in these circumstances. Giddens further posits that in late modernity people as individuals have no option but to answer to the security demands either “discursively or through day to day

social behaviour”(ibid, p.70). This essentially means the individual living in the modern times has to delineate and give an account of its space and identity vis-a-vis its surroundings. When such conditions prevail, fertile ground then exists for the thriving of self life writing.

Specifically, Giddens further observes that pre-medieval Europe had no free room for individual identity. The general pattern was that “lineage, gender, social status and other attributes relevant to identity were all relatively fixed.”(p.74) As much as this observation may fail to pay due attention to the ambivalent spaces appropriated by individuals in such societies, in the context of pre-modern societies this is generally valid. The crux of the argument here is that in these ancient times the experiential narrative had as its dominant factor the destiny of the group. The individual was only important to the extent that he merged with the group and consequently his will and conception of self were subordinated to that of the bigger group. The self in such conditions could only be understood as a projection of the family unit and its values, or at a higher level, of the community. Consequently then, it can be argued that the “idea that each person has a unique character and special potentialities that may or may not be fulfilled is alien to pre-modern culture” (Giddens, p.74).

The thesis that advances modernity as the precursor of an existential crisis that provides the raw material for auto/biographical writing is corroborated by Weintraub (1978) who asserts that in ancient times such conditions as would promote the development of self conscious individuality did not exist. Weintraub also contends that the self reflexive individual who asks “who am I?” and “how did I become what I am” is a product of modernity in which the individual is thrust at the centre of existence. In ancient societies individuals were “embedded in the social mass of given blood relationships” (Weintraub, 1978:2) and life derived its meaning from basic social and kinship relations. The individual was subordinated to the group, and self identity was always delineated within the broader scope of the group. In this argument it is further noted that for the ancient cultures, perhaps the only redeeming element with regard the provision of space for the individual was the inherent need for self glorification and self justification that is natural to all communities. These are processes which both entail celebration of the achievements of the self and explaining one’s behaviour or attitudes to life. An important factor to note is that this redeeming aspect could not be separated from the essential ingredient for the thriving of auto/biography, musing. It should however be noted that in the ancient cultures self glorification

and self justification in the form individuality was celebrated but individualism remained largely curtailed and only began to enjoy space with the dawning of modernity. Nevertheless, self reflection is critical to the narration of the life-story. This is a valid point especially if musing is understood as “the conception of a genetic personality development founded in the awareness of a complex interplay between I- and- my- world.”(ibid. p.13) The “I” or self becomes the central pivot around which the world revolves, and under conditions of modernity, especially in the West, the self began to vigorously negotiate for space in which it could consolidate its identity.

In the ancient cultures, even the heroic accomplishments of the individual were only perceived as personal achievements in so far as they exalted the whole community as the individual represented the values of the whole community. The story of his/her exploits assumed a communal character which took it away from the realm of auto/biography. Thus the hero could never function in contradistinction to the interests and values of his group. Heroism had as its defining quality the potential for the upliftment of the whole and not the individual per se. Individual genius or achievement was celebrated for its worth to the community. Okonkwo’s individuality and achievements based on solid personal genius in *Things fall Apart* (1958) were welcome in a traditional context whereas Ezeulu’s budding individualism in *Arrow of God* (1964) was deplored. Of course, the example of Achebe’s two novels here only serve to demonstrate not the form of the life story because they are not, but how traditional Africa perceived the fortunes of the individual in relation to his or her society. This was also typical in ancient Hellenic and Roman civilizations. Weintraub (1978:14) posits that in these societies man was prevented from “self definition as a separate individual by the realities of a tightly knit kinship society.”

In both Hellenic and Roman traditions, the development of the polis structure was based on the subordination of the individual. From early on in life, the individual was taught that his essence was in his being a public man. Weintraub refers to this situation as “an imposed state of servitude on the individual” (p.5), which left very little space for reflexive definition of a self. This leads to the conclusion that during “the millennium from 800 BC until 200 AD the conditions of ancient life neither stimulated nor promised the growth of auto/biography.”(ibid,13) It also follows that “the search for self identity is a modern problem” (Giddens, op cit, p.74) whose origins are traceable to a modernizing Europe. With the advent of industrialization in Europe with its

disorienting impact both for human beings and nature, as well as its beneficent promises implied in science and technology, a new social pattern was in the making. The individual is thrust to face the vulgarities of this roller-coasting upheaval alone, and individualism becomes the hallmark of life in the Western cultures. Conditions of modernity essentially created a complex environment in which the individual had to undergo an act of entrenchment in order to avoid complete erasure by the forces of modernity.

On closer scrutiny, both Giddens and Weintraub's positions are incapacitated by an imagination that insists on a solidly coherent primordial society whose homogenous nature did not allow for individual awareness. Such an insistence definitely fails to explain the ruptures of history where apparently solid communities often erupt and betray different "consciousnesses." It thus can be argued that individual consciousness cannot be completely suppressed and subsists even in those societies that are highly centralized. The same limitations are evident in Gusdorf (2001) who proffers an interesting dimension to the debate by arguing that the genre of auto/biography can only thrive in certain conditions and that it was a late phenomenon in the Western cultures. He notes that the existence of auto/biography was always "limited in time and space" (p.29) depending on the developmental progression of a particular culture. The contention is that the genre did not always exist, and when it did, it did not exist everywhere. With reference to the West, Gusdorf further argues that the advent of auto/biography as a serious literary genre coincided with "the moment when the Christian contribution was grafted onto the classical traditions" (p.29). Thus, the ancient cultures, as has been observed in Weintraub's argument, did not offer conditions conducive for the thriving of the life-story. The collective nature of ancient societies, as argued by Gusdorf, is expressed in the fact that "throughout human history the individual... does not feel himself to exist outside others,... but very much with others in an interdependent existence that asserts its rhythms everywhere in the community" (p.29.). According to this line of thought, the gaining of momentum of individual spiritual reflections to explore the state of the inner soul or the self therefore constituted the basic ingredients for auto/biographical writing.

But modernity posed its own paradoxes with regards to the fate of the individual. It thrusts both possibilities for the alienation of the individual as well as submersion of the same individual into a homogenous mass through its material culture. Adorno and Horkheimer, (cited in Dant,

2003:67) argue that modernity through mass production and mass consumption posed a threat to the perceived space for the individual. The argument is that “the potential for fostering individuality becomes limited in the face of “mounting uniformization” in which the individuals become “functions in an increasingly planned and managed society” (ibid, p.68). The individual in this sense is just a part of the mass with no meaningful and distinct identity of her or his own. The import of this argument is that modernity comes with certain styles of living and patterns of behaviour and consumption that make it difficult to maintain individual identities. Adorno and Horkheimer contend that in conditions of modernity “everyday individuals’ identity and activities are shaped through the commodities that they purchase and use” (ibid, p.70). Modern systems of work and mass culture also do not promote individual identities but “mimetic reflections” of the composite society. In essence what this argument amounts to is that in the modern context the individual is thrown back “to anthropologically more primitive stages” (ibid) that can be comparable to the pre-medieval era. The immediate implication then would be that, contrary to scholarly opinion that auto/biography is an offshoot of modernity, the conception of such self identity is seriously curtailed under conditions of modernity. In other words individuality was displaced in modern societies as the individual is submerged in mass culture. This also means that only those who are materially rich, those who are beneficiaries of modern capitalism, can afford a sense of individuality. Such an inference would mean that the auto/biographical genre is the preserve of the bourgeoisie to the exclusion of those voices at the margin. The limitation of Adorno and Horkheimer’s reading of the impact of modernity on human society is that it fails to address the plethora of life representations coming from the margins.

This study will seek to argue that contrary to the above logic, the voices at the margins have found an effective medium of expression in the genre as evidenced by narratives from the colonized, the minority and marginalized groups as well as slave communities in the New World. The example of the autobiography of the black American slave, Frederick Douglass (1845) is one that shows that ordinary mortals could defy the plantation culture and write themselves into history, clearing space for self identity in the context of a nation that looked upon blacks as an inferior other. The thrust here will be to try and read the possibility of resistance to the pervasion of modern modes of production and consumption into the individual space. The injunction from Adorno (1974:139) that “what must be resisted is the pressure of society that threatens to crush

individuals into an amorphous and malleable mass” is critical in the reading of auto/biography as a narrative defence of individual space. Auto/biography can therefore be read as resistance to the massification that is implied in the modern dispensation, a concept that entails the disappearance of the individual into the entrails of the mass society. If anything, the absurdities that characterize modern life, rather than submerging the individual, create a keener soul searching need for delineating the space and identity of the self. This leads to an alienation of a positive kind where the individual is spurred on to grope for greater and bigger possibilities. Such a search, as Adorno observes, “lies in thought, in making judgments on the world around [the individual] and identifying the traps that lie in wait in a world organized instrumentally and driven by consumption” (p.73). It is this process that gives impetus to the self exploratory narratives that seek to delineate the space and identity of the individual under modernity. In this sense, the alienating tendencies of modernity can be read as driving the individual towards self emancipation whereby the individual stands apart from its environment to consciously delineate its own space.

### **2.3 Theoretical Issues in Auto/biography**

In the study of auto/biography, one is always confronted by the challenge of trying to discipline the genre under some neat and fast binding theoretical framework. This is particularly an intriguing exercise given the fluid tendencies that characterize both its evolution and the ways of reading the genre. Scholars such as Olney (1972) observe that auto/biography is a product of man’s unique creative impulse, and as such the form it takes at any given time is unpredictable. It has the capacity to assume various forms as dictated by the individual impulsion which comes as a response to experience and the psychological mode of the individual at the time of writing. Thus auto/biography can come in the poetic, historical, theological or psychological form and still reflect the life of its writer. On the converse, the genre opens itself up for different ways of reading, making varied interpretations possible. This intrinsically means that a single and all-containing theory that can account for both the nature and form of auto/biography is at the least not practical. What is feasible is at most a loose assemblage of theoretical positions gleaned from philosophical treatises on the subject of auto/biography. When these are put together, a general delineation of the theoretical nature of the discipline can be achieved.

According to Olney (1972), what can amount to a first theory of auto/biography can be traced to the Greek philosopher Heraclitus. The fundamental tenet of Heraclitus' philosophy that informs on the subject of auto/biography was contained in his declaration that "every cosmology begins in self knowledge."(Olney, 1972:4) The import of this philosophical dictum is to locate the self as the focal point from which the world has to be apprehended and be made to make sense. The self has to consciously and reflexively explore and define itself and how it wants and can relate to its cosmos. The cosmos refers to the universe or the order of things, and the contention is that this order or universe is not simply there and that the self is helplessly predestined to suffer the vicissitudes of this order. On the contrary it is the self that makes the cosmos and this cosmos depends "entirely upon its creator for its distinctive configuration (ibid.). The self therefore is at all times located in its own cosmology, an order that it has to cognitively configure. The reflexive self therefore is not a subject of God's, or anyone's, or everyman's cosmos, but is the centre of its own universe. Such a theoretical grounding of the self strategically positions it and its agentive powers in the critical space where it begins to define its needs and interests vis-a-vis its surroundings. Auto/biography takes root from this philosophical position as it implies the search of a self and order that suits that self. The conscious self that extricates itself from the group and delineates its space is the subject of auto/biography. When that self begins to question about who it is and what it wants, how it relates to itself and the others around it, then the process of ordering the cosmos according to its needs will have started. The auto/biographical narrative process is an act of constructing the narrator's own cosmos in which items, people, systems and institutions are ordered and re-ordered depending on the needs of the narrator.

The premises of such a theoretical understanding is predicated on the fact that knowledge, whether of the self or of the universe, can "only be human, individual and subjective" (ibid, p.5). The self is thus in a constant struggle to maintain its own identity in an environment where the overarching and grand systems and institutions seek to efface it as an insignificant part of the whole. It has to grapple with ever changing phenomena that threatens to overwhelm its individuality. There is the constant danger where the self can be reduced to an anonymous part of a homogenous mass in which its subjective experience is not recognized. Therein lies the impetus for auto/biographical writing as the individual seeks to experience and know life, define it from its subjective point of view. Theoretically the self must keep pace with the constant upheavals that characterize the environment in which it lives. Here Heraclitus' philosophical



thesis again brings coherence to the understanding of auto/biography. He posits that “the elements (of the cosmos) are in continual flux and transformation, and so also are men.”(Olney, p.5) The self is transient in nature, and the act of writing a life narrative is typically an act of tracking the various selves that are ‘born’ with the passage of every day and occasion. This is what is meant by Heraclitus when he surmises that “like all elements, individual man never is but is always becoming” (ibid.p.6)

#### **2.4 Auto/biography and Self Identity in Western Scholarship**

The evolution of autobiography into significant canonicity has received some interesting critical attention from various scholars especially in the West. There seem to be common agreement that this evolution is fairly recent as in earlier times the auto/biographic genre lay in the shadows of more popular disciplines such as history, sociology and the sciences. Very little was also done by way of exploring the relationship between auto/biography and literary studies. Berryman (1999:74) complicates our understanding of auto/biographical writing by arguing that in the West, trained historians kept ‘fiction’ or the ‘fantastic’ out of their works to achieve a degree of objectivity. The historians insisted on hard facts and accurate statistics, and thereby questioned the “reliability and usefulness of auto/biography” as a historical source. By its nature, auto/biography cannot afford to be impersonal, and its overt subjectivity puts it directly in conflict with the tenor and thrust of the historical research of the period. This approach will be interrogated in this study because it creates a false dichotomy between ‘facts’ and ‘fiction’. In fact, this puts into context Robert F. Sayres’ (quoted in Berryman, 1999:73) submission that as late as 1964, the common distinctions between fiction and auto/biography had remained “shamefully unanalyzed.” Scholarly exploration of these common distinctions between fiction and auto/biography is indeed a milestone in recognizing auto/biography as a critical discipline within the literary arts and history. The exploration has the effect of taking auto/biography out of the limbo of being treated “as a poor stepchild by both professors of history and literary criticism” (Berryman, 1999:73).

Deconstruction criticism, across all disciplines, questioned claims to historical truth, and the coherence and referentiality of language, as well as textual interpretation in the wake of factors such as irony and ambiguity attendant in the reading of any text (Berryman, 1999). In the West radical skepticism of deconstructionist criticism exposed the blurred boundaries between literary

studies and history that had hitherto kept auto/biography out of serious scholarly scrutiny. Auto/biography thus makes its entry at the point where the difference between fiction and truth, creative act and memory, the objective and the subjective, blur into a subliminal reality of life. Kellogg (1994:3) suggests that in writing auto/biography, the writer creates meaning “for himself and potentially for the readers”. Meaning or meanings are created through language and symbols that cannot be subjected to unitary interpretation. Political auto/biography, just like any other work of art, creates several metaphors of the self and national belonging through language and symbols. Berryman (1999:75) supports this idea by observing that through the skepticism generated by deconstruction, auto/biography often “asks its readers to observe language as a field of contradiction”. The analysis of language and the deployment of symbols, and broad reference to semiotic theory will be central to this study of political auto/biography.

Kellogg (1994:5) further contends that experience is rendered meaningful “through the symbols that we create, manipulate and communicate to others”. The process of creating, manipulating and communicating symbols in order to make meaning constitutes the deep structure of the genre of auto/biography. This is particularly so as the rendition of experience in auto/biography is heavily dependent on memory. Memory is not neatly packaged in some backspace to be retrieved when demanded by present circumstance or need. Its retrieval involves construction and reconstruction, ordering and re-ordering, creation as well as manipulation of events and facts. The act of remembering, therefore, to pursue Kellogg’s (1994:21) line of thought, “cannot be disengaged from creating.” Stephen A. Shapiro (quoted in Elbaz, 1988:9) also underscores this point by arguing that the genre is an “imaginative organization of experience for aesthetic and moral purposes.” Auto/biography then, because of its retrospective nature and deployment of language and linguistic symbols, is a creative art, in as much as it lays claim to historical fact.

An appreciation of the intrinsic value of the auto/biographical genre and its relationship to other disciplines constituted a major step towards achieving the status of canonicity in the West. By the end of the nineteenth century the genre was beginning to enjoy critical attention which, nevertheless, tended to focus on the self as an essence. Jerome Bruner (2001:26) posits that at the turn of the nineteenth century “the process of self creation did not seem to bother students of autobiography very much”. He further observes that students of auto/biography in this period were interested in lives “in so far as they represented exemplary and representative expressions

of culture”. The representative self in the nineteenth century therefore came across as an “essential self...that was independent of the process of constructing it” (ibid). The import of this observation is to raise the concern that life narratives of the time tended to delineate the self as a given and an unquestionable reality whose form and content remained constant at all times. The perception of the self during this period was therefore not to look at it as a transient product of construction, something capable of assuming different forms at different times and contexts. This study will argue that the self cannot be conceived of as a complete and stable entity. To the contrary it is always undergoing metamorphosis that is caused by mediations of memory, culture and exigencies of time and experience.

In another sense, according to Bruner’s argument, Western conception of the life narrative viewed the life of the ordinary as peripheral as it did not play a critical role in shaping the destiny of society nor manifested its core values. This thesis will submit that the study of the life narrative remained incomplete as it did not benefit from the experiential value in the lives of less prominent members of society. The lived subjectivities of ordinary people can only be left out of auto/biographical studies much to the poverty of the genre. That the West concentrated on the prominent and culturally representative as the subject of autobiography in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was tantamount to valorizing, and even mythologizing them as the standard bearers who upheld the normative values of that particular society. Such a thrust in the study of auto/biography tended to naturalize as well as essentialize identities. Such identities could then not be conceived of as having been born out of the narrative process, but as simply being there for the auto/biographer to capture. The act of auto/biographical writing in this sense is reduced to a mechanical process of deploying descriptives to capture and pronounce an essentialized presence, an absolute and objective reality whose existence is divorced from the process of writing or telling about the self.

Because of this apparent hermetic closure to the possible capacities of the life narrative in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Bruner observes the emergence of a new approach in the 20<sup>th</sup> century that rejected the earlier position that “a life was anything in itself”(ibid, 27). It instead asserted that the reality of the self was “all in the constructing, in the text, or the text-making” (ibid, 27). This study inclines itself to this later approach to auto/biography and will argue that a life has no existential meaning outside the narrative process, whether written or oral. The study will also maintain the position that auto/biography offers a rich medium for the expression of the experiences of

ordinary people. The process of producing the narrative is a medium, for both the prominent and ordinary, through which further and more intense exploration of the possibilities of the self is carried out. Through it a more sublime knowledge of the desired self is extracted from the coarseness of everyday experience, and this desired self continues to transform itself with each new experience. The auto/biographical text therefore transcends experience since it includes introspection and interpretation of the lived experience. Bruner (ibid) intimates this trend in the 20th century life narrative where he begins to see it as beginning to gradually transform “the primary qualities of direct experience into the secondary qualities of higher knowledge.”

Western views of auto/biography tend to emphasize its quest to bring about a resolution between the narrator, who is “in the here and now” and the protagonist, who is in “the there and then” (Bruner, 2001:27), and has his/her life plotted from the past to the present. Also implied is the fact the “here and now” narrator can only plot the identities of the “there and then” protagonist through recourse to memory. In this way auto/biography merges the present self with its former selves, in a process that is rocked by the fallibility of memory. Also interesting to note in this characterization is that the narrator and the protagonist in auto/biographical texts are essentially two different characters who nevertheless share the same name and consciousness. This is because the narrator lives in the present and therefore uses this vantage position to assess and evaluate the protagonist whose lifespan stretches into the past. The protagonist mutates over time, assuming different characters at different time periods and in different circumstances, to merge with the narrator who lives in the present. The various characters assumed by the protagonist as he or she progresses towards the narrator of the here and now are all versions of the self. The projected selves in auto/biography are thus at best players that are created in the narrative process, and this point accounts for the existence of multiple self identities of the narrator.

In 20<sup>th</sup> century Western thought auto/biographical writing is a form of taking a stand vis-a-vis those who are around us. It implies acts of self-justification in which the subject narrator presents himself or herself as typically representative of the cultural and social values of the society. In Bruner’s (p.29) words, auto/biography is an “act of entrenchment” in which the narrator presents himself or herself to others and themselves as “culture confirming.” Auto/biography is in other words a “rhetorical act” in which the subject seeks self definition in relation to itself as well as its

environment. The narrator, this study will argue, thus appropriates a strategic and vantage position where he or she ceases to be just an ordinary and individual life. He or she estimates to the folk psychology and cultural mores that govern the behaviour patterns in their community. This is also to say the subject narrator in the life narrative claims to capture to some degree what is sublime and symbolic in his or her community. In its complexity, the life narrative also accommodates, together with the sublime and symbolic, elements of individuality that make every life story worthy writing about and different from any other. It is the exceptional in the individual's experiences and perception of life that lends the quality of 'tellability' in their life narratives. Tellability must strive to balance between what is canonical, that is those elements that conform to folk or one's group psychology or cultural expectations, and the non-canonical which is what captures the uniqueness of personal experience. Thus this study will argue that all life narratives are products of their folk culture and that to a large extent they explore group identity. In fact, it is this quality that makes all the life narratives to be analyzed in this study political autobiographies. The individual life narrative is coloured by group fate, and is fundamentally articulating that group fate in the process of telling the individual story.

Bruner's (ibid) detailed characterization of autobiography as conceived from the West is worthy further pursuing. The act of narration is a process of self-making that involves partial extrication from the complex maze of canonicity, of folk psychology and culture to give the self a life of its own. Extrication of the individual self, even in its partiality, must be significant enough to create a self that is distinct from those around it. The life story has to clearly mark out turning points in the life of the narrator. It is in this way that auto/biography creates interest in the story of the self. Turning points "are those episodes in which, as if to underline the power of the agent's intentional states, the narrator attributes a crucial change or stance in the protagonist's story to a belief, conviction, a thought" (Bruner, p.31). This study will argue that rather than it being a typicality of Western autobiography, marking of turning points signifies the attainment of narratorial consciousness and is a hallmark that defines the genre of autobiography in all societies. The process of self-making also intrinsically involves a dialectical process of world-making so that both evolve simultaneously.

This study will align itself to the view that the self in political auto/biography is centrally situated in narrative terms and presents itself as the body incarnate of its reference group's values. Even

where the self stands in rebellion to the reference group, it still poses as standing for the representative cultural expressions of the group. In this way the self becomes critical in the process of world making. This view is buttressed by Bruner's contention that "world making involves the constructed self and its agentive powers becoming the gravitational center of the world."(p.35) According to this view the auto/biographer is thus defining a relationship between himself or herself and the society, and as the self is given life, one's culture is also being constructed. The process of definition inherently identifies those who are aligned to the narrator as well as the out-group. The out-group is invariably disparaged and degraded as its place is "special by contrast in defining one's own qualities and the qualities of those with whom one is allied, one's in-group" (Bruner, p.35). This discourse takes the individual life narrative into the realm of group identity narratives where alliances are forged along shared myths, history and cultural values. In this study it will be argued that life narratives have the capacity to transcend individual concerns to capture the fate of groups such as the nation, race or gender groups. In so doing they capture the aspirations, misfortunes, history and cultural values of the in-group. By the same logic they also exclude those who do not belong.

At another level, Western critics posit that auto/biography has a claim to the construction of a nation's history and identity. Smith and Watson (2001:10) argue that when auto/biographers write to "chronicle an event", or "to explore a certain time period, or to enshrine a community, they are making 'history' in a sense. In other words, in telling the story of the self that is connected to the nation, the subject is also constructing certain concepts and images of the nation and national identity. Dialectically the author or subject is also constructed by the nation in the process. This insight is useful to this study because it enables one to imagine and actually point to the contradictory narratives of selves that an individual work can reveal. It is this implicatedness of the life narrative in constructions of nation and self that gives it its first level of political meaning.

Olney (1980) explores the fluid quality of the life narrative as well as its generic potential to offer itself as the organizing centre around which other disciplines can take shape. The contention is that as a genre the life narrative is the "commonest" as well as the "simplest" of all literary enterprises (p.3) since every life can be rendered into narrative. Yet this also means that the field is a jungle for the practitioner who has to negotiate on matters of identity without any

obligation to refer to existing regulation or model. Olney also underscores the clear paradox for the auto/biographer implied by this apparent flexibility where “no obligatory observances gradually shaped out of a long developing tradition” (p.3) can guide the writer in the narration of his or her life story. Two conclusions can be derived from this submission. The first is that auto/biography as a discipline has over the years defied rigid containment in terms of definition, and thus accommodates loosely related narratives such as memoirs, confessions, story of my life and at times quasi-fiction stories about the self. This fact accounts for the lack of a specific “model” of auto/biography, hence as a field it remains an open one. The second point is that the genre of auto/biography, as much as it is an old practice, had for long eluded critical attention that is necessary for fashioning a discursive model which practitioners of the life narrative will follow. Alternatively, whatever critical literature existed on the life narrative could not provide neat definitions of what would qualify as “pure” autobiography and what to leave out. Such a situation left loopholes for remotely related narratives to qualify as entrants into the discipline, thus making it difficult to give closure to the definitional scope of the genre.

Olney (ibid) also attests to this further paradox of the life narrative. He observes the disturbing discrepancy where auto/biographical writing has for long been considered “a normal and natural, even a necessary human activity” (p.7) while its literary critique has remained “the most elusive of literary documents” (p.3). He contends that there are no long established traditions of critical analysis of the life narrative, and that its history stretches to as recent as 1956. This essentially means that even for the critic there are no existing hard and fast guidelines on how to approach, classify and define the autobiographical genre. This scenario also explains why autobiography remained in limbo in relation to other disciplines which would not accept it as a useful and related field of study. This study will, as has already been hinted, situate the genre within the realm of literary study and use literary tools and theories to critique it. It is submitted that there has been remarkable growth of critical interest in auto/biography since the 1950s, but compared to other disciplines this remains only a modest contribution to the understanding of the genre.

Arguably, the greatest strength of Olney’s argument is in his proposition that there is an intrinsic dissolution of generic boundaries in the humanities that creates space and scope for auto/biography to offer itself as a central and unifying entry point into any of those discourses. In fact he attributes the ever- increasing interest in auto/biography in the academic world to this

special quality of the genre whereby it focuses on the individual to reflect on the collective. This argument proffers a very succinct definition of the genre, where it is seen as “the story of a distinctive culture written in individual characters and from within” (p.13). The individual character in this view is understood as a function of the collective culture, hence the most reliable entry point to understanding that very same collective. Through the individual a “privileged access to the experience” (ibid) of a people is gained. If this logic is pursued, it then can be argued that whosoever intends to gain entry into a particular culture or a particular society’s experience has to begin with the individual life-story. The historian, sociologist, psychologist, anthropologist and the literary critic all have an obvious stake in understanding the individual story that has been shaped by the collective experience.

Auto/biography from this point of view becomes the “focalising literature for various studies that otherwise have little by way of a defining, organising centre to them” (ibid). It is a valid observation that the auto/biographical narrative has been a critical avenue for accessing the experience of especially those groups at the margin of society since dominant historical narratives do not afford them space. The slave narrative is key to appreciating the African – American experience in the same way the African life narrative is important in understanding the plight of the colonial subjects under conditions of colonialism, post independence oppression and patriarchy. Women’s auto/biographies occupy a special category in opening the peepholes into the experience of women under both patriarchy and colonialism. In the scope of this study it will be submitted that Zimbabwean/Rhodesian political auto/biography is critical to the understanding of the Black experience, White Rhodesian experience as well as women’s experiences and the cultures that inform these. It is just as Olney contends that in order to understand the American mind (or the Russian mind, the Maori mind or the European mind for that matter) one has to engage a few autobiographies from that society (p.14).

## **2.5 African Conception of Auto/biography**

If auto/biography is a late phenomenon of modernity in the West, this implies a much recent history for the genre in Africa. Traditional forms of identity such as the ethnic, kinsman-ship, and tribe remained intact well after the West had gone through radical changes as a result of both the agricultural and the industrial revolutions. Auto/biography in the conventional sense only comes into being with the advent of the written word. It thus can be submitted that



auto/biography in Africa is indeed a product of late modernity whose influence was spread through European imperial forces. The same is true of the nation state in Africa which owes the content of its form but not necessarily all the forms of its content to the values of Western modernity. This study will maintain that this is largely true an observation irrespective of the existence of oral forms that captured aspects of self identity as well as the existence of incipient nation states in Africa.

The African life narrative characteristically located the individual subject at the centre of his/her community to defend it against the cultural and political onslaught of the Western imperial project. Jomo Kenyatta's *Facing Mount Kenya* (1938) is one of the early political life narratives from Africa that casts its subject narrator as the central beacon around which Kikuyu, and by extension African values, are celebrated while the values brought by colonialism are frowned at. The unity of the Kikuyu identity is traced to the kinship and land tenure systems, initiation practices, traditional religion and marriage, and Kenyatta's own identity and political career is premised on his adeptness in defending those values. The emergency of such life narratives in Africa, which Europe largely classified as ethnographical, has great significance in that, as Celarent (2011:723) argues, "it had a profound if paradoxical commitment to represent the Other for itself." Africa as Europe's Other employed the life narrative genre to articulate its subjective experience both prior to the contact with Europeans and during the cultural and political upheaval that the contact entailed. Africans also defined the vision for their communities, and early nationalists and pan-Africanists carved their identities and those of their communities in direct response to the effects to the West's modernizing agenda. Nkrumah's *Ghana: The autobiography of Kwame Nkrumah* (1957) defines its subject and the new state of Ghana in pan African terms that distinctly emphasized the differences from imperial Europe. Kaunda's *Zambia Shall be Free* (1962) constructs the identity of the man who was to become the first president of Zambia through projecting the humanism of the family and community he grew up in, and that was only shattered by the coming in of the colonial state. This trend in autobiographical writing in Africa is further highlighted in *Long Walk to Freedom* (Mandela: 1994) in which the image of the charismatic, transformational leader is developed from the existing conflict between the supremacist white race and the Africans. The inception of the Afrikaner state in 1948 is indeed a late and disturbing development of modernist oriented European settlers that thrust African

society into disarray, resulting in the experience being given subjective renditions in the form of life narratives.

Coullie et al (2006) in their introduction to the interviews on Southern African Auto/biography titled *Selves in Question* make some very useful insights into the nature and scope of African auto/biography. Their starting point is that the auto/biographical narrative process transforms the individual life story into the realm of the public. The mere act of writing involves engaging a public or publics which constitute the audience or readership. Effectively, therefore, identity construction entails questioning and defining “notions of self” as well as interrogating how these “relate to later selves” and others (p.1). Also implied in this process is that personal identities come into being at the same moment as the collective identity is being formed. The import of these observations in the study of political auto/biography is that each auto/biographer is then put and read in a specific historical and cultural context. Personal circumstances and experiences are not allowed to make meaning in isolation as they are always given context by the collective experience. This is succinctly noted in Coullie et al’s contention that, “the creation of personal identities takes place in temporal contexts” where meaning and action are critical factors in how we define ourselves” (p.1).

Another very significant perspective that Coullie et al advance is that the auto/biographical narrative in Southern Africa, perhaps as everywhere else in Africa, is instrumental in the scaffolding of agency. What this means is that potential futures of ourselves are imagined through the different images we create and stories we tell about our past and present selves. Auto/biography of necessity attends to the question “who do I want to become?” and in this way activates us, consciously or unconsciously, towards certain desired stations in life. In the process of writing, the auto/biographer does not only create the images of desired selves, but spurs him or herself on to become what is desired. However, this study will argue further to say that the aspect of agency is not only limited to the individual as implied by Coullie et al. If the individual is only an atom of the whole, nevertheless with its own circumscribed existence, it is also constitutive of the bigger historical agency that facilitates the formation of group identities such as nations, ethnicities and gender groups. Through the self life narrative the individual can begin to envisage a more critical self identity that participates in the shaping and making of a bigger

identity. The created individual identity can then be read as the embodiment of those values that allow for the coalescence of discrete identities in the group identity.

Coetzee (2006) corroborates this line of thought by suggesting that auto/biography has the capacity to order inchoate and fragmentary life experiences into some specific shape. Broadly interpreted, Coetzee's statement cannot be limited to the specific shape of an individual identity born out of a life narrative, but extends to how fragmented life experiences of individuals under certain historical conditions can be disciplined by the process of narration into a specific group identity. This capacity of auto/biography is essentially one that entails evoking a sublime awareness not only of the individual identity, but of that same individual's place and mission within the bigger group. New selves that are weaved into a complex relationship with the group are created through the narrative process, and these cannot exist outside this process. And every attempt at a new narration has a destabilizing effect of displacing earlier selves. Thus Coetzee argues that putting "the historical self into writing" (p.216) inevitably involves the substitution of that self with another or other selves. All auto/biography is therefore the story of another or other selves or *autre-biography*. A most pertinent point here is that "all life writing invents its object, whether or not it declares its fictionality" (ibid, p.214). Mphahlele (2006) underscores the fact raised by Coetzee (2006:214) that "all autobiography is story-telling". This means that by its nature the life narrative cannot intend to reproduce reality. If anything what is created in auto/biography "in a sense is a monument of self" (p.244). What is reproduced at best can be read as a metaphor of the self and not absolute fact, thus this study will maintain that fiction is a definitive aspect of the life narrative.

## **2.6 Critical Scholarship on Zimbabwean Auto/biography**

This research endeavor will inevitably be saddled with the challenge of a lack of critical literature on Zimbabwean political auto/biography especially in the period preceding the 1980s. What is abundant in this period, stretching as well into the post-independence era, is critical literature on Zimbabwean fiction. This critical literature is useful in that it helps situate Zimbabwean literature within its cultural and political context. Zimunya's *Those Years of Drought and Hunger* (1982) is a thematic engagement with this literature that largely succeeds in explaining the negative impact of colonialism on the Zimbabwean people. It explores the themes of drought and hunger as metaphors of the moral, spiritual, economic and political dysfunction

that resulted from colonial subjugation. Another important text is Gaidzanwa's *Images of Women in Zimbabwean Literature* (1985). The text interrogates gender representations in a Zimbabwean fiction that is largely dominated by male writers. Its seminal thrust significantly focuses on literary attention, both in terms of fiction writing and criticism, on the role and treatment of women in Zimbabwean literature. Veit Wild's *Teachers, Preachers and Non-Believers* (1992) attempts a comprehensive social history of Zimbabwean fiction that is invaluable to new readers of this literature. Veit Wild's work is later on complemented by an equally salutary criticism of Zimbabwean literature by Zhuwarara (2001). In the text *Introduction to Zimbabwean Literature* Zhuwarara explores Zimbabwean fiction from both a generic and thematic approach that brings out this literature's capacity to express the experiences of its people. This work, however, just like the ones that preceded it, does not specifically handle the life narrative as a genre.

Nevertheless, the new millennium saw significant interest in the criticism of Zimbabwean life narratives. Chennells (2005) traces literary writing in the country by observing that early narratives in Zimbabwe emanated from white missionaries and travellers and these fell in the category of "imperial romances" By categorizing these narratives as imperial romances is suggested the fact that they were meant to assuage the thirst for jingoistic adventure as well as generating support for the imperial project back home through fascinating tales of conquest and discovery of the hinterlands. Those narratives which estimated towards the auto/biographical genre were also meant to contribute to the larger imperial discourse. This scenario effectively identified the people of the hinterland by their absence or negative existence as the other who was so critical in the self perception of the settlers. Chennells further argues that a change in reference between the self and other only became possible with the displacement of the empire by local nationalisms. The shortcoming of this otherwise insightful comment is that it does not go deeper to explore how essentialized identities are moulded and consolidated in the political processes of early nationhood. He asserts that the slow birth of auto/biography as an "account of the typical became a medium of black writers" (Chennells, 2005:133) to foment nationalist consciousness without showing how cultural identities were transformed and aggregated, or even fragmented, in the process of nation-state formation.

A point of convergence by Zimbabwean critics is on the notion that in the context of the West auto/biographical writing was born out of the idiosyncrasies of modernity. However, Vambe and

Chennells (2009) modify this view in the context of Zimbabwe by positing that it is the postmodern dispensation that triggers serious reflections of the individual self and nation. They attribute the recent surge of academic interest in biography and autobiography to postmodernism which “theorizes the experiences of a world whose material realities as much as its ideologies call into question the teleologies of class and nation, and in the Southern African experience, of race”(Vambe and Chennells,2009:10). The point they are making is that essential categories of identity are rendered incapable of neatly ordering new experiences just in the same manner the dominant narratives of modernity had failed to account for the contradictions in the experiences of the subjugated. This reading of the development of the life narrative and its criticism in Zimbabwe however sounds simplistic as it suggests a clean break between modernity and postmodernity. It seeks to locate auto/biographical writing in Zimbabwe outside the general scope and the grand ordering debates of modernity. According to Brennan (2004) modernity, which refers to technologies associated with “modern life” as well as to “a cast of mind, an attitude, an approach to problems as much as to a period” begins “with Enlightenment and never ends” (p.129). The thrust in this study will be to problematise how identity categories of the self and nation and their conception crystallize under conditions of modernity. It will be argued that postmodern conditions, which somewhat question the narrative of modernity, only serve to elucidate the contradictions inherent in continuing modern conditions.

The question of context becomes significant in these conditions and the individual life and experience is seen as inscribed by the larger contexts in which they live. In the case of Zimbabwe the crux of the matter is that the historical misfortune of colonialism and the narrowed democratic spaces of the post-independence era created unique contexts that demanded complex ways of responding to questions of identity. The life narrative emerged as one way of effectively capturing the group story through the story of the individual. Such a logic helps in explaining how the settler autobiographies entrenched white hegemony, only to be subverted by nationalist narratives which annulled the “presupposition of white history that there were no alternative and valid black perspectives which whites did not command” (Chennells, 2005:134). By the same token, this position alludes to the disruptive potential of auto/biographical narratives where dominant versions of history and nation are challenged by oppositional narratives. The “idea of a single black Zimbabwean identity that commands a single black subjectivity” (ibid)

characterized by Zanu PF patriotic historiography is rocked from beneath by alternative ways of interpreting identity.

The transcendence of the individual story into a communal one is predicated on a “common” experience under both colonialism and post-independence for the subaltern groups. Under colonialism the subaltern consisted of the African populace who were the subject natives, while in the post-independence it consisted of those who found themselves in the fringes of power- that is minority ethnic and gender groups. Nevertheless, the ability of the individual story to contain the group fate is imbued with conflictual strands that yarn the personal and the communal into one composite labyrinth. Vambe (2009:81) pursues this line of thought by submitting that “the migration of a personal story from the individual to the community, from the local context of its production to the global arena of reception is one fraught with contradictions.” He further notes that the life narrative is often characterized by fractured and unstable identities because accounts of other selves intrude into the narrative. Ashleigh Harris, 2005, commenting on how white identities are inscribed in Zimbabwean auto/biographical writings, reveals how such narratives are implicated in European settler perspectives of culture and nation. She posits that “any articulation of personal memory in testimony, or in auto/biography, becomes not only enunciated in the public sphere, but becomes subsumed within a broader social, political, and historical discourse of nationhood” (2005:104). Thus, as Vambe (2009) has contended, white life narratives also migrate from the personal into realms where settler notions of community and nation are constructed.

Muchemwa (2005:195) gives the notion that “Zimbabwean fiction and autobiography written in English set out to contest official narratives of the past in order to open new spaces for the recreation of cultural memory, revisions of the past and re-inscriptions of identity.” This view goes a step further in that it casts cultural memory as an artifact that is manufactured or created through the narrative process. Muchemwa further destabilizes nationalist narratives which he attacks for demanding a special position where memory is seen as a “sacred set of absolute meanings owned by a privileged ethnic group.”(ibid, p.195) What Muchemwa misses in his argument is the critical fact that the auto/biographical narrative itself inherently has the propensity to destabilize and fracture itself from within and this to the point where even the individual life narrative is home to multi-layered identities and meanings. Chennells’ (2009)

position where he privileges the presence of the auto/biographer at the scene of events as guaranteeing a monolithic reality and truth in the interpretation of experience also bears this obvious shortcoming. If anything, this will reduce the auto/biographical narrative into some formulaic scientific equation where the presence of the observer and the availability of observed phenomena will yield clinical truths and meanings. It will therefore be vital for this research endeavour to critique the very nature of auto/biography and explore the fault lines within the genre. These include partialities to ideology and faith and mediations of culture, history and memory. The “authority of presence” is also undermined by factors such as how much vocabulary and conceptual understanding one has in order to be able to interpret the contradictions embedded within an experience.

A critical point that this study will pursue from this argument is that the auto/biographical narrative in Zimbabwe is involved at a political and discursive level where it shapes the imagination and construction of both of the self and nation. The study will strive to show how cultural identities are often conflated into political identities in the process of nation-state building (Mamdani, 2001). This will foreground how the diverse cultural/ethnic composition of the country assumes national identities at certain times and contexts and yet retreat into narrower identities in other contexts. Though there can never be a “Berlin Wall” between these two identity categories, where the imagination of national identity is concerned, it is important to delineate Rhodesianess or Zimbabweanness as political identity categories and trace where and when they came into being. The thrust of this logic is that an understanding or conception of national identity in Rhodesia/Zimbabwe should reckon with the fact that Rhodesia was not always there, nor is Zimbabwe and Zimbabweanness primordial phenomena that were always evident before colonialism. The cultural consciousnesses that undergird these identities take shape at specific historical points, and they are only heightened in the course of nation- state building. In essence then, the fragmented cultural groups find accommodation within a broader political identity grouping. Probing this process in Rhodesian/Zimbabwean life narratives is vital in order to avoid what Gatsheni-Ndlovu (2009) has termed the tendency to “naturalize” certain identity categories. Evidence of this tendency is seen in attempts in life narratives to make recourse to mythical origins for both the self and the nation, and thereby essentializing their being. Current critical literature on Zimbabwean life narratives has barely paid attention to this phenomenon, and this study will endeavour to explore this grey area.

In the Zimbabwean literary context, the writing of auto/biography is complicated by the multiplicities of the ethnic, cultural and racial backgrounds of the writers. Colonial politics racialised auto/biography and the patrons of this genre imagined a version of Rhodesia in which blacks were to be subordinated for the ‘smooth’ function of the country (Chennells, 2005). On the other side the cultural composition of the indigenous Shona people made up of the ethnic groupings of the Zezuru, the Karanga, the Korekore, the Manyika, and the Ndau suggested that there could not be any single and dominant subjectivity with regards to the construction of identities of the self and nation. The presence of non-Shona groups such as the Tonga, Venda, Kalanga, Shangani, and more prominently, the Ndebele of Nguni origin who came into the country in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century also meant that alternative versions of identities of self and nation are negotiated from their perspectives. At this juncture, it becomes critical to explore how the autobiographical narrative and the self are linked to the conception of national identity.

## **2.7 Conceptions of Nation**

This study will acknowledge the fact that general critical commentary on the nation converge on it being a constructed entity, and that, in its modern sense, it owes its origins to “western capitalism and industrialization” (Macleod, 2000:68). In the African context, the nation is seen as an offshoot of imperialist expansion. In the modern day, any attempt at a discursive conceptualization of the nation has to acknowledge the seminal contribution to this discourse of Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (1983), in their text *The Invention of Tradition*. This study will make its departing point the contention that nations are not “rooted in antiquity and are not self evidently natural”, and that they are, if anything, “products of invention and social engineering” (Hobsbawm and Ranger). In simpler terms nations are not to be conceived of as “naturally occurring phenomena.” (Macleod, op cit). This is despite the apparent fixity in terms of representation which tends to give nations as permanent entities. Their intriguing nature has been further complicated by the fact that in today’s world nations have become the most obvious and significant mode of social and political organization and hence their being there can be taken as a matter of fact.

Hobsbawm and Ranger’s (1983) thesis goes further to argue that nations, together with their critical content, nationalism, “are constructs and cultural artefacts”. The task of this research will of necessity be to show that the Rhodesian/Zimbabwean nations and the nationalisms that inform



them owe their reality to narrative processes. Conversely, they have no reality outside the narratives that have rendered them their being. Rhodesian/Zimbabwean political auto/biographies are narratives whose main significance is in the propagation of a group identity alongside the construction of a self identity. Such group or national identities largely get nourishment from a perceived group fate, a shared history, common tradition and value system which Hobsbawm and Ranger define as invented traditions. Nations are therefore based on invented traditions, which are defined as:

a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules, and of a ritual nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past. (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983: 1-2)

Also critically important in Hobsbawm and Ranger's argument is their observation that every society has recourse to a large repository of ancient materials which are then deployed in the construction of invented traditions. This study will critique the ways in which White Rhodesian and Black Zimbabwean political auto/biographical narratives are vehicles to the ancient repositories where cultural artefacts and traditions are to be retrieved and put in the service of group and individual identity construction. The study will also assess with what effect new traditions and or new symbols are introduced and deployed in the process of constructing the nation and or self identity. New symbols have emerged with the rise of nation states and these take the form of flags, anthems, and emblems of the nation (Hobsbawm, Ranger, 1983, Smith, 1998)

The thesis advanced by Hobsbawm, and Ranger (1983) that in the construction of the nation the crucial element is the invention of emotionally and symbolically charged signs of group membership, such as flags, anthems and emblems is unsettlingly pertinent to this study. This is to mean that the new symbols constitute the cementing glue that binds, both emotionally and spiritually, those members who feel they share the same destiny and thus identify with the symbols. Yet Hobsbawm warns that these new symbols or invented traditions, as distinguished from the old traditions, are unspecific and vague in the content of the values and obligations of group membership they inculcate- such as "loyalty", "duty", "patriotism" and "playing the game" (Smith, 1998:119). It will be argued that both the Rhodesian and Zimbabwean

nationalisms are characterized by emotive appeals built around unquestioning loyalties to the nation and its symbolic representations. In its bid to bring the group together nationalism does not open up or leave spaces for alternative ways of perceiving the nation and its core values. George (1996:14) alludes to this characteristic of nationalism by observing that “it leads to the interpretation of diverse phenomenon through one glossary.” It will be argued in this study that the Rhodesian white nation conceived of itself in terms of its English history and civilization and had no space to accommodate its subjects in its discursive narratives. Colonial nationalism drew its vitality and moral justification from the technological and scientific progress of the West. As such, Rhodesian auto/biographical narratives conceive of a nation whose core citizens are products of a superior culture that has to be spread for the benefit of the backward people of other regions.

On the other hand, the Zimbabwean nation’s anti-colonialist nationalism seeks complete exclusion of the former colonizer from its discursive narrations of the nation. In fact, the liberation struggle itself is mobilized around the need to dislodge colonialism which is perceived as the impediment to black self determination. Self determination assumes the existence of a group, a nation, whose being is curtailed by a colonizing power. The coming to being of that nation becomes the main agenda of Zimbabwean nationalism. This nationalism had its appeal in promising to break the shackles of imperialism and restore the people to their land and heritage. The reality of suffering and dispossession provides a more immediate rallying point for the black population in terms of national consciousness. Recourse to a common ancestral past always fed into this more immediate reality of colonial oppression. Mcleod (2000:75) makes a succinct observation that “if colonialism had condemned millions to a life of subservience and dispossession, anti-colonial nationalism promised a new dawn of independence and political self determination for colonized people.” Werbner (1998) also posits that the new independent state often peddles an anti-colonial appeal that often invents tradition as a way of building an authentic past. His argument is that generally in Africa’s newly independent states “the political origins myths usually imagine the founding of the nation in decolonization” (Werbner, 1998:75). The only contradiction to be noted in this imagination is that the process of decolonization had to recognize and maintain the permanency of colonially delineated boundaries. In the Zimbabwean case this means that the map drawn by the colonizers continued to define the spatial scope of the nation as it exists today. As such, the ethno-cultural compositions of the groups within these

boundaries were subsumed in the nationalistic thrust with the totality of their difference. This accounts for the obvious fissures that strain the national project as these heterogeneous elements become manifest in the post independence state.

The various auto/biographical writings chosen for this study betray contestations as different races, ethnic groups and genders seek the status of the in-group in the nation. This situation is what Fanon (1968) characterizes as the pitfalls of national consciousness. To uphold the project of the Zimbabwean nation, the anti-colonial rhetoric is sustained and played out strategically to create a sense of insecurity from an imperial enemy as well as providing a rallying point for the diverse strands within the post independence nation. In this argument, Werbner's (1998) point is borne out by the amount of state memorialisms and popular counter-memory whose objective is to rupture the colonial legacy. This is a persuasive argument even when it has to be conceded that in the context of postcolonial Africa "memory as a public practice is increasingly in crisis" (Werbner, 1998:1). Its moral force as a source of objective truth has always been problematic. Yet in auto/biographical writing memory is what defines the genre as has been noted earlier on.

In both cases the Rhodesian and Zimbabwean "nationalisms" strive to create a "sense of mutual, national belonging" through the "performances of various narratives, rituals and symbols which stimulate the individual's sense of being a member of the select group" (McLeod, 2000:69). The performances that are acted in the name of the nation are highly emotive, and are effectively the magnet that pulls the diverse individuals to come together as a group. Through these performances a deep 'horizontal comradeship' (Anderson, 1983) is established. The nation and those who belong to it are then legitimated by a history that seeks to give them permanency and posterity. Such a history is patriotic, that is in the service of the nation. Mcleod (2000:70) observes that "nations are often underwritten by the positing of a common historical archive that enshrines the common past of a collective people." Through this history heroes are extolled, origins explained, disasters collectively mourned and future destiny is also collectively projected. Individual figures are identified as main actors and actresses in the story of the nation, and for Rhodesia, Rhodes's name is made synonymous with the nation. Ian Douglas Smith, among other Rhodesian notables, is a critical player of the Rhodesian nation. Conversely, Zimbabwe cannot be conceived of without names such as Kaguvi, Nehanda, Chaminuka, Takawira, Chitepo, Tongogara, Nkomo, Mugabe and others. Such luminaries of the nation are often juxtaposed with

the villains who provide the negative role that is interpreted as threatening the safety of the nation. This construction of otherness is a fundamental element of nationalist representation (McLeod, 2000:74). In its patriotic approach, nationalistic history privileges a particular slant of interpretation of the past that does not acknowledge the existence of any other. It makes “one particular version of the past the only version worthy of study” (ibid).

The intrinsic exclusionary tendency of nation construction provides an imperative of a definitive nature which demands that we define what Rhodesia is and who belonged to it. The same imperative demands that we define what Zimbabwe is and who belongs to it. Such an exercise is necessary as both in colonial Rhodesia and in the post independence Zimbabwe, there have been tendencies whose effect have been that of embedding “undemocratic practices” and producing some ‘extremely brutal forms of exclusion and dispossession’ (Hammar et al 2003:32). Both nationalisms privilege particular groups, and rewards to such groups may come in the form of trappings of power that effectively push the others, those who do not form the core of the nation, to the margins. The exercise is also fundamental in understanding the different modes of nationhood that obtained within the same geography, with the empire-born Rhodesia being created out of belligerent colonial settler nationalism and Zimbabwe being constructed out of the struggle to unseat colonialism. Chennells (1995: 103) contends that Rhodesia, “as a space, defines an English race that discovers through the process of conquest and appropriation the nature of its own civilization.” Conquest and appropriation here do not only refer to processes of swallowing up the vanquished, but also processes of writing them out of the narrative of belonging to the space and constructed group community. The English race here is emphasized for its specificity, underlining that those who do not belong to it cannot also belong to the Rhodesian space.

In the case of Rhodesia, race was a critical factor in determining who belonged to the nation. The question of race could also be stretched to the point where those from England were the core group that looked with suspicion at other white groups such as those of Afrikaner origins. What can be understood from the Rhodesian situation is that racial differences are “political constructions which serve the interests of certain groups of people.”(McLeod, 2000: 110) Such differences are only emphasized as a way of disqualifying other “races” or ethnic groups from positions of influence or power in the national equation. Once the core group has defined itself to

the exclusion of the rest, it becomes critical that they defend their project, and more often than not the nation is bloodily contested. Chennells' (1995) argument goes further to characterize Rhodesia as an "ideological space" where the values of the empire are imposed to the exclusion of those of the indigene. Such models had already been seen in the cases of Canada, New Zealand and Australia.

With the effective occupation of the geography between the Limpopo and the Zambezi in 1890 a new nation was being born where pre-colonial indigenous groups had always contested for the same space. The new name, Rhodesia, Chennells (ibid) suggests, is a proclamation of difference. It is difference from the earlier imperial version, South Africa, as well as difference from that which it aims to conquer, the indigenous groups in the occupied land, and also the rest of Africa to the north. It is also a difference that manifests itself in terms of race identity where not only whiteness but belonging to the exclusive English race qualifies one into the new nation. Such a discourse maintains that 'Englishness' is oppositionally situated to 'Africaness', that it defines Africaness as its other. To pursue the same argument, Rhodesia as a nation cannot be conceived of completely outside the empire, and one became a true Rhodesian by becoming a spokesperson "of the discourses of the empire" (Chennells, p.132.).

To the effect that the empire captured the essence of Rhodesian nationhood, the imagination of the Zimbabwean nation has as its subject matter the deconstruction of the same. Rhodesia's subalternities have to re-write themselves back into the space by scuttling the grand discourses around which the Rhodesian nation was built. Black nationalism and the liberation struggle became the agentive processes of re-imagining a new community, a new nation that would also exclude other ethnicities. Muponde (2005:122) underscores the point that "the liberation war is central to an understanding of how the Zimbabwean nation is forged and imagined." Chennells (2005) is more specific in the analysis of genre trends with regards the transformative processes from Rhodesia to Zimbabwe. He argues that in Rhodesian and Zimbabwean auto/biography, "the referents of the narratives change as the imperial nation is replaced by local nationalisms." (2005:132). Auto/biography in this sense plays a mediating role in the creation of a new identity that is informed by a new consciousness of belonging to a group that has been peripherized by the empire. Yet the genre defies simplistic and essentialized reading. The narratives that mediate the conception of a new Zimbabwean nation prove to be more complex as they cannot only be

read as “ethnic narrative(s) that present an occasion for a subversive revision of dominant version of history” (Palumbo-Piu, 1996:211) but as narratives that de-legitimize other ethnic groups from claims of belonging. In this case the dominant history is that which was authored and authorized by the empire and its spokespeople at the outposts such as Rhodesia. Once this dominant history is subverted both physically through the liberation struggle, and discursively, a new and narrower narrative is born with the express objective of legitimizing the new ruling elite.

The trend is observable in contemporary Zimbabwe where the dominant version of history is the “self-serving historical memory” of ZANU PF (Chennells, 2005:153). Christiansen, (2005:203) also notes “the eternalizing spiritual narratives of the nation, as the Third Chimurenga discourse of ZANU PF” as falling within the category of a patriotic but self-seeking discourse meant to advance the interests of the ruling elites. At most, she posits, such a discourse can be read as a strategy that seeks to represent the Zimbabwean nation “as an eternal community forged in the struggle against colonialism” (ibid.). The crux of the matter here is underscored by the fact that for ZANU PF the anti-colonial struggle defines the nation, and the “liberators of the nation” as such must be accorded a privileged position in the narratives of the nation. Muchemwa (2005) concurs with this reading of contemporary Zimbabwe where he notes that the Zimbabwean nationalist narrative carries “an insistence on memory as a sacred set of absolute meanings owned by a privileged ethnic group” (p.195).

Muchemwa’s argument problematizes the discourse further by positing that the conception of the Zimbabwe nation rests on “ancestral memory” (ibid). This means “a continuity of an ethnocentric Shona ancestral imagination that has threatened to subsume the memory of other ethnic groups in [the] country” (ibid.). A narrative of ancestral imagination is a legitimating discourse whose logical objective is a claim to indigeniety. Ancestry is tied to a particular space or geography as well as common history and values, and as such it can only privilege a specific group of people. It constitutes what Muchemwa calls “myth of indigeniety.”(p. 201) The validity of Muchemwa’s argument is in that those who do not share the same myths cannot enter the spaces opened by such myths, and therefore are excluded from the nation project. In contemporary Zimbabwe this is the fate that has befallen non-Shona groups such as the Ndebele, Kalanga, Tonga, Shangani, Asians, coloureds and black immigrants from neighbouring

countries. Even the former dominant Whites have been reduced to an ethnic group at the periphery of the project. Such myths of indigeniety also have the capacity of disrupting other groups' ancestral memories in the process of consolidating their own claims.

Mudenge, (1988:364) picks up this essentialized conception of nation from primordial times to reinforce the Shona ancestral claim. His definition of the Zimbabwean nation refuses to acknowledge the broad and inclusive perspective of Zimbabwe as the product of just modernity. He posits that:

Present Zimbabwe,...is not merely a geographical expression created by imperialism during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It is a reality that has existed for centuries, with a language, a culture and a worldview of its own, representing the "inner core" of the Shona historical experience.  
(Mudenge, 1988: 364)

In as much as Mudenge contests the view of the nation as a product of modern Western conception, his definition is imbued with subtle ambivalences where it excludes several groups that are not part of the "inner core", while at the same time glossing over the differences within the so called "inner core." The Shona "inner core" comprises the Zezuru, the Karanga, Manyika, Korekore and Ndau, and this research will critique how these ethnic groups are placed within the project of the nation as constructed in the various political auto/biographies. The study will also argue that even within the various Shona groups there are fissures spelt by class, ideology, ethnicity, gender and generational differences that destabilize them at all times. It will also question whether the same epistemological values are employed by the various ethnic groups in the conceptualization of self and national reality. Also as noted before, the Zimbabwean geography is also home to the Ndebele ethnic group that migrated from the south in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and it will be a subject of this research to find out how they are located in the national project.

Mudenge's definition of nation also excludes the White Rhodesian component despite the fact that it occupies even a more salient position in the history of the land, having governed the country for close to a century, and hails from a different culture and history. Kaulemu D. (in Harold-Barry, 2004:79) further highlights the exclusionary tendencies inherent in processes of

national definition with regards to Rhodesian settlers. He argues that Rhodesia “had built walls between Whites, Blacks and Coloureds.” This is further underscored by Harold- Barry (2004:249) who posits that “Ian Smith, the Man, or the symbol, was (and for some still is) seen to stand for the white community. What obtains then is a hypothetical existence of two nations within one country, but nevertheless an oversimplification given the fact that this definition tends to regiment national conception in broad categories of race. White, Black and Colored are perceived as the key indices in the understanding of the Rhodesian nation. This however fails to address the fissures and differences within the White or Black or Colored groups which then are viewed as homogeneous.

A shared past, with its moments of celebration and suffering, allows for a common destiny that comes up as a dominant theme in the national history. It therefore can be submitted that both Rhodesian colonial nationalism and Zimbabwean anti-colonial nationalism are guilty of thriving on spelling closure to alternative readings, interpretations and definitions of nation and its values. Mcleod (2000:110) further argues that in the case of anti-colonial nationalism, divisive criteria are often used to define those who belong to the nation and those who do not. National unity is manufactured more often than not on the basis of “race, ethnicity, or religious exclusivity” (ibid). Yet in its representations the nation presupposes a homogenous composition which gives the impression that everyone is allocated equal space within it. This is a necessary aspect of the nation as it seeks consensus in its legitimacy and authority. Chazan et al (1992:16) argue that issues of legitimacy, and of “arriving at a consensus on the valid exercise of authority”, and “participation and inclusion in decision making processes” are critical issues in conceiving and constructing the “nation.” They further note that this is so because there is a need to create “a coherent set of relationships among the many groups and interests competing for access and control within the state framework.”

Beyond the questions of race and ethnicity, all forms of nationalisms tend to assume a complex character with regards how they accommodate the issue of gender. The critical element is that the gender question surfaces at a more subtle level that is beyond the identity categories of race or the ethnic. It rocks the nation project even where the in-group has effectively appropriated the privileged position of the core group in the nation. There is thus the need to explore how both men and women are located within the nation even if the subject of discussion is an established



dominant group. This is necessary given Mcleod's (2000:114) submission that "nationalism is very frequently a gendered discourse." The implication is that in terms of gender nationalism is not ideologically innocent and allocates different spaces to men and women in the nation project. Mcleod further argues that nationalism "traffics in representations of men and women which serve to reinforce patriarchal inequalities between them" (ibid). The discourse of the nation, even as much as the nation is often represented as female, can be read as "perpetuating disempowering representations of the woman." This position is further supported by Mayer (2000:1) who contends that "despite its rhetoric of equality for all who partake in the "national project", the nation remains like other feminized entities- emphatically, historically and globally- the property of men." A very useful observation that Mayer makes here concerns the exclusionary nature of the nation. Besides raising questions of who belongs to the nation and who is at its periphery, Mayer's position makes allusions to the contested spaces within the nation not only along race and ethnic lines, but also along lines of gender. The inclusion of female, male, black and white auto/biographers in this study is meant to give insights into the dynamics of these categories in the discourse of the nation.

As Mcleod (2000) rightly suggests, nationalism is often dismissed as a viable nation-building force specifically for its failures to redress the subordination of women to patriarchal structures in the post independence state. This insight is indeed useful, though it misses the critical point that beyond the politics of the nation women often subordinate each other. The whole trend is evident during the anti-colonial struggles where the female agency is downplayed or represented as heavily dependent on the active male whose duty is to defend the nation. Both the female and the nation are assumed to belong to the same gender and therefore need to be defended, and through this process the male members of the dominant group in the nation occupy positions of power.

Political auto/biography of working class as opposed to conventional auto/biography can be read as a useful tool which captures how different groups within the same geography negotiate and position themselves in the national project. In this sense, the political life narrative is therefore an expression of a patriotic view, which at an individual level betrays a degree of narcissistic love of the self, and at a broader level, a conscious identification with the group fate. It is because of this broader level that we can be able to conceive of Hobsbawm's (in Smith,1998:121) further

contention that nations are made by nationalists, indeed that they are the product of nationalism conceptually and historically. Benedict Anderson, in his work, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (1983) also makes a vast contribution to this seminal discussion on the nature of the nation. His notion of the “imagined community” bears some relations to Hobsbawm and Ranger’s (1983) thesis, yet he goes further to underscore the importance of representation in the construction of the nation. Anderson’s major contention is that the nation as an imagined community has to be “represented if it is not to remain in the purely private realm of the individual’s mental processes” (in Smith, 1998:137). According to Anderson a nation “is no more than the sum total of its cultural representations” (ibid) This view amounts to a radical conception of the nation which when understood in this light has no reality outside its images and representations. To conceive of the Rhodesian or Zimbabwean nation will then be an engagement with modes of representations as carried in cultural artefacts such as biographies, autobiographies, films, novels, plays, radio bulletins, television broadcasts and newspapers and other cultural expressions. It is also to take stock of symbolic representations as captured in coat of arms, flags, national anthems, heritage symbols and national heroes. Since the focus of this study is the political auto/biography, it will pursue the argument that the auto/biographical narrative process is one such cultural activity through which the nation is not only conceived, but constructed. Such positionality conforms to Anderson’s (1983:146) view that the nation is both a “historical fatality” and a “community imagined through language.”

Anderson’s conception of the nation also agonizes over its paradoxical nature where the deep seated feeling of belonging to the nation is apparently in contradiction with its imagined status. He thus recognizes the “specific love” for the nation and the devotion and sacrifice that the nation commands of its subjects. By “imagined community” he therefore does not mean “fabrication” but “creation”. The nation in that sense is a creation and therefore real, and is “deeply felt and acted out” (ibid). It ceases to be just an abstraction and an invention, but a concrete community guaranteeing a solid identity, continuity and even immortality through descendents. The under-girding argument is that what is imagined collectively, takes on a definite social reality. With this analysis, Anderson’s argument transcends criticism that he undermines “the sociological reality of the nation, the bonds of allegiance and belonging which so many people feel, and obscures both the institutional, political and territorial constitution of

nations, and the powerful and popular cultural resources and traditions that underpin so many nations and endow them with a sense of reality” (Smith, 1998:137).

Mayer (2000) also subscribes to the notion that the reality of the nation comes through an act of creation. Categorically she argues that “myth remains in fact essential to the life of the nation” (2000:3). The argument is that it is through “embracing myths about the nation’s creation that members perpetuate not only national myths but also the nation itself.”(ibid) The existence of the nation therefore is weaved on the canvas of mythical narratives. Mayer then argues that members of the group then “amplify the past and keep memories of communal sufferings alive”, and also share “national symbols like customs, language and religion.” (ibid.) It is also possible that the members of the group can remain oblivious of the fact that their national narrative is based on myth, or what has been called “fictive ethnicity” (Balibar, quoted in Mayer, 2000:3). This position echoes Smith, (1981) who posited that the nation “is a glorified ethnic group whose members are often attached to a specific territory over which they strive for sovereignty or at least the ability to manage their own affairs.” ( in Mayer, 2000:2) In this argument, nationalism, which is a political programme (Hobsbawm, Ranger, 1983), or an ideology shared by members of the same group (Mayer, 2000), remains the intrinsic driving force in the creation of the nation.

Day and Thompson (2004) also concur with the mainstream definitions of the nation. Their emphasis is on the observation that “all key categories of human existence, such as gender, race, class, community and generation can be shown to be socially constructed” (2004:85). This contention underscores the view that human existence itself is a script on which different identities are or have been narrativized. This therefore explains why Day and Thompson(2004) privilege social constructionism as the best tool for theorizing concepts of nation, gender, class, race, generation and community. It is essentially because social constructionism makes the human being an active and conscious agent in the creation of his/her social milieu.

The various views of the nation so far reviewed (Hobsbawm and Ranger, Anderson, Smith, Tamar, Day and Thompson, Kaulemu) all tend to contextualize the nation within the discourse of modernity where it is “imprisoned within the framework of the West” (Chrisman, 2004:184). The argument is that the nation as it exists today in Africa, as elsewhere in the world, derives from the thrust of enlightenment, and in Africa it is an imposition of colonialism. Though this can be contested with notions that the African state evolved of its own as a response to specific

cultural conditions obtaining in Africa (Mudenge's definition of Zimbabwean nation), this study will largely situate the discourse of the nation within modernity. It will be argued that even with evidence of the existence of states such as the ancient Rozvi state at Great Zimbabwe, Ghana and Mali; it is still valid that modern day African nations conform to the character and principle of the modern conception of the nation. Thus the narrative of the Zimbabwean nation, and the construction of its image(s), is better appreciated when put within the realm of Western grand discourses of modernization. In the case of Zimbabwe, this provides for a thorough interrogation of both the colonial constructions of the nation and the anti-colonial movement with its resultant formulations of the same. The process of modernizing in Zimbabwe, just like in other African countries around it, involved the challenge of "fostering a common sense of purpose among culturally diffuse groups" (Chazan et al, 1992:16). Paradoxically, the very advent of modernity itself, as Giddens (1991:6) argues, produced 'difference, exclusion and marginalization.'

## **2.8 Conclusion**

This chapter has attempted to contextualize the study of Zimbabwean political auto/biography by reviewing relevant literature. The reviewed literatures are on areas that help define, in a broad sense, the area of auto/biography and issues of identity construction. Critical definitions pertinent to the understanding of these issues have also been made. These include definitions and scholarly opinion on the self, the nation, and construction of national identity, history and memory and their roles in the identity making process. The next chapter will attempt to interrogate the processes through which settler nationalism entrenched itself in the creation of the Rhodesian nation. The chapter will critique the myths, symbols and other modes of representation that settler political auto/biographies employ in the construction of the self and the Rhodesian nation. Ian Smith's *Bitter Harvest: The Great Betrayal and the Dreadful Aftermath* (1997) and Peter Godwin's *Mukiwa: A white Boy in Africa* (1996) will be the basis of analysis in this chapter.

## **CHAPTER 3: RHODESIA- THE SELF AND NATION**

### **3.1 Introduction**

The previous chapter reviewed relevant literature that defined concepts of self identity and nation. Both concepts were historicized as a way of putting into context how they can manifest in Zimbabwean political auto/biography. This current chapter focuses on how white Rhodesian settler life narratives conceived of and constructed Rhodesia as a nation, and Rhodesian-ness as a distinct quality of belonging to that particular racial group. The chapter is confined to an analysis of Ian Douglass Smith's *Bitter Harvest: The Great Betrayal and the Dreadful Aftermath* (2001) and Peter Godwin's *Mukiwa-A White Boy in Africa* (1996). The two life narratives have been chosen as representative of the general patterns understanding contradictory settler identities in Zimbabwean political autobiography. The chapter argues that perceptions of settler identities in Rhodesia are not a homogenous entity. There were always diverse voices from within the British and Afrikaner components of this community. The chapter will thus explore how the concepts of Rhodesia and Rhodesian-ness are mapped out against their perceived others such as Britain, the imperial progenitor, the Cape colony which sponsored the initial project and even the other imperial projects in its neighbourhood such as Portuguese Mozambique, as well as the Afrikaners and Africans on the contested geography of Zimbabwe. Further to this, constructions of the self and its complex manifestations and interactions with the conflicting 'collective' identities embedded in the idea of self, community and nation are explored within the specific conditions that obtained in colonial Rhodesia and independent Zimbabwe.

### **3.2 Ian Smith - *Bitter Harvest: The Great Betrayal and the Dreadful Aftermath***

#### **3.2.1 Clearing Spaces: Entrenching White Settlerism in Rhodesia in Ian Smith's *Bitter Harvest: The Great Betrayal and the Dreadful Aftermath***

Ideological spaces are bitterly contested in any given context as these entitle one to claims of not only belonging, but also of defining one's identity. Space in this sense must be conceived of as more than just "an objective physical surface with fixed characteristics upon which social categories are mapped out but both as social product and a shaping force" (Primorac, 2006:59). The import of this is that spaces are in the first instance created by society, both physically and discursively, so as to house specific cultural and social perceptions of self and group identity. In

the second instance space influences the way those who inhabit it view their world. In the context of Rhodesia, both self and national identities are imagined within a physically and discursively determined space which also begins to propagate certain and desired world views and identity amongst those who occupy it, all to the exclusion of those who are deemed not to belong. Self and national identity are therefore rooted in, and defined within the parameters of a specific space that can be appropriated as one's own. The act of appropriation involves discrediting, or even eliminating, other narratives that vie for the same space.

*Bitter Harvest: The Great Betrayal and the Dreadful Aftermath*, (hereafter to be referred to as *Bitter Harvest*) is an auto/biographical narrative that attempts to construct the life of Ian Douglas Smith from the time of his birth, through his childhood days in the small mining community of Selukwe (now Shurugwi) and his formative years at university in South Africa. The narrative also paces through the subject narrator's participation in the First World War and the years of radical political formation in the 1950s when he began to grapple with ideas of what it meant to be Rhodesian as well as an individual in this colony that was culturally bound to England. This phase is the most critical in Smith's life, and the narrative constructs an individual who begins to position himself as predestined for the great challenges that link him inextricably with the nation of Rhodesia. The Unilateral Declaration of Independence in 1965 is plotted as the defining moment for both the Rhodesian nation and Smith, and themes of betrayal are built around activities and notions that are divergent to this defining moment. UDI is forced on Rhodesians partly against the counsel of the mother country, Britain, and at a time when African nationalism was already beginning to organize into articulate forms of resistance to colonial occupation. Thus Smith's auto/biography resorts to constructing identities that are informed by race as well as ideological differences, and in the ultimate striving for an unassailable, unitary identity of the subject narrator. It leaves no alternative ways of conceiving the nation outside his construction of Rhodesia, and no alternative ways for conceiving individual identity outside the epistemologies of racist Europe. Africa and the Africans are constructed as the others who must be subordinated to Europe and the Europeans, and post-independence Africa is described in terms of regression to primordial forms of existence. The most significant act that the auto/biography attempts to do in the first place is to entrench white settlerism in the land that now bore the name Rhodesia, and to dispel contesting narratives that viewed his white community as colonial usurpers.

The entrenchment of Rhodesian settlerism in the land bounded to the south by the Limpopo and to the north by the Zambezi was a result of efforts to clear the space, both physically and discursively, of any other contestants. Primorac (2006:64) observes that imperial conquest and expansion always “involved new concepts of space-time being violently imposed on societies which had developed significantly different forms of manufacturing the experience of the “real”. In Smith’s *Bitter Harvest*, (2001) the ultimate objective of raising the “flag for Queen and country” (p.1), alludes to a collusion between metropole and colony in a relationship that sought the establishment of an empire. Empire refers to the authority assumed by a state over another territory. The auto/biography thus from the beginning operates within the framework of imperial discourse. Its thrust leads to what Boehmer (2005:3) would situate within the ambit of what can be called “colonialist literature.” By definition this is a literature that is informed “by theories concerning the superiority of European culture and the rightness of empire.” Alternatively, Primorac’s categorization of the Rhodesian chronotope to refer to Zimbabwean fiction works that are “instrumental in essentializing colonial identities by infusing spaces with fixed, polarized meanings, and tying them into social identities”(p.72) would very much accommodate white auto/biographies.

In this categorization binaries of black/white spaces, inside/outside Rhodesia are predominant. Though the imagination of the empire has much been associated with the novel of the empire (Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* (1902), Haggard’s *King Solomon’s Mines* (1885), Kipling’s poetry (1922), the white auto/biographical genre in this case proves to be a very useful source of insight into the identity tropes of the empire. Such identities are constructed on the values of empire and entrenched in opposition to everything that deviated from those values. Up to the point of disengagement from the British Empire, Smith’s contention is that his Rhodesian people were the only genuine remnant of the imperial spirit that the British people had betrayed. The establishment of empire is both a cartographical and discursive exercise that aims at effective physical occupation of the Rhodesian space as well as rationalizing the process. Thus Smith’s auto/biography straddles both the physical and discursive tasks of empire building. The geographical space that the Pioneer Column occupied is discursively populated to enable the settlers to appropriate it as their own by virtue of them projecting a perception that amounts to suggesting that there were no deep rooted claims of nativity by any of the indigenous African groups.

Smith's first contestation in his auto/biography is that the west of the country that became known as Rhodesia was occupied by Matebeles, "a tribe of the Zulus in Natal" (p.1) who had recently arrived and settled "in this new country" (ibid). It is further contested that the Matebeles had moved into a land which was "uninhabited apart from wandering Bushmen" (ibid). The net effect of these statements is that the Matebeles were new comers with no deep historical links with the land they occupied. As such, they cannot claim to belong to this new country as their origins and nativity is traced to Zululand in Natal. Not only are the Matebeles' claim to nativity challenged, but the narrative also does not allow any other group to lay claim to the space. The presence of the local people is acknowledged grudgingly as they are dismissed as "wandering Bushmen" (ibid). The qualifying adjective "wandering" here serves to deny these people any serious cultural and spiritual attachment to the land they occupy, their presence is temporary, even transient. The same effect is achieved by the usage of the denigrative term "Bushmen" which relegates them to the margins of the human family where they are not allowed any fixed claim to any specific geographical space. In essence then, as a group they are effectively obliterated and denied any claims of belonging to the space they occupy.

The eastern parts of the country, which also became the subject of settler occupation, also had to be 'unpeopled' if white settlerism was to take root effectively. These parts are said to have been settled by 'a number of different tribes, nomadic people who migrated from the north and east, constantly moving to and fro in order to accommodate their needs and wants' (ibid). The suggested motley nature of these "tribes" is meant to hint at the fact that there was no social or cultural cohesion amongst these groups. This also suggests a dearth of political organisation that could account for any definitive claim to the space. Effectively de-rooting these groups is the assertion that they were not sedentary and that they moved from the north and east, therefore not identified with any specific place. Even the south of the country only consisted of "scattered settlements of Shangaans from Mozambique and Northern Transvaal" (ibid). To this extent, the land between the Zambezi and the Limpopo was not occupied by any group and was open space for contestation by who so ever willed and had the means. What is achieved through this narrative is a statement that this was "no man's land" (ibid) and the white man moved in to settle with "a clear conscience" (ibid) as there was never an invasion to facilitate the birth of the Rhodesian nation.



The auto/biographical narrative in this case performs the role of discursively clearing the ground for the white Rhodesian nation to take root. It performs what can aptly be referred to as displacement by discourse, a process through which all other claims of presence and belonging are destabilized and undermined so as to open up the space for fresh contestation. Smith's narrative of Rhodesian nation effectively denies any claims of indigeniety by any of the African groups in the land, and critically ruffles notions of who is indigenous and who is not. It also opens up critical interrogations that threaten to go beyond ascriptions of belonging that tend to assign and associate certain races with certain continents or regions. The obvious implication of this narrative is that if what became known as Rhodesia was no man's land, all the groups who came to 'people' it at relatively the same time can claim to be indigenous to it, and this includes the Whites. Definitions of nativity assume a complex nature that not only defy commonsensical interpretations, but opens up fierce contestations of who is native to the land and who is not. The narrative provokes new ways of defining concepts of settlerism and colonialism as after their discursive displacement the African groups are defined as potential colonists. The liberation movement is denied the legitimacy of presenting itself as representing the owners of the land who are fighting the invaders. The reference to the "New Zanu PF colonialists" (p. x) raises the possibility that the ruling party had an agenda of its own that it wanted to impose on the people. Moore (2008) supports Smith's thesis when Moore refers to elements of "Bonapartism" (p.31), a concept implying ZANU PF's leading the new black government gravitated towards domination rather than hegemony as its operational strategy to consolidate its hold on the people over which it ruled. By branding the ruling party the new colonists Smith's intention is to invoke ideological nuances of the meaning of colonialism, where, beyond denying the nationalist movement's claims to having brought political independence, entrenches settler claims to nativity, because the new black government led by ZANU PF is depicted as imposing a foreign ideology on the land and its black and white people. This foreign ideology is deemed as running counter to constructions of a Rhodesian society that is modelled around Western civilisation.

The appropriation of a native identity is crucial for the Rhodesian whites as this will enable them to contest for both cultural and political dominancy from a vantage point. Auto/biography in the first instance operates as the first line of defence and in Smith's narrative that defence comes in the form of an assertive positioning of the Whites as indigenous Africans. Having just arrived in the land, just like any other African group, the Pioneer Column is just another African tribe,

albeit a White one. By rebranding the White settlers as a tribe the narrative is conveniently situating them within those identity conceptions, albeit constructed in Western thought, that are normally reserved for black African groups. The objective is to establish parity which would then deflect their being designated as aliens in Africa. The assertion that “there is only one white tribe, the Rhodesians, who are indigenous to this country” (p.327) is an aggressive declaration of belonging to a space which otherwise would have been understood to belong to the black groups. The White tribe, - the Rhodesians-, are entrenched into the space alongside the “many tribes in our country- the Matebele in the West, the Karanga in the Midlands, the Zezuru and Manyika in the east, the Venda and the Shangaan in the south and the Makorekore and Tonga in the north” (ibid). The quest for legitimation in this space assumes even more subtle nuances where the White Rhodesians in the various regions of the country can also adopt the identities of the Black tribes occupying the area.

The Whites in Matabeleland are therefore identified as “White Matebeles” who should not be isolated for attack during the so-called “dissident activities” of the early 1980s. The Rhodesians thus could easily be subsumed in the various territorial identity labels that designate African groups, making it possible to have White Mashonas or White Manyikas. This means that territorial identity designations are rendered porous to the extent that they accommodate new comers irrespective of their place of origin or race. They lack the capacity to screen even on the basis of the time duration from arrival to the point when one can claim to belong. The question is how much time does one need to be in the territory in order to qualify as a White Matebele or White Mashona? At another level the narrative’s deployment of meaning to territorial identity designation is reductive to the extent that Ndebele or Shona or Karanga identities are then understood as nothing more than signifiers of geography. Such an understanding refuses to deploy cultural belonging and consciousness as the key factors in identity formation for the Black African groups. Cultural belonging and consciousness as determinant factors in identity formation and realization is only allowed to the White tribe, the Rhodesians.

At this stage, the narrative project that starts off as an act of defence becomes a hegemonic project. Transmutations of identity that are allowed for the White tribe, thus enabling them to be Matebeles or Mashonas, empower them to lay claim of belonging in any space in the Rhodesian territory. Conversely, the identity category of Rhodesian, the only white tribe in the land, does

not open itself up, at least ideologically and culturally, to accommodate the Black groups. Rhodesian-ness as an identity is more than a geography as it is informed by a specific culture and value system that clearly marks out those who do not belong to it. The space called Rhodesia is occupied by “Rhodesians” and “our blacks.” (p.25). Primorac (2006:68), in her discussion of the Zimbabwean fiction in Rhodesian space-time, which is pertinent to the settler auto/biographies, is forthright when she observes that even after the political fall of Rhodesia, as “a mental construct the Rhodesian chronotope turned out to be resilient.” It is therefore imperative to explore how this auto/biographical narrative, after clearing the space of other contestants, grafts and maintains the concept of Rhodesia and Rhodesian-ness onto that space.

J.R.T Wood, in the introduction to Smith’s autobiography (2001), attempts a definition of Rhodesians by stating what they are not. His contention is that “whatever the origin of the White Rhodesians, they were simply not South Africans, nor were they the British abroad, talking of home” (p. vi). In a further attempt to define the nation of Rhodesia, he maintains that the “colony was neither the outcome of British imperialism at the height of the scramble for Africa, nor part of a vision generated in London” (ibid). What is achieved through this effort is to reveal the complexity, and elusive nature, of the identity concepts of “Rhodesia” and “Rhodesian-ness.” It is a complexity that nevertheless has not been extended, rather deliberately, to the identity categories of Shona, Ndebele, Karanga or Manyika in the narrative. By distancing Rhodesian-ness from the British when everything was done in “the name of Queen and country,” (p.1) and from the Cape from whence the sponsorship came, the narrative prepares the ground for grafting a new identity category that seeks to satisfy the criteria for indigeniety. Rhodesian-ness is spelt out as an aspect of African-ness which makes it distinct from other identity products that derived from British imperialism. It is an identity that contests the alien classification. The closest that it is connected with the mother country is where it is defined as a “product of sub-imperialism by Britain’s Cape Colony” (p.vi). This definition is consistent with the strategic act of distancing Rhodesia and Rhodesian-ness from the metropole and rebranding them as native phenomena that could only exist in African conditions and at the time that they did. In this way the narrative not only appropriates the spaces for its desired identity, but entrenches this identity as beyond contestation. Yet, paradoxically, the narrative acknowledges the “spirit of nationalism associated with the opening up of new lands in the name of monarch and country” (p.2). It is this experience

and spirit that in the second instance defines the Rhodesians as distinct from the “Britishers” (ibid) who have never participated or experienced the imperial adventure from its frontiers.

In the very first instance, the narrative of *Bitter Harvest* defines Rhodesian-ness as an intrinsic extension of Britishness whose “special” quality is a result of being tempered by jingoistic adventure at the frontiers of the empire. Britain remains the basis from which the whole edifice of the Rhodesian nation and identity take root. It is Britain that informs the cultural values and standards which become the foundational values of the Rhodesian identity. Britain is celebrated as that “small island off the coast of Europe, this mighty atom which had spread its Western Christian civilization over half the globe, introducing proper standards of freedom, justice and the basis of education, health and hygiene.”(p. 2). From it comes forth a special breed of men, British people with “strong, individual character, with that important quality of having the courage of their conviction” (ibid.), and these are the people who laid the foundations of Rhodesia. The discursive thrust of this narrative is to not only uplift the British man at the frontier of the empire, but also to set him apart from the black man whilst maintaining claims of belonging to the African space. It seeks effectively to appropriate higher moral and cultural ground over both motherland and the black subjects on the Rhodesian space. Britain is chastised for failing to maintain the high standards that are carried forward into the interior by those at the frontiers, while black Africa is despised for its alleged inferior civilisation. Essentially, it is this appropriation of higher moral and cultural ground that enables the narrative to pursue the theme of betrayal of the Rhodesian cause.

As a result of this partializing of the identities of the people, Rhodesia is thus constructed as the shining lighthouse right in the southern part of the “dark continent”, whose heroes are “men of British stock.... carrying the torch on one of the few frontiers yet to be civilized” (p. 2). Rhodesia and Rhodesian-ness are thus best conceived of against their “others”, the Britisher who remained at home and would countenance the decline of standards, and on the extreme the “primitive” black African. Rhodesia is portrayed as the outpost of unadulterated Western values of modernity, law and order, democratic governance and Christianity. Situated in Southern Africa, it is the bulwark against savagery, despotism, communist fascism and hedonism. Throughout *Bitter Harvest* the narrative voice of Smith maintains the image of Rhodesia as the “classic example of a country which had been consistently dedicated to the ideals of the British Empire,

freedom, justice, the Westminster system of government with its inherent democracy, and economics based on the free enterprise system” (p.271).

The above characterization of Rhodesia and Rhodesian-ness marks out the black Africans as the critical ‘other.’ This is particularly so because the black African occupies the same physical space as the white settler in a relationship that consigns him to be the inferior other. The contestation for belonging, for nativity, also provides a prelude for a battle of moral and cultural superiority. The battle is pitched up to the level of contestations of citizenship and subject, (Mamdani, 1996) with the Rhodesians declaring that “we knew that the country was ours in perpetuity, and our children and grandchildren would go on living here” (p. x). This declaration of ownership of the country excludes the blacks whose claim to native status does not entitle them to Rhodesian-ness in a cultural and ideological sense. The discourse of “ownership” should be read within the context of control and domination. What is implied in this mode of thinking is that, the country belonged to Rhodesians, and it is important to note that this is an identity category that exclusively accommodates those of British stock who adventured to the outpost of the Empire. It is only this group that can technically claim citizenship in Rhodesia, which is full participation in the civic processes of the country. The “other” who is the African who has been physically and discursively disinherited from the space can only be a subject who is controlled and dominated. He can only be incorporated to the extent he is able to approximate or estimate to the standards defined for him by the dominant settler group. The concept of gradualism with regards to the admission of blacks into the country’s civic processes concretizes the equation between those who belong to Rhodesia and those who are its others. The narrative consolidates this scheme by underscoring the need for the Rhodesians to “work in conjunction with our indigenous people, and incorporating them in our plans for the future” (p. xi). The concept of “our” or what can be referred to as the politics of “ouring” does not imply equality in belonging to the same physical or cultural and moral space. Rather it designates that which is “oured”, the object, from the subject that owns it. It spells out a hegemonic relationship in which those who are “oured” are the inconsequential other that can be forced to conform to the ideology and values of the one who is dominant. The reference to indigenous people as a signifier of identity claim linked to some geo-cultural space remains an ambivalent reference whose currency stretches to the extent that when it becomes convenient, it encompasses the Rhodesian as well.

In its desire to construct and propagate the Rhodesian nation peopled by whites, Smith's narrative, proceeds through metaphors of exclusion. Yet it is also critical that the Rhodesian nation project should be elastic and complex enough to market itself as accommodating everyone within its boundaries. The challenge therefore is to unmask the facade of inclusion so as to understand the designated spaces within the nation project. In its narration of the Rhodesian project, the auto/biography defines the core group that occupies the centre of the nation project, and clearly demarcates its margins. In the discourse of the nation it is the core group that wields both political power and cultural influence which enables it to assign spaces to the various others within the national boundaries. The indigenous black people are apportioned peripheral space not only physically and politically, but culturally and discursively. Those at the core claim to know and understand them and therefore proceed to define them and what is good for them (Said, 1978). The narrative builds its case around the conviction that "there was a cultural gap associated with our respective history, tradition and ways of life" (p. 25).

The language of difference, of gaps between the Western-inspired Rhodesian culture and the black African values, logically leads to insinuated calls of deference towards the values that are assumed to be superior. Thus Smith immediately reminds the reader that "this was my country, my home", and "provided that things could be done in our own time, maintaining standards of Western civilisation, there was no reason why we could not all live together to our mutual benefit, gradually bringing our black people in, as and when they were prepared to accept change" (ibid.). With the narrative adopting such an assertive tone, one could interpret it as making a counter claim to those narratives that installed African nativity on the land as well, as promoted African nationalism such as Samkange's *On Trial for my Country* (1966) or Katiyo's *Son of the Soil* (1976). In *Bitter Harvest* it is clear that from the outset of the Rhodesian nation project the black people were rank, as well ranked as, outsiders whose partial inclusion in that project was dependent on their preparedness to defer to Western values and traditions. The condition that black people needed to change was predicated on the myth that Western principles of modernity were superior and good for the African. The African therefore was expected to happily abandon his culture and rejoice in the new world brought by the whites.

The metaphors of exclusion are consolidated through practical acts that are implied in the policy of gradualism. Gradualism in the Rhodesian context was a policy of evolution that would only

recognize the indigenous blacks as and when they “qualified to accept responsibility” (p.6). The pace of progression in this evolutionary process was determined by the white settler. This already suggests a power equation where one group has appropriated an ideological and political advantage to define and judge the other. As such, the policy of gradualism becomes an ideological and political tool in the hands of the Rhodesians to minimise or completely exclude black participation in the political and civil processes of the country. The narrative maintains that the native needed “adequate training and preparation” (p.38) for them to qualify to participate in these processes. What is disturbing and subtle about this position is that the decision to quantify adequacy and to provide the means towards that training remains in the hands of those whose interest is to minimize holistic inclusion.

For the black man, the longer they took before qualifying had the serious implication of not qualifying as citizens, and hence would remain subjects at the margins. Up to the 1960s the narrative proffers the argument that the blacks were not ready for full participation in political issues. It argues that stretching consultations on the issue of independence from Britain to the generality of the black people would be “to the detriment of our country” (p. 75). The “great mass of tribesman” are disqualified for “having no understanding of the meaning of the word constitution”, for having “never voted in an election or referendum” (ibid). Thus representation of blacks in the consensus-searching process on the issue of Rhodesian independence is frowned at.

For calling for such representation Britain is seen as weak and susceptible to the influence of the Organization of African Unity. The OAU’s goals are seen as the antithesis of the Rhodesian project since it called for majority rule which would torpedo white supremacy in Rhodesia. It is evident that the OAU stood for a certain specific foundational philosophy of national construction that could never be reconciled to the Rhodesian nation that Smith wanted to build. The alternative that the OAU stood for is steeped in a political and cultural definition of belonging that seeks to restore the country back to the indigenous black Africans.

Paradoxically, Smith’s narrative carries favour with the traditional African leadership which is trusted when opinion on Africans is needed. This raises questions as to the extent to which the traditional system had been reinvented in the colonial context in order to serve the interests of the settlers. Not only were the traditional institutions prone to reinvention and manipulation, but the

traditional myth and symbols that should sustain the alternative to the Rhodesian project are appropriated through this narrative process. Central to this problematic is the question of representation. Representation is an elusive concept that invites interrogations of the degree to which it is possible to stand in for the other. Deepka Bahri (2004) characterizes representation as having multiple connotations, ranging from reproduction to likeness, formation of an idea in the mind, to proxy presence in the sense of speaking for. Smith utilizes the political connotation of speaking for, whereby the chiefs are the spokespersons for the Africans in Rhodesia.

The topology on which this thesis is constructed is the assumption that the Africans constitute one essentialized identity category that makes it possible for chiefs to speak on their behalf. Essential identities, as Pnina Werbner (1997:228) shows, “impute a fundamental, basic, absolutely necessary constitutive quality to a person, social category, ethnic group, religious group or nation.” There are assumptions of perpetual continuities and internal sameness, or even discreteness that marks the unity from its others. Thus authoritative statements can be given as representative of the general disposition of the group in question. The danger of this narrative assumption is that it tokenizes a small category of the African population in Rhodesia and relies on it to arrive at monumental decisions that affect the whole. Tokenization according to Spivak (1990) authorizes individuals to speak on behalf of others as they are deemed to represent that category. Yet in political terms representation can never be total as it assumes that there are those who are incapable of representing themselves. Representation is thus a fiction that is strategically conjured for the purpose of furthering political interests. The tokenization of the African chiefs both in the narrative and in real terms in the cauldron of Rhodesian politics has the strategic effect of silencing them so that no criticism is aimed at the Rhodesian nation project.

An apt example of tokenism in *Bitter Harvest* is where at a 22 October 1962 Chiefs Indaba to gauge opinion on independence Smith recalls that one Matebele chief from Matopos, one of the most sacred places of the land, reported what he refers to as an ominous event. It was reported that a large boulder on the hill where Rhodes and the Matebele chiefs made peace had crushed to the bottom making a thunderous noise as if it was from the heavens. Such an occurrence at Matopos was bound to provoke interpretations and meanings that are steeped in African traditional cosmology and with a bearing to the physical and spiritual welfare of the Africans. The subversion of the African traditional cosmology is captured in the interpretation that Smith



ascribes to the event. It is ambiguously stated that “this was an omen telling them to cut their strings so that they could live their life in their own land” (p. 81). This is a politically riddled statement that does not make it clear from whom “the strings” are to be cut and what “living their life in their own land” refers to.

However, what cannot be missed is the subtle ambivalence through which Smith is able to appropriate traditional myth to imply a cutting of strings with Britain so that Rhodesia would become independent. This being the agenda of the Indaba, the narrative is claiming African mytho-traditional sanction for the independence project of Rhodesia from Britain. In this one act, the narrative is also effectively situating Smith, and the white Rhodesians, within the ambit of African cosmology that guarantees them an African identity. It enables the Rhodesians to boldly pronounce that “we were of Africa and, therefore Africans” (p. 202) who could make recourse to the African traditional oracles for divination.

The auto/biography captures the inherent contradictions in identity construction where the Rhodesians are able to occupy, albeit ambivalently, the African space as well as maintain a distinct Rhodesian identity that keeps them apart from the blacks as well as other whites who did not hail from Britain. Yet the narrative could also be undermining itself where the interpretation of the incident could mean Africans cutting links with the Rhodesians and therefore an inference to black independence. This unsettles the base on which the auto/biography seeks to consolidate white identity, and Primorac (2006:65) aptly hints that “colonial constructs of space-time are precarious, contested and always needing to reassert themselves.” Smith apparently gives little thought to this other politically subversive meaning that speaks of the intrinsic complexity of the auto/biographical genre. Emphasis is placed on the precedent that Rhodes made peace with the Matebele chiefs at the Matopos and thus a common cause is established which allows the Rhodesians to also domesticate local mythologies.

This interpretation is upheld when Smith says “the chiefs’ decision was one of unanimous support for independence on the 1961 constitution” (p. 82) and that the subsequent referendum of November 1964 was a resounding success with voters in favour of independence on the basis of the 1961 constitution. The narration of the events leading to the November 1964 referendum on the question of independence exposes how the political self justifies its project and (re)presents its others.

The narrative of *Bitter Harvest* attempts to gloss over acts of resistance from the indigenous black people in the early stages of the colony by minimizing the significance of the 1893-7 uprisings. These are reduced to uncoordinated skirmishes that were fomented by a few malcontents amongst the Africans. This narrative strategy is maintained right up to the point of Black Nationalist independence as black resistance is reduced to communist insurgency or wanton terrorism by black malcontents. Otherwise the generality of blacks were supposed to be appreciative of the incoming modern values. After 1897 it is asserted that “because the local black people knew nothing about mining, and were interested and fascinated at the white man’s digging” for minerals, there was virtually no friction between the settlers and the indigenous blacks. In addition Africans were said to be happy to have the opportunity to work and to earn money for the first time in their life. The intention here is to cast the encounter between the settlers and the indigenous blacks as a meeting of the modern and the primitive. Typically the physical space that became designated as Rhodesia is read as a cultural blank before the advent of settlerism.

The auto/biography engages in narrative reductionism that cannot acknowledge the existence of a black cultural civilisation before the coming in of the settlers. Thus as recent as 1890 the indigenous blacks are said to have known nothing about minerals and trade. Civilisations such as those that are testified to by the Great Zimbabwe and Khami monuments which largely thrived on gold mining and trade and agriculture are not recognised. Understandably, the identity categories of Rhodesian-ness and Rhodesia, because of their exotic character, cannot draw from these symbols for their construction. Yet these symbols are the premises upon which the alternative identities of Zimbabwean-ness and Zimbabwe will be built. To this extent Zimbabwean-ness of necessity excludes those who cannot claim any cultural stakes in the heritage embodied in the cultural symbols of these ancient black civilisations, just as in the same way it is excluded from Rhodesian-ness.

*Bitter Harvest* also performs acts of justification whose objective is to portray white settlerism as a benevolent force that brought good to the indigenous blacks and never caused any disruptions to the African way of life. Even the population distribution across the geography is naturalised through reference to inhibitive low levels of civilisation that would make the Blacks opt for the sandy regions of the country for occupation. It is argued that because the blacks used primitive,

wooden agricultural implements as opposed to iron tools used by the whites, they naturally were concentrated on the sandy and loam soils that were easy to cultivate (p. 2). The contestation here is that in the first place the Rhodesians did not displace anyone as they settled on a no-man's land and all the indigenous blacks were either just arrived or nomadic. In the second instance the whites did not disrupt any black settlement patterns as levels of civilisation dictated that the whites would go for the red and clay soils thanks to their iron implements.

Consequently what is implied is that blacks were never alienated from their ancestral lands and had no cause for grievance. What this amounts to is a defence of the skewed land distribution which favoured the whites with fertile lands while pushing the Africans into the semi arid Tribal Trust Lands. Conveniently the effects of exclusionary policies that culminated in the Land Apportionment Act of the 1930s, whose objective was to entrench binary categories of African Purchase Areas/ Tribal Trust Lands on one hand, and White Commercial Areas on the other, or the rural and the city, are not highlighted. The thrust of the narrative seeks to portray a pathetic existence for the black natives before the advent of white settlerism. This then casts the presence of the whites in the land as a boon for which the natives must be grateful. It is asserted that before 1890 "the local population had remained at about 300 000, kept in check by constant war, disease, pestilence, malnutrition and starvation caused by droughts" (p. 57).

The conservative figure of the population reinforces the thesis of vast tracts of land that had remained virtually unoccupied until the coming of the whites. It also justifies colonial presence as a positive development which is then seen as bringing redemption to the natives who were plagued by disease and war. And as if to give emphasis to the goodness of the colonial force, it is contented that by 1967 the population had jumped to between 4-5 million owing to reduction of internecine wars, modern medicines and veterinary services. These assertions are underlain by a loud silence about the means through which the settlers subdued the native population through war and disruptions of native economic activities. There is also a deliberate silence as to how the native population responded to the roller-coasting impact of colonial subjugation, for instance the early forms of resistance expressed in the first Chimurenga. This narrative silence can be read as a way of sanitizing the economic interests that accompanies the project of the empire. It is just as Boehmer (2005:35) cautions that the British "had a genius for fashioning moral ideals which matched their economic needs." According to this argument, the purveyors of empire always

married duty to interest and Christianity to profit in such a way that only the supposedly higher moral ideals were more visible.

To this extent, the message that is propagated throughout the narrative is value ridden to the extent that colonialism is given as an ideologically redemptive system that would uplift the lives of the native. Eze (1998:215), critiquing Hegelian thought on Western philosophy in relation to the people of colour, exposes the Western myth that “colonialism was also a benefit to Africa because Europe inseminated it with its reason, ethic, culture, and mores, and thereby historicized it.” Smith agrees with this reasoning and in his narrative submits that “in reality, colonialism was the spread of Western Christian civilization, with its commitment to education, health, justice, and economic advancement, into areas which were truly “darkest Africa” (p. 144). What the auto/biography fails to apprehend clearly are the contradictions that are inherent in the colonial process. Whereas it is a fact that colonialism empowered some Africans who then chose not to offend it, for instance the character Babamukuru in Dangarembga’s *Nervous Conditions* (1988), it also imparted a liberal discourse of freedom in others who then began agitating for political independence. This narrative handicap makes Smith maintain that his Africans were the happiest in all sub-Saharan Africa.

Boehmer’s (2005:39) exegesis of the ways in which the empire validates its existence is very apt. She posits that the British Empire presented itself as a “benign force of fate” that would “widen the skirts of light [and] “increase the total quantity of good in the world.” The overt implication of this submission is that the presence of British settlers in Rhodesia was a benefit to the backward indigenous groups that occupied the territory. Metaphors that are reminiscent of the language of the Empire, images of disease, darkness, ignorance, savagery are what mark Africa apart from Europe. In contrast, Britain is elevated through its history, which Boehmer (2005:24) describes as making up “a tale of firsts, bests, and absolute beginnings.” There is an inherent assumption that Africa as a continent lacked any positive endowments before the advent of the empire.

In fact, the allusion to new beginnings implies, in a subtle way, an insignificant presence at most, or at worst, an absence of both history and culture on the space to be occupied. Thus in pursuance of the need to defend the settler presence in Rhodesia, Smith’s narrative operates from the condescending heights where the mere act of seeing a white man is supposed to wield

redemptive powers for the African. The confirmation of African existence takes place only at the point where contact with the white world is made. Thus the narrative declares that “the people in these areas of sub-Saharan Africa had never seen a white man, had no written language, no medical facilities, and no currency, so barter was the only means of trade” (p. 144). In simple terms this means that in Western eyes Africa and Africans did not exist and were only ushered into existence by the contact with the West. Thus Sub-Saharan Africa’s connection to its northern part is surgically severed to ensure that there is not even the slightest claim to civilizing processes in North Africa. North Africa is designated “Western Arabia”, which denies the rest of Africa any claim to its perceived advancement in terms of civilization. Through this the auto/biography rationalizes the settler project in the southern part of Africa that came to be known as Rhodesia.

The same justifications however fail to explain why that part of Africa that it designates as West Arabia also became a victim of Western imperialism despite conceding to its cultural progress. Instead the narrative buttresses its claim to predestined duty in this southern part of Africa by stressing that “our problem was to bring these Africans across, to try and bridge a 2000 year gap in the shortest possible time” (p. 149). As the presence of the settlers is contested both culturally and politically, the narrative even takes its defence to ideological levels where Rhodesia becomes the vanguard against those forces that threaten the Western enterprise.

*Bitter Harvest* draws minimal standards of character that clearly demarcates Rhodesia from its others. These standards make it possible for Rhodesia to define itself in relation to both the British and the African natives. It is clearly stated that Rhodesia will never “compromise on basic principles which were the foundation of our Western civilisation” (p. 193). Rhodesia stood for the “cause of the Christian civilisation which the forefathers had brought to the country” (p.209). This declaration prepares ground for departures where the Rhodesians felt that even the mother country, England, was failing to uphold the principles of western civilisation. It also consigns African traditional values, religions and political institutions to the realm of the negative forces that threaten to impede the spread of those very principles that define Rhodesian-ness.

In its latter stages, in *Bitter Harvest*, Rhodesia is portrayed as the bulwark against communism in Southern Africa, that arch enemy of western free enterprise. The construction of Rhodesia, or

rather its buttressing in the 1960s and 70s is premised on its being the only hope for western civilisation in a continent that was being overtaken by African nationalism. Joyce (1974, 114) reflects on Smith's view of black nationalism and its effects on the ideals of the Rhodesian nation. He opines that Smith firmly believed that "the nationalists had deliberately torpedoed the white man's sincere efforts to build a nation" (ibid). In this the narrative rejects any other alternative views of conceiving and constructing a nation. This also in a way explains Smith's recalcitrance in breaking away from the UFP party, and thus paving the way to UDI, which he accuses of having agreed in principle to cede power to the majority Africans. His attitude towards nation and Rhodesian identity is conveyed in his characterization of the Rhodesian Front Party, which is described as "a rallying ground for people of different political parties who realized that if they (UFP Government) were not checked, we were going to lose our country" (ibid. p.118). The immediate responsibility of the Rhodesian Front therefore was to "marshal our forces in order to prevent the implementation of this mad idea of a hand-over, of a sell-out of the European and his civilization, indeed of everything he had put into the country" (ibid.). Hence up to the point of the nation's demise, the auto/biography celebrates Rhodesia as a tremendous nation with "an epic history of fighting a lone battle for freedom and Western civilisation" (p.299). She is accorded a place in history for playing a "significant role in the battle against communism on the African continent" (p. 311). Britain and the West in general are implicitly criticised for their complacency in allowing the takeover of their former colonies by Black Nationalist governments.

In its defence of the Rhodesian project, Smith's life narrative calls for the "free world" to "reject communist propaganda about the evils of colonialism" (p. 127). The growing rift between Rhodesia and Britain largely is a result of the perceived appeasement of the African nationalists at the expense of the Rhodesians. Subtle language of exclusion relegates these black nationalists to some space beyond the confines of Rhodesia where they are seen as fomenters of trouble for the white establishment. On the issue of the Federation the narrative makes a resolution to the effect that "if, in the end, the British did decide to appease the black extremists and renege on all their promises, then... we Southern Rhodesians could fall back on our independence" (p. 38).

The Rhodesian identity is thus inspired and informed by British jingoism, and yet to achieve its own independent identity it seeks detachment from the monarchy that sired it. It logically builds

towards Smith's thesis of liberating the Rhodesian nation from British imperialism through the Unilateral Declaration of Independence. The auto/biographical narrative here makes the claims that are meant to carve Smith and his radical core group of settlers as liberators, claims that would also later be made by the different black African nationalists. This narrative strategy seeks to subvert the African nationalists' claim to legitimate cause in fighting the Rhodesian nation project, or at least rendering their cause irrelevant. This intrinsically problematizes the notion of liberation. The questions to be asked are at what stage does sub-imperialism become capable of liberating, and who is liberated in the process? This question is significant because it transforms those who are the subjects of both British imperialism and Rhodesian sub-imperialism from being named as villains and elevating them to status of heroes.

The auto/biographical genre exposes itself as imbued with internal contradictions that explode it into several subversive narratives. In writing the story of the self and the Rhodesian nation, Smith has no control over slippages that result in alternative interpretations of his perceptions. Therein lies the intrinsic political nature of the auto/biographical narrative. Joyce (1974, 177) hints at this irony where he notes that in Smith's attempt to embody the core values and interests of Rhodesia, he seemed to "represent everything he did not believe in: reaction, racial prejudice, the oppression of majorities by minorities and injustice." When the narrative is read in this way, the possibility of contesting, or even establishing the narrowness of, the 1965 Unilateral Declaration of Independence as a liberatory act becomes solid. Even within the white population itself there were discordant voices on the issue of UDI as well as the war to prop up the nation of Rhodesia so created. Moore-King's novel, *White Man Black War* (1989) is one such expression of the contradiction-riven credo around which the self and Rhodesian nation were constructed. The content and ideological thrust of the UDI becomes the subject matter that sustains contesting African nationalist auto/biographies that proffer alternative definitions of liberation. Rhodesia after 1965 regresses into a case where imperial power is usurped by a group of settlers who then consolidate this power to effectively occupy, exploit and govern the indigenous black population. The justifications advanced in *Bitter Harvest* that Rhodesian whites are a superior race, are in fact enacted by Smith in order to write his own identity on the emerging nation as its most ardent defender and main protagonist in Rhodesian whites' battle perceived as waged against the supposed barbarity of Africans.

### **3.2.2 The Making of the ‘Political’ Self in Ian Smith’s *Bitter Harvest*.**

One of the classic sociological perspectives on self identity situates the development of a conscious self identity within concrete social settings. In the modern dispensation personal identities are said to be nurtured and shaped by factors in one’s environment. David Harris (1996:177) posits that personal identities must have a social base, that they “are provided (in various ways), supplemented or negotiated, and reinforced in concrete social settings.” The immediate bearing to life narratives is that the emergency of a critical and conscious identity is not possible in a social vacuum. This is valid even when the question of personal or individual agency is considered as an important factor in shaping self identity. The construction of a self identity in Smith’s auto/biography is first and foremost premised in that societal unit that gives society the basis of existence- the family. The family aura is created in a way that is meant to give predestination to the subject narrator. The political identity of the self is raised above ordinary character and circumstances through its linkage to a great family tradition and pedigree.

The assertion by the narrator that he was born of parents who “strove to instill principles and moral virtue, the sense of right and wrong, of integrity, in their children” (p.7) serves to define a distinction between the narrator and those others who by inference hail from families with no such values. The positive values typifying the narrator’s family become the springboard that catapults him to a position of dominancy as well as legitimate that dominancy. Both from the father and mother there is only virtue to inherit, virtue that at a higher ideological level proclaims the superiority of the white race. Yet for purposes of furthering the agenda of political self identity it seeks to locate the narrator in a unique position even among the white kindred. The father is characterized as blessed with drive, energy and ability as manifested in his successful business, while the mother is a social organizer who gave several voluntary services to the community.

This narrative description seeks to effectively naturalize, through anchoring the individual in impeccable tradition, so that the ascendancy of that individual self is deemed predetermined. A logic of predestination is constructed in which the identity of the self is plotted on a grand linear scale that leads to celebration of the achievements of that particular self. Self identity therefore consolidates itself by appropriating a special and privileged position whose co-ordinates are determined by solid family history. The self in this case becomes unimaginable outside this



social context which even in later life continues to water its roots. The subject narrator indeed picks up the essence of his self identity as “a member of a close-knit family built around worthwhile traditions (p.27). The moral and psychological support of the family or the immediate social unit is also critical to self realization of the individual identity. It is as noted by Harris (1996:184) that the approval and agreement of those “significant others we encounter is crucial in the attempt to establish or achieve an identity.”

These significant others are politically and ideologically relevant as they are often chosen from one’s immediate family or race. The place of great families in nation building is clearly delineated through the reminder that “great nations are built on the foundation of great families. (p.27) Family is thus linked to the nation in a political equation that relegates the less significant others to peripheral roles in the construction of the nation. The auto/biography in this case situates the subject narrator, Ian Smith, at pole advantage to emerge as a natural leader in Rhodesia. The narrative tactfully “forgets” or deliberately mutes any references to other great family histories that, in his time, could have shaped the destiny of Rhodesia. Where mention is made, it is qualified in a way that seeks the diminution of such individuals or families to lesser pedigree.

From childhood the individual subject retrieves from selective memory the positive elements that family and societal institutions availed to augment personal character. These include the sporting activities that the individual pursued both at school and at university. Sport is particularly carefully chosen as a discipline-forming activity that prepares the individual for a significant role in future. The individual in this narrative is a great athlete who distinguished himself in running, rugby and rowing. An aggressive and assertive self identity that would play a central role in the Rhodesian nation is in the making.

The choice of rowing as a sport is justified as a sport that “promoted philosophical thinking and reasoning” (p.9), a discipline that has “therapeutic qualities, encouraging participants to resolve differences through peaceful communication and rationalization” (ibid). What is achieved through these justifications is to position the individual subject as someone who qualifies for the onerous tasks expected of those who embody the national destiny. Mental grooming that is gained through sport later on manifests itself through the individual subject’s contrived distinction in his encounters with those around him. In later life we see a self that claims not only

to be the custodian of the best values of the Rhodesian nation, but also to be the sole voice of reason in the nation. During the 1961 proposed constitutional amendments that sought to introduce a new voting system with A and B voter's roles, Smith claims that at the special party congress that debated the new changes he was "the only dissenting voice out of the 400 delegates." (p.41). This statement amounts to a political act in which only the subject narrator claims to be the only one endowed with a unique and perceptive vision which everyone else in the Federal Party did not have.

The ascendancy of this 'political conscience' to leadership is thus represented only as natural. Auto/biography in this case is not only an image building exercise, but also serves to buttress individual political ambitions. The subject narrator through the narrative performs an act of self-extrication that distances him from the perceived political malaise around him. Federal politics is seen as pervaded with a certain level of permissiveness that Smith himself could not tolerate, and Edgar Whitehead's leadership is dismissed as indecisive, just as his policies were ineffectual. Thus the narrative laments that "our political world was riddled with compromise, appeasement, indecision, all part and parcel of the deviousness which permeated our society" (p.45). While the subject narrator claims to maintain sobriety and to avoid over-reaction, - the basis on which the Rhodesian Front,- Smith's own party, is to be formed is solidly laid through discrediting Whitehead and Federal politics.

Once the Rhodesian Front ascends to power, Smith again carves an identity that thrusts him not only over and above the political leadership of Winston Field, but that places him at an advantage on claims of legitimacy in terms of that political leadership. The narrative boldly entrenches its subject by exclaiming that "for the first time in its history the country now had a Rhodesian-born Prime Minister, someone whose roots were not in Britain, but in Southern Africa, in other words, a white African" (p.67). What is achieved by this statement is a gradation of the Rhodesian identity whereby those born in the land had more entitlements than those who migrated to it. As such the best interests of the nation could only be best taken care of by this category of "pure Rhodesians" or the white Africans. This conception of identity amounts to political reductionism whereby only a particular individual or group of people appropriate the right to define the self and how it relates to the nation. All the preceding Prime Ministers and Field in particular, are seen as falling in for the duplicity of the British on the question of

Southern Rhodesian independence. The Rhodesian-born Smith is thus legitimated, and is portrayed as never misjudging, always perceptive and conscious of the greater good of those who are at the core of the Rhodesian nation project.

Smith's auto/biographical narrative often graduates into a self-legitimizing discourse which seeks to entrench self identity firmly within the contested space of the nation. This is done through naming and defining the insignificant white other whose claim to nativity in the nation space is trivialised, or the primitive African other who, because forces of modernity have not yet liberated him from nature, is then assigned a peripheral space. The narrative strives to draw a distinct dichotomy between those whites who were born in Britain and later on migrated to Rhodesia and those who were born and bred in Rhodesia. Insinuations of betrayal are extended to British-born Rhodesians who are accused of countenancing British impertinence and duplicity on the question of the political fate of the indigenous blacks.

Those born and bred in Rhodesia are shown to have a high degree of commitment to the Rhodesian nation and were clear as to the space that the blacks should occupy. Commitment to nation is underscored at the outbreak of the Second World War when Rhodesian "young-bloods from Selukwe boarded night trains to enlist and do service on behalf of the nation" (p.9). The identity of the subject narrator both as an individual as well as a Rhodesian is consolidated through his clear conscience and sacrifice to answer to the national call to fight for both nation and Queen.

Abandoning university studies, followed by a distinguished military career in the First World War on behalf of Queen and country are factors that forge self identity and the nation into a complex labyrinth that makes up the subject of political auto/biography. Through this forging Smith's individual identity is entangled with that of the nation to a point where his ascendancy to political significance is unstoppable. Though it can be contested that this was actually Britain's war, the Rhodesian contingent to which Smith is part would claim its position through participation alongside their European kindred. Selukwe, as the place of Smith's origin is allowed a special place where a unique spirit of Rhodesian nationalism had taken root. Rhodesian nationalism is therefore embodied in those whites born in Rhodesia, and even the Federation time Prime minister, Roy Welensky, would always remind his critics that he "was born in this country,... and the good of our country is always uppermost in my mind" (p .42.)

Smith's life story operates on a binarism where, on the other extreme end is the black native who the narrative recreates as the beneficiary of the bounty brought by settler modernity. This native is best epitomized in the anecdote of Smith's encounter with an African from the Zambezi valley. What is stressed is the fact that the native only had two large toes, a phenomenon that is lent the authority of science by one Gelfand, a Professor of Medicine, who explained that the two toes had developed so as to help the natives to climb trees in order to obtain food (p.29). It is also stressed that the native had never visited any urban areas. The native is thus depicted as a victim of the vicissitudes of nature, the primitive other who should defer his claim of nativity to those who brought him redemption. His entry into the nation project can only start from a marginal position, and progression towards its core is gradual and determined by those who claim to be the harbingers of modernity. And the narrative legitimates the position of the settler self by subtly claiming that the native knew and acknowledged the beneficent other who brought redemption to him. Thus on being asked who Smith was, the two-toed native confidently answered that he was the Prime Minister. The logic of a modernizing authority and its political legitimacy is thus upheld through the narrative of the subaltern.

The auto/biographical genre also betrays a certain complexity that allows it to both advance the political ambitions of the self as well as manage the image of that self so that it retains its public appeal and acceptability. The former is achieved through delineation of the self's vision(s) for the attainment of a better selfhood and the greater good of the group, while the latter is achieved through moderation and rationalization of the activities of the self. In Smith's case, once the Rhodesian Front party is formed and garnered its first victory in 1962, he purports to have harboured no ambition for political leadership. The rationale for this was that Winston Field as Prime Minister would be overwhelmed by candidates vying for ministerial positions, and therefore would relieve him of pressure by requesting not to be considered. The narrative here represents Smith as a dedicated patriot, a conscientious party worker who has the common good of the nation at heart. The progression to political leadership is presented as foisted on the individual by the community that apparently has identified indisputable qualities of natural leadership in him. The feigned reluctance to take on the leadership role is a strategic narrative act that allows the subject narrator to submit to the people's call, thus he becomes the servant of the people. It is a strategy that gives a political veil to the unbridled urge to dominate, and to promote the ambitions of the self.

The narrative of *Bitter Harvest* also, here, reveals its capacity to elevate both the individual and group within the context of nation. Group identity is delineated as the context that allows for the cultivation and growth of a specific self identity that, at convenient times, alternates between self immersion in the group and marking itself as distinct from the rest of the group. Meanwhile it maintains a clear demarcation between the categories of the self, the inner- group and the exotic other that is distanced through purported lack of reason, race and backwardness. The exotic other is always kept apart, and the narrative maintains the discourse of “Rhodesians and our local people” (p.62), “the great mass of our tribesmen” (p75) and “our black people” (ibid). It is a discourse of ownership that does not allow for equality between Africans and Europeans, hence it speaks of a process of relegating blacks to the marginal spaces of the nation.

The language of difference is employed for effect to enable the emergency of the identity of the self and that of the in-group. This is self evident in the contention that:

“it is difficult for people who have never lived in this part of the world to appreciate that Sub-Saharan Africa is different. It was the last part of the world to come into contact with Western European civilisation, and when the pioneers arrived in this country [Rhodesia] the local had no written language, no form of currency, no schools nor hospitals, and lived in makeshift houses and grass roofs. The wheel had not yet evolved, nor had the plough” (p.55).

The civilizing rationale of the west is defended through the life narrative that subtly assumes an ideological position for purposes of self and group entrenchment in the nation space. Given the implied “backwardness” of the country before the advent of white settlerism, the achievements thereafter are then pronounced phenomenal and “a tribute to what the white inhabitants did over a period of ninety years” (ibid).

The narrative thus celebrates the achievements of white Rhodesia in the fields of education, health, housing, cultural and sporting amenities for the indigenous people. It creates a Rhodesian identity whose realm conceptually is not of Africa, but a model of the modern Western nation whose first citizens are whites. Thus the narrative declares that “over a period of eighty years, a small band of people, mainly of British stock, had turned a piece of untamed African bush into a classical example of modern western civilization” (p.255) comparable to New Zealand, USA,

Canada and Australia. Smith's auto/biography therefore seeks to construct a self and Rhodesian identity based on an ideological binarism that effectively assigns fringe space to all those who are not of British stock.

After the declaration of independence in 1965 Smith declared that "to us has been given the privilege of being the first Western nation in the last two decades to have the determination and fortitude to say: so far and no further" (p.106). The auto/biography here continues to advance two fundamental categories whose main purpose is to define, by way of exclusion, the Rhodesian identity and the ideological premises that gave it character. The "us" always occurs in its oppositional context where there is an assumed "other", which other could be white but mostly is not white or significantly not of British stock and therefore peripheral to the Rhodesian identity. The declaration of Rhodesia as the "first Western nation" is meant to ideologically situate it alongside nations of the West such as Britain, or its established colonies such as Canada, USA, Australia and New Zealand. Though physically grafted on the African continent, the Rhodesian nation is located on a higher plain where only those who are connected through blood kinship can be accepted into the inner core of the Rhodesian nation.

The narrative further emphasizes this exclusionary tendency through an item in the declaration of independence where it is stated that "the people of Rhodesia, having demonstrated their loyalty to the crown and to their kith and kin in the United Kingdom and elsewhere..." (p104) now could justifiably claim their independence. The fact that the reference point remains Britain, and that the emphasis in Rhodesian identity is characterized by blood relations as suggested in "kith and kin", means that blacks were never part of the Rhodesian nation project. This should explain the beginning of an incipient Zimbabwean nationalism, as opposed to Rhodesian-ness, from the very early days of settler occupation. The ambivalence with which the narrative of *Bitter Harvest* seeks to loosely draw the indigenous groups into the nation project at convenient times, and push them asunder at other times can only be read as political manoeuvring. On the base the Rhodesian nation was built on a race ideology that drew its content from modernist assumptions of the superiority of Western civilisation. Rhodesia and its leader are thus constructed as the beacon of that Western civilisation on the African continent. Thus on being awarded a miniature replica of a lighthouse, Smith affirms that "for so many years I had served as a warning beacon to the free world on the dangers of international communism." (p. 275).

In the ultimate, Smith's life narrative is fractured by its very intention to create an overarching self image as well as Rhodesian nationalism. It premises its identity constructions on an exclusionary glossary that privileges British progeny in Rhodesia. Its totalizing language is undermined by the fact that auto/biographical narrative is "only ever a rehearsal" (Nuttall, 1998:75) that cannot claim absolute meanings. This intrinsically means that both the self and the Rhodesian nation can be conceived of in several other ways at different times and contexts and by people situated in different contexts and contexts. Thus Smith's narrative is only one version out of the possible many. The narrow nationalism that it champions is also fissured by the fact that it, in the first instance, excludes blacks, or includes them as subordinates, and in the second place excludes some whites on ideological grounds or ethnicity. The narrative is in this way victim to the stubborn contradictions inherent in life writing, which paradoxically is based on what could have been included but is not, or is minimized or suppressed. The next section of this chapter will explore the ways in which the Rhodesian life narrative can confirm as well as question absolute constructions of the self and nation.

### **3.3 Peter Godwin - *Mukiwa: A White Boy in Africa***

#### **3.3.1 The Dis/eased Other and the Self in Godwin's *Mukiwa: A White Boy in Africa***

The focus of this section is Peter Godwin's *Mukiwa: A White Boy in Africa* (1996). Because Godwin is also a white writer in Rhodesia, I will seek to identify continuities with Ian Smith in the constructions of white selfhood and the Rhodesian nation. But a more critical reason for the inclusion of Godwin's work in this study is to expose the discontinuities in conceptions of self and nation amongst whites of different generations. Such discontinuities can also be spurred by acquired consciousness(es) earned in specific subjectivities.

*Mukiwa: A White Boy in Africa* (hereafter to be referred to as *Mukiwa*) is a disguised auto/biographical narrative that traces and delineates the life of Peter Godwin in colonial Rhodesia from childhood up to the time he returns to independent Zimbabwe in the early 1980s. Its significant setting is in the Eastern Highlands which are etched in the memory of the young narrator as a miniature of Rhodesia and white civilization. The first narrative movement is spelt by threats to the nation of Rhodesia and the settler community from the Crocodile Gang, a group of black freedom fighters who signal resistance to white constructions of identities and nation in

Rhodesia. The second movement sees Godwin answering the call to defend the Rhodesian edifice in Smith's military army, an act that subjects him to new realities and consciousnesses that enable him to revise childhood conceptions of both white identity and images of Rhodesian nation.

Like any other memoir/ auto/biography, *Mukiwa* brings to the fore matters of self identity and its complex interactions with the nation. Ashleigh Harris (2005) alludes to this relationship between the self and its wider environment and how the auto/biographical narrative commits itself as a negotiation act between the two categories. The argument is that "any articulation of personal memory in testimony, or in autobiography, becomes not only enunciated in the public sphere, but becomes subsumed within a broader social, political and historical discourse of nationhood" (p.104).

Self identity, in its dynamic fashion, carves its form and content within the context of the bigger collective identities of family, community and nation, and for the subject narrator in this narrative, it is the community of white settlers in Melsetter district, the Rhodesian nation and the peripherally located Africans. As Levin and Taitz (1999:171) posit, this is a delicate process that involves alienation as well as the "fracturing of a communal identity in order to write the "I" into prominence, and a necessary rewriting of the position of the "I" in relation to particular communities/identities which then allows for the possibility of a reinsertion of the "I" back into the commun(i)ty with which it both identifies and dis-identifies simultaneously." The general perception which typifies Godwin and the white settler community is that of a superior race that has a duty of setting civilized standards for the backward indigenous natives. To this extent the young Godwin follows in the creative and ideological footsteps of Smith. There is continuity in descriptions and imaginings of the values that underpin Rhodesian identities. This identity perception is only possible because of the presence of a perceived and negative "other"- the black African in the first instance, and the other white groups such as the Afrikaners who are referred to as "rock spiders" or "white kaffirs".

Boehmer (2005) infers that psychoanalysis (especially Lacanian) has postulated that self identity is constituted within the gaze of another. She further posits that the other is signified as the unfamiliar and always extraneous to a dominant subjectivity. Yet this other remains critical for the definition of the dominant subjectivity. This essentially means that Godwin, just like Ian



Smith, falls back on the identity dichotomies of the civilized and the savage retrieved from the imperial repertoire. It has been contended that in its relations with the colonies, “the West conceived of its superiority relative to the perceived lack of power, self consciousness, or ability to think and rule, of colonized peoples” (Boehmer, 2005:21). In its attempts to textualize the self, colony and empire, Godwin’s auto/biography, recoups the images of the colonial subject caught up in nature’s maladies and awaiting salvation from white settlers.

Godwin’s narrative from the onset tries to imagine the possibility of an exclusive white Rhodesian identity and nation. Though with the approach of adulthood and his involvement in the war this possibility is riddled with uncertainties, the alternative of a Zimbabwean identity is largely kept out as a non-option. This is openly declared when the narrator complains that the peace that came at the end of the war had actually “robbed us of our identity” (p.326). Harris’ (2005) interpretation of Godwin’s narrative is on this point somewhat misleading. By reading this text as striving towards a white Zimbabwean identity Harris is painstakingly trying to build up a case for political relevance in the context of Zimbabwe as a nation distinct from its predecessor, Rhodesia. The error here is in suggesting that Zimbabwe, both as nation and identity, was always there in Godwin’s childhood consciousness, hence the attempt to re-inscribe his self identity on to it through narrative. The contrary holds true in the sense that both the concept of Zimbabwe and Zimbabweanness are equally recent constructions that not only Godwin, but other white narratives (Smith, 1997) defy even at the moment when it had become a reality.

Nuttall (1998:80) correctly posits that auto/biography involves “writing from a beginning towards a destination”, and that the “destination is fixed.” What then should be said beyond this statement and the ambivalences encountered in the process of trying to define the ever unstable identities of self and nation is that Godwin’s narrative is not destined to consummate in a Zimbabwean identity, whichever way it is conceived. The narrative remains strictly what Chennells (2005:133) has called an “ethnic narrative”, or a “part of a representative cultural history” (p.132) of an imagined Rhodesian identity and nation. Chennells sees white life narratives as a discourse whose objective is to assist in shaping up a “discrete white Rhodesian national identity” (ibid) whose ultimate validation was realised through the unilateral declaration of independence from Britain in 1965. As much as this may sound like an essentializing

characterization, it reveals a valid point that at different stages in their lives whites defined their identity from the narrow perspective of Rhodesian nationalism. The young whites were susceptible to this racial regimentation and exclusive white ideas of superiority from their adults. This is the bone of contention in Moore-King's (1989) narrative in which in adulthood he accuses the elders of the Rhodesian nation of misleading the young generation on the purpose of the Rhodesian war. Nevertheless, there is no coincidence in that the narrator in Godwin's work begins the reconstruction of his childhood by significantly beginning his narrative only two years before the declaration of UDI by Smith. Rather it is a confirmation of a symbolic landmark in the imagination of an exclusive Rhodesian nation and identity. Yet the paradox is that as the life narrative progresses, it seems to demand a life of its own and rebel against its creator's narrowly defined conception of nation.

To peg the indices of self identity and the Rhodesian nation Godwin's auto/biography deploys the trope of dis/ease and death. Dis/ease here does not only recall the pathological disequilibrium of the body, though this is implied, but invokes a discourse of cultural and identity dislocation and displacement. It carries implications of making one uneasy, both psychologically and culturally, with whom one is, that is with one's identity, and with one's cultural milieu and its values. Foucault's (1999:43) medico-legal exegesis of leprosy cases in the Middle Ages provides us with interesting metaphorical parallels to perceptions of the self and other in Godwin's auto/biography. It makes reference to the social practice of excluding lepers from society as instituting "a rigorous division, a distancing, a rule of no contact between one individual (or group of individuals) and another." The victim of leprosy was cast into the outer world, beyond the town's walls, that is beyond the limits of the community. Foucault qualifies this exclusion as being beyond the moral, but a juridical and political disqualification of the individuals so affected.

In Godwin's narrative, images of disease, leprosy included, and death as mainly affecting the African subject operate within the conceptual confines of Foucault's Middle Ages society. These images introduce mechanisms of disqualification and exclusion of the other over whom power is to be exercised. They carry with them significations of untamed violence and primordial barbarity, hence Chennells' (2005:140) conclusion that such images are meant as "metonymies of the violent continent." The narrative intent of such dis/easing of the self's others is a death

wish that should see them erased or subsumed within the dominant image of the self and Rhodesian nation. The infectedness of the body and its malfunction and/or death is a destabilizing metaphor whose effect is to suggest lack of normalcy or equilibrium within the body entity of the individual other as well as in his value system and cosmos. The auto/biographical narrative here assigns itself the task of re-inventing and reconstructing the settler's others in negative terms that would ensconce only him as the authentic and balanced being, physiologically, psychologically and culturally.

The first acts of dis/easing or displacing the subject narrator's others is located at the physico-identitarian level. Reminiscing of his childhood days the narrator submits that "my days were filled with dogs and servants" (p. 23). The submission enables the narrator to establish two physical identity categories that are very distinct, human beings (himself) on one side and dogs and servants on the other. This suggests no physiological commonality between the subject narrator and the servants who are grouped with the dogs. The servants belong to the lower and instinctive species and their estimation to humanity is through association with the subject narrator. The submission invites a movement from the surface structure where a master – servant relationship is hinted to the deep structure where to be a servant in the colonial context is to be below normal humanity. The subject narrator is thus delineated against its opposite- the abnormal. The servant identity appellation becomes an aberration to the norm as defined by the colonial society.

Foucault's (1999:50) explanation of the meaning of the norm is critical to the understanding of identity constructions in colonial Rhodesia. The norm must not be conceived of as "natural law" but rather should derive its meaning from the "exacting and coercive role it can perform in the domains in which it is applied." In this sense the norm defines itself by sanctioning those that are considered elements of aberration in the Rhodesian society. Through acts of sanctioning the norm claims a privileged position, and to pursue Foucault's argument, it then constitutes the "element on the basis of which a certain exercise of power is founded and legitimated." The subject narrator, as opposed to his others, represents the norm and thus relates to the servants and dogs from a privileged position of power. This argument is maintained by the narrator's admission that he knew the servants only by their first names. These were Knighty the cook boy, Violet the nanny and Albert the garden boy from Mozambique. Unlike the narrator whose full

identity is Peter Godwin, the servants are not known by their surnames. The confession that “in those days Africans did not have surnames to us” and that their “Christian names were fairly strange” (p.23) serves to deny these characters any links to ancestry, genealogy and a permanent subjectivity in history.

Only human beings trace their identity through history and genealogy, and to the white settlers who are qualified by the reference “to us”, Africans could not be part of the human family. The narrative thus far has adopted an exclusionary mechanism to designate the space of self identity and its others in colonial society. It is this tendency of colonialism that undermines it from within, that Lazarus (Castle, 2001:233) refers to as its propensity to create “conditions of possibility of its own overthrow.” Colonialism forever designates its others to marginal spaces, albeit in subtle ways. It therefore discredits itself and digresses from Foucault’s (1999:50) conception of a norm whose function is “never to exclude and reject” but rather to act as a “positive technique of intervention and transformation to a sort of normative project.” This, as the auto/biographical narrative develops, destabilizes its constructions to the extent that colonial society and its values cease to be the norm, but rather an aberration to its others. It is on this score that the colonialist narrative embodied in auto/biographical form is challenged by the African nationalist discourse.

The servants in Godwin’s narrative are known by their so-called Christian names. These are not only strange but signify the re-invention of identities for the Africans. Such names cannot provide the symbolic identity coding that must put them in harmony with their cultural milieu. On the contrary, the names are an attempt to call them into the world as new creations of a new world order, the world of Christianity. Older Africans tended to pick arbitrary English words as names as they believed that “having a name in the white man’s language would attract a white man’s power’ (p. 23). This shows that the act of naming or choosing a name is not innocence. Naming is politically as well as ideologically significant in as far as it invites the subject into a particular cultural perspective. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (2001), commenting on the implications of relating to English literary texts for Indian second language speakers, suggests that choosing a name from a different culture and language is to try to identify with that culture, albeit remotely.

Just like relating to English cultural texts, picking English names for Africans in Godwin's narrative may also be "the subtlest kind of cultural and epistemic transformation" (Spivak, 2001:55) and remote entry into that cultural realm. English names, and by extension, English language, are ascribed fetishistic endowments in the narrative. This is a way of providing a proxy rationale for dislocating Africans from the values embodied in their indigenous names. The construction of the self is thus achieved through this process of distancing or displacing the Africans from their value system and what is human. What is emphasized in the narrative is the utility function of the African, hence where their names should be accompanied by surnames they are qualified by the duties they perform. An essentialist identity which seeks to fix the African only as one dimensional source of manual labour to the white man is constructed. In the long term the African is, through such a narrative, conditioned to conceive of his identity through a history of servitude to the white master.

Once this is achieved, the narrative then locates the acts of dis/easing at the pathological level where disease and death are the typical metaphors that describe African existence. The opening of the auto/biographical narrative is somewhat absurd owing to the narrator's declaration that "in fact, I was proud with my familiarity with death" (p.3). At face value this can be attributed to the fact that the mother was a Government Medical Officer and the subject narrator would often accompany her on her routine duties. This reading is given a different turn as the narrator later on shows that this familiarity was more with African cases than the Europeans in the district.

The obsession with death images that are deployed to signify the existence and identity of one particular group, the self's other, is strategic in the construction of authentic self identity. This obsession is intended not just to expose the vulnerability of the other, but the dwindled significance of the other who nevertheless is critical in the definition of the self. The construction and conception of self identity always materialize in relative terms whereby the self appropriates a position of security and prominence in relation to its others. Thus Godwin's narrative pushes the colonized other to the diseased margins where death stalks every day of their existence.

Diseases become interesting in this regard, as evidenced in the assertion that "the most interesting of all [diseases] was leprosy. ...Only black people got leprosy" (p.96). Significantly leprosy ceases to be just a disease, it is a discursive trope that dis/eases, removes and distances the black people from mainstream humanity that by implication is immune to it. Mainstream

humanity, which is represented by the subject narrator, is above pathological disorders of that kind. In this way the narrative strives for an ideological, cultural and political hegemony of the self vis-a-vis its insignificant others. The black man is portrayed as the primitive other who is still trapped in nature and thus has remained susceptible to pathological disorders that have long been eliminated in the West. The young Godwin submits that “wet leprosy was becoming rare, even by the mid sixties” (p100). The only cases were to be found amongst tribes-people in the remote areas across the borders with Mozambique.

The very physiological condition of the African is dis/eased throughout the auto/biographical narrative. The killing of a predatory leopard allows the narrative to make subtle innuendoes about the virility of black men. Beyond this, it also enables the displacement of the blacks from the realms of “civilization” to the abysses of superstition and barbarism. Besides the fact that the leopard had attacked and eaten a child, the tribesmen wanted to help themselves to its testicles. The white man Lovat could not understand this and thus expresses surprise that these “munts now want to take this leopard’s wedding tackle and blood well scoff it as some sort of aphrodisiac or fertility booster.” (p.51). What is underscored in this statement is the chasm between “them” and “us”.

This chasm is both cultural and historical in that the narrative implies that the white man has long adopted scientific methods and approaches to life. Godwin through this narrative situates himself within the locus of a white family and settler community that has benefitted from a long history of “modern” civilization. This allows the self and its immediate group of white people to make claims to rationality and also to minister it to the “backward” other. Thus Lovat, appropriating the hegemonic position of the empowered group to which the subject narrator is part, chastises the blacks:

“When are you munts going to get civilized? We send you to school.

We teach you to read and write. We vaccinate you against disease.

And you still want to eat a leopard’s bloody bollocks.”(p. 51).

The world of the other is exposed as dumbfounding to those who experience it from the security of a self exacting consciousness. White selfhood is constructed on values of education and

literacy, scientific medicine and modern technology, something that distinctly mark it from black selfhood that is characterized by a lack. The black remains in the throes of unpredictable nature and irrationality that makes him titter at the brink of death. The subject narrator observes that drowning was a common cause of death in his district, and casually adds that “Africans were forever falling into rivers, usually on their way from beer drinks” (p.83).

How and when death is met, over and above the metaphor of disease, signifies the difference between the self and the other. The failure to appreciate life and preserve it, and thus lose it in wanton circumstances, relegates one to the lower levels of existence. This is the space that the narrative is designating for the narrator’s others. Dialectically the self identity of the subject is mapped on a higher level of conscious human existence. The ultimate in the other’s lethargic experience of life is captured in the black man who had a barbed arrow shot through his head but apparently did not realise the danger he was in. The construction of the other does not just suggest primitivity, but a primordial lack of sensuality that significantly separates the world of the self and that of its others.

The carving of a self identity by the narrator maintains a polemic that effectively seeks to highlight the disequilibrium, even natural, in the identity of the black other. If the denigrative trait that defines the African as apart from the white man is not lodged within his mental incapacity or physiological weakness, then nature seems to confirm his disharmony with what is normal. The narrator notes that a lot of people were struck by lightning in Rhodesia, then quickly qualifies this by adding that “most of these were Africans” (p. 168). Arguably Africans constituted the majority in the country in demographic terms, and statistically it would make sense that incidences involving them would be more than those involving whites. But the narrative suggests otherwise, that there is something that makes the African different, inferior and stand in disharmony even with nature’s forces.

Death again testifies to the expendability of the African, who because of this disharmony, is apparently rejected by the environs in the Rhodesian eastern highlands. In contrast the narrative strives to establish harmony between the white settlers and the Eastern Highlands. It is a harmony that builds towards the entrenchment of the self as legitimately belonging to the contested space. This harmony is only disturbed by the undercurrents of resistance from the displaced other. Thus this far the auto/biographical narrative acknowledges the “contestedness”

of constructions of self identity. Otherwise it entrenches the white settlers onto the Rhodesian space, contenting that “white people didn’t get such interesting diseases as Africans” (p. 102). It submits that when “whites did die they tended to die in car accidents or because of old age” (p. 103). The narrative here manages to maintain, through the trope of dis/ease and death, the categories of the self and the other.

The self identity of the narrator and his inner group in *Mukiwa* is further consolidated through what can tentatively be referred to as socio-economic dis/easing of the self’s others. This process involves both the black Africans and the Afrikaners whose existence at the social and economic margins of Rhodesia is naturalized through narrative sanction. Godwin’s auto/biographical narrative recoups from childhood memory only the social and economic disparities between whites and blacks, and then Whites from Britain and the Afrikaners, without interrogating the cause of these differences. Historical circumstances that account for these disparities are conveniently muffled and the status quo is depicted as the natural order of things. The agro-forestry industry of the Eastern Highlands is associated with the settlers of British origin whose claim to belonging in that space apparently cannot be questioned.

The Afrikaners, as represented by the Oberholzers family, are a group whose identity is described in terms that make them inferior to the settlers of British origin. Their existence is characterized by material poverty and the metaphor of death is used to destabilize their identity. The narrator submits that the Oberholzers were “the poorest white people I knew” (p. 4). Mr. Oberholzer also becomes the first white victim of the African nationalist resistance to white domination. Besides symbolizing a physical and military contestation for the Rhodesian space between the blacks and whites, the murder of Oberholzer can be read as an act of clearing spaces that only the subject narrator and his group must occupy.

Through poverty and death the Afrikaners are dis-entrenched from the Rhodesian space. The rituals they observe as they enter their departed is described as funny as they did not allow Africans to dig their graves (p. 110), and yet a certain closeness between Afrikaners and blacks is established through Boshof’s deathbed act of giving his black servant his pipe to light for him. The narrative removes the Afrikaner from mainstream white identity in Rhodesia, and thus entrenches the self identity of the narrator’s group as the only ones who belong to the Rhodesian space. At the very least the Afrikaners, if they are accepted as whites who should be ranked



above the Africans in the context of Rhodesia, are placed in such a way that they provide some kind of a social and cultural buffer between blacks and whites of British origin.

In the same breadth the bareness, social rot and economic stagnation of the African Tribal Trust lands such as Mutema (p. 134) is accepted as natural and the logical space for the Africans. The name 'Mutema' itself captures the symbolic signification that reveals the metaphorical associations between black people and the semi-arid regions of the country that are designated for them. This means that when the African is outside this designated space, and is in Tanganda or Chipinga, then he is only temporarily availing his labour in a space legitimately belonging to the settlers. Poverty is a socio-economic dis/ease that typifies the gulf between the settler and the blacks. It does not only naturalize the inferiority of the black man, but also provides justification for a dominant white identity that also acquires political significance in the affairs of Rhodesia. A discourse of difference becomes the hallmark in defining self identity in the auto/biography. The cutters at the timber factory looked like "rustic pirates, barefoot and usually shirtless" (p.115), while those blacks who attended old Boshof's funeral are described as "dressed in ragged formality: ancient jackets and trousers torn at the knees for men" (p. 111). The outward appearance of these Africans is not only testimony of how they are materially dis/eased, but also how they are assigned the peripheral space that enhances the conceptualisation of a solid identity for the white narrator and his inner group. The image of the black man is of necessity a denigrated one. At school the narrator's friend, Fatty Slabbert, remarks that "kaffirs pong because they don't wash" (p.180), and at Mangula Godwin observes the black miners "got fearsomely drunk when they came off shift, and also brawled" (p. 248).

Essentially there can be no unitary perspective in the perception of self identity with regards to different individuals or groups. The other's world remains a strange world which can only be familiarized with from a point of negation. The world of the self is the only one to be imagined and conceived of as the authentic model and the one against which everything else has to be judged. When the young narrator, Peter, encounters the Shona proverbs and folklore while herding cattle he abrogates the need to engage their philosophy and meaning, but is quick to pronounce that "they weren't like the English fairy tales I'd read" (p. 124). The self betrays an insecurity that handicaps it from moving from that which gives it its identity and essence. It cannot find comfort outside the familiar unless the unfamiliar is subdued and disciplined as the

inferior. Premium is given to difference to enable the self to declare that therefore I am! To be is to be significantly so, and this can only be possible if the other is negated as less significant. Thus Peter dismisses the Shona folktales as “oblique and puzzling”, taking hours to recount, ‘with all sorts of irrelevant diversions and asides” (p. 124). English ones are described as fairly obvious and easy to understand. Just like the puzzling riddles, Africa itself, despite the efforts of the settlers to tame it, remains the unpredictable space inhabited by so many dangers. Just like in Lessing’s novel, *The Grass is Singing* (1950) the African jungle is an important metaphor that conjures the space of the “brute other” who has to receive the benevolence of white civilization.

The self identity of the white settler is delicately constructed in this dangerous environment where he represents the forces of good that are pitted against evil. The narrator’s sense of belonging to the eastern part of Rhodesia is constantly rocked from the bottom by these lurking dangers in his immediate environs. These include the hippos, crocodiles, Matabele thorns and bilharzia in the Sabi River as well as the tokaloshis, varoyi and the tsotsis (freedom fighters) in the area (p.138-9). Given these circumstances, the magnificence of the Birchenough Bridge is described as “not just another ridge, [but] rather an apparition from a different, more modern world” (p. 135). It is the modern world represented by Birchenough Bridge that the narrator and his ilk identify with and that informs their sense of self identity. The re-enactment of that modern, “safer place” in Rhodesia, which nevertheless destabilizes the world of the colonial subjects, is the discursive subject over which the battles to define both the self identity of settlers and the identity of their others, the Africans, is fought. The resistance narrative to the forces represented by African nationalism running underneath the life story of Peter Godwin results in him yearning for a safer place which could not be realised in the Eastern Highlands. Thus he ultimately reveals the shattered roots of his attachment to Rhodesia by supposing that maybe that safer place was England, “a deciduous place where man had tamed nature and moulded it to do his bidding” (p. 139).

The fact that the life story of Godwin captures acts of resistance to white domination in Rhodesia suggests alternative ways of writing the identity of the other. Acts of resistance, from the murder of Oberholzer to the sabotage of economic activities on the plantations of the Eastern Highlands to the full blown war of the late 1970s can be read as efforts of reclaiming agency and voice in the definition of the identity of Africans at the periphery. At this point, the subaltern, that is those

who exist but are not allowed to speak and define who they are, reappropriate their subjectivity. Through this, the genre of auto/biography reveals its complexity by containing the contradictions defining the identity of the self as well as that of its others (Coetzee, 2006). There is even a way in which these two categories undermine, subvert and then speak to, each other. The portrayal of black spiritualism through the Apostolic sect that young Godwin briefly attends is an interesting case in point. At the beginning this religion is described in dismissive terms as “a combination of traditional African animism and selected morsels of Christianity, mostly from the Old Testament” (p.29). In this dismissive description of the Apostolic religion one can read an attempt by the narrative to imprison other latent meanings that are embedded in African spirituality. At another level it is a characterization that is meant to distance African religion from “civilized” Christianity, so that it becomes the religion of the dis/eased other. The religion involved individuals getting into a trance in which they would become spirit mediums embodying a departed ancestor or some other character from the Old Testament. The subtle and yet critical point in the act of embodying the spirit of the departed is in how possibilities of self identity are not only explored but confirmed.

Spirituality becomes a backspace for identities under siege from the dominant other, and in this backspace such African identities continue to contest and subvert the hegemonic narratives of self and belonging. Peter concedes that on one of the sect’s session he witnessed a young girl of eleven become possessed and narrating in detail a land dispute between two local tribes back to its origin in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. He also notes that the girl’s discourse “was sprinkled with archaic chi Ndaus phrases long passed out of common usage” (p. 30). Retracing a land dispute to the 18<sup>th</sup> century is a significant act of trying to address questions of belonging. It situates the African tribes in question within a particular geographical locale and history, while at the same time clearing the space of those whose arrival is recent. Rather unconsciously here the narrative also discloses the long history of the African people in the land, an act that departs from Smith’s (1997) contrived effort to unpeuple the landscape of all Africans before the arrival of the settlers.

Whereas Smith seeks to portray the Ndebeles, Shonas, Ndaus and other indigenous groups as recently arrived, and therefore had no deep roots in the land, Godwin’s story subverts this by alluding to land disputes stretching back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Smith’s narrative therefore suffers from deliberate non-disclosure of other narratives that seem to challenge and undermine his

desired conceptions of the self and Rhodesia. In this sense Godwin's narrative of belonging and domination on the Rhodesian space acknowledges and resists the totalizing discourse of racial superiority advanced by in Smith's narrative, and in the process, unsuspectingly, Godwin affirms the existence of African narratives of belonging. The archaic phrases of chi Ndau firmly place the land dispute in history where language is a critical defining element of one's culture and identity. Through this process the dis/eased other is able to recover and define his identity, humanity and values outside the sanction of the narrator.

The complexity of self identities is in that they are situated in volatile spaces characterized by transgressions and overlaps. This means that essentialisms can only obtain in specific contexts and times, hence temporary. The essential self identity that Godwin delineates is unsettled the moment the narrative delves into the spiritual world of possession where stable identities cannot be maintained. On another occasion at a spiritual wake Godwin got possessed and in that trance began speaking in Shona, a language that he had hitherto not learnt. Speaking in the Shona language, even in a state of possession, reveals the subconscious undercurrents that shake all attempts at constructing a stable, essentialized white Rhodesian identity. For that brief moment the subject narrator transgresses into the subjectivity of the dis/eased other and inhabits that space as the unconscious other. At a more conscious level this trend is pursued through the acknowledgement of the African myth of tokaloshis. Godwin's mother believed in their power and would offer supplications for safe passage whenever she had to drive past the Tokaloshi corner at night. Godwin here shows that whites could also be controlled by African myths, and that as much as they could control the physical spaces through violent enforcements, they could not totally control the spiritual geography of Africa. This also shows that as much as the myth of tokaloshis assigns African mythology to the primitive margins, subscribing to its potency and meanings on those values that inform white self identity such as science and reason is to question the assumed unassailability of modernity.

### **3.3.2 Difference and Deference in the construction of Rhodesian-ness in Godwin's *Mukiwa***

Peter Godwin's auto/biography constructs Rhodesian identity and nation on the basis of difference and deference. These two concepts are fundamental in the narrative of the nation as they allow for the clear delineation of the core group and its symbols and values as well as the superimposition and recognition of these on those excluded from the nation project. Difference

insists on unlikeness, a distinctness that becomes the defining element between two phenomena. In the discourse of the nation this distinctness is manifested at the levels of culture, race, ethnicity, language, myths, tradition and history. The conscious elevation of these defining elements, and the subsequent emotional congregation around them, constitute the nationalist sentiment that then seeks to position itself centrally, that is in relation to other groups, within the nation project. Once this status, this distinctness and centrality is established, then the nation project calls all the other groupings that are located around its margins to defer to its culture, myths, language, history and symbols. It is at this stage that the nation project becomes dominant.

Deference towards the value system of the core group of the nation may initially consist of coercion, but more importantly it can be achieved through manufactured consent of those who are at the fringes of the project. Essentially therefore, Godwin's conception of Rhodesia and Rhodesian-ness is inspired by a sense of a distinct white settler group who, for centuries, have had at their disposal a superior civilization, worthwhile traditions, culture and language. The race category of white settler is further unbundled so that a specific group tracing their origins to Anglo-Saxon ancestry form the core of Rhodesianess. This means that the nation in its conception is both reductive and encompassing, and can be viewed in terms of concentric tiers around the core group. On the outer tiers are the indigenous African groups whose culture, traditions, history and languages are the furthest from the centre. In their varying degrees, the groups at the margins are in several subtle ways expected to adjust and move towards the values of the centre. This process intrinsically implies the abandonment of world views, culture and other elements that define one's original identity. The requirement to defer towards the centre in the interest of the nation project invites narratives of resistance in which the claims of the core group are contested. Godwin's life narrative grapples with these contradictions to the point where it admits to unsolvable ambivalences in the Rhodesian nationhood and identity.

In Godwin's narrative, Rhodesian-ness and the Rhodesian nation are plotted from one central and defining motif that unfolds from the small village of Melsetter in the Eastern Highlands. Strategically located at the centre of Melsetter is "a wide, grassy central square" whose middle is occupied by "a pioneer memorial" which the residents visited "as part of [our] history lessons" (p. 57). A memorial is put up to capture the foundational values and spirit of the architects of

what was to evolve into the Rhodesian nation. The existence and commemoration of the pioneer memorial, both as history and symbol of nascent Rhodesian nationhood, constitutes a narrative of a new beginning that defies as well as clears the space of all those histories and symbols that occupied the space before the advent of the pioneers. In fact, pioneering presumes absence, or at most the existence of antiquated phenomena that has to give way to the new. Pioneering, beyond the physical penetration into new territories, provides the opportunity for the authoring and imposition of new discursive realities on existing terrain. It is a process of taming as well as terming the strange so that eventually it corresponds with the familiar. As Said's (1978) seminal thesis of *Orientalism* suggests, the dominant thrive by deploying their vocabulary to define and manage, and therefore exercise power over, their subjects.

This is done through naming the strange in familiar parlance which in the case of the colony is retrieved from the discourse of the empire, or simply by demanding compliance with the new values. Its effect is to displace local narratives of identity and nationhood in favour of the new and dominant value system. The pioneer memorial thus is more than a sign from the past, but a symbol that crystallizes the sum total of the Rhodesian identity, aspirations and nationhood. Symbols are powerful in that they embody values, both past and present, and carry them into the future. It is this symbolic representation of identity and national aspiration that is invoked when Rhodesia rebelled from Britain in 1965.

Blacks are therefore excluded in the construction of Rhodesian nationhood, though for purposes of creating positive and unitary perceptions of the nation they are accommodated in its representations as making the margin of a presumed powerful center. Rhodesian nationhood and identity is built on the traditions and institutions of imperial Europe that the pioneer settlers wanted to graft on the opened territory. Thus schools such as St George's, founded in the 1890s, and which young Godwin attended, were the vehicles through which European values and notions of identity were propagated. The school "jealously guarded [the history of the white man in Rhodesia] and kept an obsessive observance on tradition" (p. 175). This history and tradition supplanted and sought to erase all the other historical narratives that had thrived before the advent of the settlers. Only those subjects, who through a process of gradualism, gravitated towards the traditions and values of the settlers were given promises of eventual, albeit peripheral, incorporation into the Rhodesian nation.

There are internal contradictions even within the broad settler category whereby emphasis on difference result in the ethnicization of other European groups such as the Afrikaners and Portuguese. The traditions and history that are valued in this outpost of British imperialism are those of England and any others are relegated to marginality. The Portuguese of Mozambique are described as “quite strange” in that though “they were Europeans they could not speak English” (p. 153). The narrative here gives the impression that to be European is to be English and leaves no room for any other identity in England’s imperial outposts. Alternatively the English language is foisted as the all dominant language that everyone must speak. The auto/biography manifests itself as coercive discourse that interprets difference as inferiority. Thus because the Portuguese could not speak English, they become an ethnic group on the fringes of the dominant English, derided as “sea-kaffirs or Porks” and often treated ‘as though they were not entirely white” (p. 153). Their habits are highlighted as a way of stressing difference and inferiority. Their food is described as doused in peri-peri and “their buildings were different too because they often forgot to finish them” (p.153).

The narrative’s denigration of the Portuguese, who are competitors in the empire project and occupy a different geographical space, is a strategic act that not only places English settlerism at vantage point, but also allows for the diminution of the black subjects in colonial Rhodesia. Mozambique is famed for having the oldest buildings, excepting Great Zimbabwe, which is then qualified as a ruin. Buildings and their architecture reflect a people’s cultural values and general level of development. In this sense, Portuguese Mozambique is as distinctly different as it is backward when compared to Rhodesia, and in the same vein the civilization represented by Great Zimbabwe has become extinct as what remains are just ruins. Rhodesia through the Western values that it represents is thus constructed as the only viable model of nation. The narrative therefore defers towards the Rhodesian identity and the values that define and inform it.

The Rhodesian nation, by marking its identity indices through difference, creates what can be called the “space of the adversarial” (Boehmer, 2005:21). Difference marks the other as not part of the whole, as that which is always situated oppositionally to the significant entity. This situation allows for that which is marked as different and insignificant to consolidate, both in terms of cultural and political consciousness and physically, so as to confirm their difference. At this stage the insignificant other will confound the master by refusing to acquiesce into the

modes of identity designated for him, rather choosing to take pride in his discredited world culture and features. This process is often typified by a tendency to conceive of the identity of the insignificant other as recoverable, and for purposes of reconstituting the self, from the original culture.

Cabral's (1966) clarion call for a return to the source becomes a conceptual tool in the hands of the colonized in their efforts to re-imagine an existence independent from the colonizer. This recourse to the past however does not have to be conceptualized in terms of physical journeys, or as taking the Africans to some absolute and unified past (Zegeye and Vambe, 2009). But while recognizing the "plurality brought to bear on those processes" (Zegeye and Vambe p.3) the return to the source can be a strategic tool to upend the imperial value system and undermine its structures. By insisting on difference and authority based on assumed superiority, colonial rule produces the "conditions for its own delegitimization" (Boehmer, 2005:100). Godwin traces this challenge to settler authority through growing defiance from the African people.

### **3.3.3 Negotiating the self in the Rhodesian War and After**

By the 1970s when Peter Godwin is in the Rhodesian security forces as a police officer the narrative acknowledges the African nationalists as firmly rooting themselves within the adversarial space, where "the power of extreme difference to disturb, distort, or overwhelm dominant expression" (Boehmer,2005:21) was becoming a reality. This explains the paradox of subversive narratives running underneath Godwin's life story where identities and conceptions of nationhood are contested and the possibility of others suggested but suppressed. Through this way the solidity of the Rhodesian identity and nation is undermined and a sense of temporariness and insecurity fractures both his conception of self identity and nation. The most significant revelation of the contradiction is revealed when the subject narrator betrays his admiration of the hither-to despised and excluded Afrikaner people. He submits that the Afrikaners "seemed more secure than us, more settled" (p.187) and wished he belonged to this identity group who had a more solid identity than the English settlers. The quest for a solid identity and sense of belonging to the contested space is so deep running to the extent that Godwin started spelling his name the Afrikaans way as Pieter.



The sub-text in this auto/biography is important in that it constructs, through the narrative of resistance, alternative modes of conceiving identity and nation. The resistance that is explored at great length is that of the armed struggle to dislodge white domination in Rhodesia. The critical aspect of this armed struggle is that it goes beyond the physical since at the base line it constitutes a counter narrative of how the “othered” self conceives of itself and contests how it has been constructed. The murder of Oberholzer by the Crocodile Gang of ZANLA guerrillas is the first narrative incident that opens up the space for the interrogation of the images of the dominant self and its others. Symbolically this act is the beginning of long and sustained effort by the Black people to register themselves outside the identity conception framework assigned by the dominant settlers. This effort is met by a determined fixity of settler perception of the black other as the backward and inferior subject whose action is triggered by instinctive criminality. Thus the Crocodile gang is dismissed as “tsotsis” or thugs who engage in senseless and wanton murder. This perception builds on the existing stereotype of the black man as the infantile other who cared only “about three things in life: food, fucking and beer” (p.192).

The black man is depicted as forever imprisoned in primitive sensuous cravings that impede him from the pursuit of the higher callings of life. The result is however, that the black man is not denied a conscious existence in which he can define his own identity, sense of belonging and the right to own nationhood since he can found his agency through the nationalist struggle. Rhodesia as a nation is thus portrayed as inspired by the need to “maintain civilized western standards (p. 183) that would be endangered if blacks were allowed political self determination. By juxtaposing the two narratives of Rhodesian settler nationhood and African nationalism that seeks to dislodge it, the auto/biography maps the sites of self identity and nation as battle zones that cannot be tamed by one- dimensional perspectives. As more acts of nationalistic resistance are experienced, the subject narrator, though grudgingly, admits to the existence of a “loop in history” (ibid) that allows for the revision of the dominant discursive narratives of the self and nation in the context of colonial Rhodesia. On a physical level this loop of history is captured by the reverse movement on the old slave routes in the Chimanimani mountains.

The reference to the loop of history allows Godwin’s text to construct a sub-narrative that reveals his subconscious awareness of the potential rupture that could be caused by African nationalism to Rhodesiana ideology. This is a remarkable departure from Smith’s construction of a solid

Rhodesiana edifice. In an ambivalent way Godwin's narrative acknowledges the African contestations to colonial processes that excluded them to the margins in their native land. Thus the old slave routes in the Chimanimani were now being used by the black people who "proclaimed they were fighting against their own enslavement at home" (p.169). At a metaphorical level the narrow Chimanimani passages come to represent the birth canal through which a black identity and nation is ushered with the accompanying excruciating pains of birth. The activities of Chief Vezi Maduna Mafu of the Filabusi area, Godwin's operational area, lift the resistance act beyond sporadic and wanton violence by the Black people. Chief Maduna is elevated to a nationalist of some note as his activities go as far back as the first Chimurenga in which he participated as one of King Lobengula's commanders. That he should be associated with the second Chimurenga testifies to the enduring effort of writing a new black identity and nation into existence despite the auto/biography's reluctance to accord it the prominence that it deserves.

The narrative resistance that begins with the murder of Oberholzer and spreads to acts of sabotage on the plantations of the Eastern Highlands to the guerrilla warfare that engulfs the whole country creates new selfhoods and a new nation of Zimbabwe. Godwin's participation in the war on the side of white Rhodesia affords him a chance to reconstruct and reflect on perceptions of self identity and nation with some scepticism as the fluidity of these concepts became very apparent. Even as the narrative continues to stereotype the blacks, it also interrogates the settler version of self identity and nation which increasingly recedes into a self-indulging illusion. White Rhodesia is fast on the decline, but the alternative black nationhood that independence is supposed to usher is dismissed as a "banana republic" headed by a ceremonial head of state called Banana.

For most whites independence meant a disruption of the ideals and values that they had cherished as the foundations of a civilized nation and back-thrust into primitive existence. Godwin admits that for the settlers of Rhodesia, independence left them seriously wounded as it robbed [them] of [their] identity" (p.326). It involved a re-conception of both nation and self identity which sought to re-incarnate black cultural revival and the reclamation of birthright. Yet this is the point that the auto/biography refuses to acknowledge, instead choosing to reduce the liberation struggle into a comical farce where "old devils had suddenly become gods", and

“witch doctors had become traditional healers”, while whites could be prosecuted for calling a black adult a “boy” or calling them “kaffirs” (p. 326). What is of importance in these revelations is that the intrinsic protocols of nation and narration force Godwin’s narrative to admit to ironies of trying to establish stable Rhodesian identities that are nevertheless constantly undermined by resistance from African freedom fighters. The African nationalist’s voice is acknowledged by the narrative even if it is done in negative terms. This is unlike Smith (1997) who stubbornly refused to consider the possibility of black rule in a thousand years to come.

The very symbols of the new Zimbabwe nation are disparaged as ridiculous as evidenced by the reference to the Zimbabwean flag as a “garish beach chair cover” (p.325). A nation is represented through its symbols and, as such, by disparaging these, the net effect of the narrative is to consign this process of nation-formation to doom. Paradoxically, in the same breadth the narrative captures the recession of Rhodesian nationhood and exclusive self identity into insignificance. The white community were undergoing painful metamorphosis “from settler to expatriate”, or at the very least “shrank back into a laager of home and video, braaiivleis and sports club, muttering privately about how the blacks were ruining God’s own country” (p.326).

Even when the narrative exposes the disturbed notions of white Rhodesia identity and nation, it strives to maintain the discursive polemics of them and us, the superior race and the savage who have to be redeemed. When the Rhodesian nation is on the decline, and reporters were already doing stories on the end of Rhodesia (p. 237), the narrative refers to a country that was fast sliding into a civil war (p.232). There are two critical insights that can be inferred from this. The reference to a civil war is a determined claim to belonging to the same space that the liberation fighters are threatening to dislodge the white settlers from. A civil war can only occur between groups who conceptually wield the same claim to a particular space. This contentious presentation of the conflict thus inherently undermines the premises of the new Zimbabwean nation which is constructed on the basis of claiming a usurped birthright and suppressed cultural values. In its constructed-ness, the new Zimbabwean nation threatens to exclude the “Rhodies” who are not ready to identify with those symbols and values that define the new nation. The whites retreat to exclusive spaces where they continue to cherish memories of the good olden days, a process which takes them away to the margins of the new nation.

Godwin's *Mukiwa* adds an important dimension to ways in which white and Rhodesian identities have been constructed in auto/biographical narratives. Informed by exclusive values of Rhodesian settler society, the narrative confirms as well as interrogates the unitary constructions of settler and Rhodesian identities that are portrayed by Smith. Godwin exposes the plurality of views and perceptions that lead to questions about the rationale of the Rhodesian war that Smith sells as the necessary act of defence of a superior civilization. In this way *Mukiwa* allows for the construction of fractured identities and ambivalent allegiances that instead of upholding Smith's accusations of the "great betrayal" in absolute terms, the narrator doubts the Rhodesian cause as spelt out by Smith. The possibility of alternative ways of constructing nation through African nationalism, though kept under the surface, is allowed to constantly destabilize essentialized views of the Rhodesian nation. Thus unlike in Smith where the existence of African nationalism is scoffed at, Godwin's participation in the war exposes him to its realities. Nevertheless, he also committed a political act by choosing to fight on Smith's side, murdering for Smith, and when opportunity availed itself, opted for the comfort of England. After Zimbabwe's independence, Godwin names the disturbances in the Midlands and Matabeleland regions acts of genocide, something that he did not apply to the murder of Africans by the Rhodesian war machinery to which he was part. To this end, as much as the in-between-ness and subconscious confessions that characterize his constructions of self and nation humanizes him compared to Smith, he is equally implicated by sticking to the Rhodesian side, at least culturally, up to the end.

### **3.4 Conclusion**

This chapter has established that settler life narratives are premised in the imperial logic from whence they proceed by way of delineating oppositional spaces for the modern as distinct from the primitive, white as distinct from black, Christians versus the heathens, the civilized versus the barbaric, and humans versus the sub-humans. The life narratives complement early colonial fiction and diaries which Primorac (2006) has classified as the Rhodesian chronotope, and Chennells (2005) as colonialist literature, for their committed essentialization of colonial identities. Both the concepts of Rhodesia and Rhodesian-ness are constructed on the paradigm of difference that pits the self versus its perceived others. Self identity amongst settler Rhodesians consolidates itself in a relational process that displaces, both physically and discursively, the perceived others. Through this process the self creates spaces where it then occupies a dominant

position in relation to its margins. Through the process of othering and dis/easing, Rhodesian identities create conditions for their self entrenchment. Rhodesian-ness and Rhodesia are imagined as exclusive ideals that are even carried over beyond the political existence of the nation of Rhodesia. Thus it is argued in this chapter that between Rhodesian identities and the construction of a Zimbabwean identity there remains an ambivalent space characterized by the reluctance of settler identities to metamorphose into the parameters that define the new Zimbabwean identity.

Smith's *Bitter Harvest* has constructed self identity in deterministic terms that seek to put the subject narrator beyond fault and contest. Deriving from claims of genealogical pedigree, individual genius and political astuteness, Smith creates himself as naturally destined for the higher callings dictated by group fate. His constructions of the Rhodesian nation are equally over-determined. Rhodesia is built around values of the British Empire, yet it acquires its unique quality from the political exigencies that can only obtain at the frontier. Thus only those whites born of settlers were the true Rhodesians. Such absolute constructions refuse to acknowledge any other modes of being, and of conceiving both the identities of the self and nation. This exposes Smith's narrative to destabilizations arising first from the auto/biographical genre itself, which insists the life narrative is only ever a version and not complete in its own. In the second instance, the identities that Smith proffer become more defined by those things which they exclude, the narrative of the African other and that of African nationalist alternative to the Rhodesian nation. Smith's narrative has been confirmed as well as complicated by Peter Godwin.

For example, Godwin's *Mukiwa* constructs the identities of the self and nation using the cultural and ideological vocabulary of the Empire but somewhat the narrator retrieves his narrative from the Empire's absolute reference framework. Its constructions of identity conforms to Hall's (2000:17) thesis that "the concept of identity does not signal that stable core of the self, unfolding from beginning to end through all vicissitudes of history without change." The narrative allows sub-narratives of African identity and alternatives to the Rhodesian nation to rock its own constructions in a way that testifies to the complexity of auto/biographical writing. Caught in this ambivalence, Godwin's text can be read as literature criticizing other literature especially where it begins to interrogate Rhodesiana ideologies and cultural values. But

ironically its ambivalence does not free it from a political commitment that causes the narrator to fight and defend the Rhodesian edifice. Thus both Smith and Godwin are/maybe or were white Rhodesians but their understanding of their identities differed in other respects but also met at the confluence of upholding the racial superiority of whites in Rhodesia, even years after the armed liberation struggle and the subsequent land struggles have undermined this certitude. In other words, the two white authors leave a gap where they do not extend their conceptual tools to explore in depth the constructions of the self identities of their 'others' or of the alternative nation that is implied in African nationalism. In this respect their autobiographical works have been instrument in revealing not only the fractured nature of racialized identities, but also that even the individual's life is riddled with paradoxes which cannot easily be reconciled. Smith's insistence on a pure, authentic identity for whites actually invites critics to question the other perspectives on white narratives that have been suppressed. This aspect defines the 'political' nature of the autobiographies that is that both works are based on the suppression of certain views, which, for a perceptive critic reveals the incompleteness of their narratives. The next chapter will focus on political auto/biographies by African nationalists as a way of seeking a better understanding of the identity categories of self and nation.

## CHAPTER 4: ZIMBABWE-THE SELF AND THE NATION IN BLACK-AUTHORED AUTOBIOGRAPHIES

### 4.1 Introduction

Chapter Three of this study focused on White Rhodesian auto/biographies and observed that both Smith's *Bitter Harvest* and Godwin's *Mukiwa* largely construct images of the self and the nation using the cultural vocabulary and ideological lens of the British Empire. Chennells (2005:133) has validly pointed out that "when colonial or imperial autobiographies recall the self's activities they simultaneously reveal how the settler or imperial collective knows and imagines itself." Smith strives towards a unitary narrative that collapses the "personal" into the "collective" (Chennells, 2005:137) in a way that refuses to accommodate the black Africans and their narratives of self and nation into the Rhodesian space. Godwin ambivalently confirms the prototype Rhodesian identity as imagined by Smith and also ambiguously acknowledges its ruptured state by referring to the subtle potency of the undercurrent African voice. He also interrogates the values of the Rhodesiana ideology though he does not completely divorce himself from it. Thus the two writers do not make a comprehensive attempt to read and understand identity constructions of the African subject who is largely maintained at the margins in the conception of the Rhodesian nation.

This current chapter makes a shift from white, male-authored autobiographies and analyses black-authored Zimbabwean nationalist auto/biographies to further explore how alternative identities of self and nation are constructed. The analysis will be based on Maurice Nyagumbo's *With the People: An Autobiography From the Zimbabwean Struggle (1980)*, Abel Tendekai Muzorewa's *Rise Up and Walk(1978 )*, Joshua Nkomo's *The Story of My Life (1984)*, and Edgar Zivanai Tekere's *A Lifetime of Struggle (2007)*. The argument of the chapter is that although these life narratives can be described as nationalist auto/biographies, they imagine the self and nation differently.

The problematique that these narratives have to confront is rooted in the very nature of the discourse of nation and nationalism. Bhabha (1990:1) alludes to "a particular ambivalence that haunts the idea of the nation, the language of those who write of it and the lives of those who live in it." These are concepts whose fluidity makes them refuse containment in definitions that are of a singular nature. Thus Bhabha (ibid) further argues that "despite the certainty with which

historians speak of the ‘origins’ of nation as a sign of the ‘modernity’ of society, the cultural temporality of the nation inscribes a much more transitional social reality.” Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983) also hint at the complexity of the concept of nation by positing that nations are products of social engineering. This means that written narratives which focus on the nation as their subject are consciously or unconsciously implicated in the process of engineering a nation. But then the paradox produced by these narratives is that, as Bhabha (1990:2) stresses, “to encounter the nation as it is written displays a temporality of culture and social consciousness more in tune with the partial, overdetermined process by which textual meaning is produced through the articulation of difference in language; more in keeping with the language of closure which plays enigmatically to the discourse of the sign.” Thus all attempts to narrate the nation can only yield partial stories, or at most versions that must compete with each other for attention. With such narratives thrust at the coal-face of the social engineering, what cultural tools autobiographies will use and who they will co-opt or exclude in the project is indeed what defines political auto/biography. In the ultimate the four life narratives I will analyse in this chapter have to content with the volatile character of both the concepts of nation and nationalism as well as the instabilities in the form of any narrative, whether written or oral.

The four narratives in this Chapter are largely steeped in the process of trying to imagine an alternative nation from the one represented by Rhodesia. This invites them to envision new kinds of ‘nationalisms’ that are necessarily differently imagined in the different texts. Yet each of the envisaged nationalism would tend to try and interpret the diverse phenomenon in the nation through a single glossary (George, 1996). The life narrative that is implicated in the construction of the nation thus cannot escape the inherent contradictions that arise from the nation’s compulsive attempt to hold diversity under one roof. The life auto/biographies do not only fracture their own narratives in trying to discipline both self identity and nation, but also reveal the fractured state of the nation project. The nation project that is imagined as a replacement for the colonial state is fissured by the epistemes that it adopts for its foundations. Werbner (1998) argues that the new independent state often resorts to tradition as a way of entrenching itself. The assumed stability of tradition, which nevertheless relies on conscious or unconscious selection of the cultural resources it puts to use, can be the first limitation of the postcolony. This is specifically so because the founding of the nation is then imagined in terms of decolonization, often narrowly understood in physical, and visible military action performed at some space.



When the definition of what is political is thus contracted to mean open forms of rebellion only, then sometimes the fractured ideological underpinnings of such acts of narrated identities of selves and nation are subsumed into a totalizing discourse that will not allow for the possibility that multiple identities is the condition of possibility of ‘authentic’ identities of selves and that of the nation. The texts in this study will thus be interrogated for the visions for both self and nation they advance beyond the decolonization process. Radhakrishnan (2001) cautions that post-independence nationalism has a tendency to become narrower when it excludes those who are viewed with different views of the nation who then are subsequently described as not part of the core group in the new nation. It is in this context that Fanon (1968) describes the postcolony as already fractured into the diverse interest groups that used to exist in the colonial state. Thus from the onset the narratives under study are mired in complex contradictions where they have to negotiate both self identity and nation.

## **4.2 Maurice Nyagumbo: *With the People***

### **4.2.1 Sketching Space for the Self in Colonial Rhodesia**

Maurice Nyagumbo’s life narrative begins with his early acquaintance with the realities of a colonial situation at an African primary school pupil at St Faith Mission. At the youthful age of thirteen, the young Maurice began to grapple with the overt truths of a race-conscious Rhodesian settler society that designated different spaces for its African and European population. Fundamental assumptions about the dignity of humanity, equal opportunity and rights are thoroughly destabilized as to engender a critical interrogation of self identity and belonging for him and to his people. Through a series of encounters with the settler world, a precocious sense of existing at the fringes of mainstream society develops; a sense that testified to the segregation and marginalization of the Africans by the White settlers. At the core of the Rhodesian society is the settler of British origin and the African constituted as its peripheral other. Claims to a superior culture, history and civilization, all of which could be availed to the less fortunate peoples of the “dark continent” (Conrad, 1902 ) through the British imperial project, became the needed rationale for settler domination in the colonial space (Smith, 2001, Godwin 2006). Rhodesian society regarded the Africans as the very anti-thesis of colonial civilization that they nevertheless needed for defining their own identity. This conforms to Hall’s (2000:17) argument that “identities are constructed through, not outside, difference.” The African subject in these

conditions of necessity gropes for, even creates, space(s) for own self definition as well as contest assigned identities. For Nyagumbo these early encounters become critical in the formative years of self definition and quest for meaningful sense of belonging to the Rhodesian geography and cultural space.

The construction of the young subject's self identity is achieved through discovery and reactions, both conscious and emotional, to the frictional encounters in contested spaces where settler domination is imposed. The first such encounter is the incident when Nyagumbo and his friends are tasked to take the St Faith mailbag to the post office. Africans are not allowed inside the post office, and when Stephen Shumba, Maurice's colleague dared to take the bag inside since it was raining, he is severely attacked by a white man. The effort to get sanctuary from his uncle who worked in the adjacent Native Commissioner's office did not pay as the man avoided him on realizing that he was under assault from a white man. There is a subtle moral to this experiential encounter which in the first instance is not accessible to the young African boys. This moral is in that the Rhodesian colonial society is a compartmentalized society where intrusions, both physical and cultural, are not countenanced. Settler society is hedged in a protective laager (Lessing, 1950) that is meant to effectively keep Africans at the outskirts.

The African adult, as evidenced by Stephen's uncle, has been forced, albeit resisting in various forms, to acknowledge the violent enforcement of the white man's sense of space. Nyagumbo's revulsion with the injustice and violence of it all, coupled by the ineffectiveness of the missionary Sister Esther whose response is passive sobbing and Father Knight's threats to expel them from school if they got into trouble again, leads him on an early path of affirming his human dignity. The responses of the missionary sister and father suggest to Nyagumbo that he must not protest but take colonial status quo as normal. In this sense the missionaries are accomplices. The individual self under construction here is cast against, even at this tender age, the adults who acquiesce into indignity implied by their assigned positions in the colonial order. A critical self consciousness is beginning to awaken that seeks to entrench the individual as different and yet significant in its own way. Even at an early age the life narrative begins to scaffold character dispositions that will become more pronounced and definitive in later life. The process of self invention through narrative is mired in the contradictions between the hold of a traditional system of identity signification and the lure of a promising modernity represented by

the missionaries at the school. Even more complex is the fact that the individual has to locate himself within the chimerical imaginary of the nation that draws from both tradition and modernity to attain its own reality.

The burgeoning of Nyagumbo's self identity is complexly located in the childhood efforts to probe race epistememes of settler society in Rhodesia. Race relations in colonial Rhodesia are invested with modernist thought values that privilege the white race as biologically, culturally and mentally superior to the subject groups. As such, settler society thrives on its drive to at least relegate, or at most obliterate, the African other from the space that is designated as white space. Violence, disparagement and undermining of the other's humanity are weapons that are used to constantly remind and convince the other of his or her position of inferiority. Yet this assigned space of inferiority is typified by zones of contradiction where those who are shunted off to the marginality of existence begin to grope for meanings of selfhood and how this selfhood should interact with its environment. Nyagumbo's questioning of the colonial violence around him is a critical exercise in mapping out a self identity that is oppositionally placed against the logic of colonial epistemology. The incident in which a white boy bumped into Weston Madziva, his colleague, resulting in a group of white boys attacking the African schoolboys is evidence of the intrinsic racial logic of settler society. There are two important identity categories that become eminently apparent in the Rhodesian space, and these are the Rhodesian and the Rhodesian African. Through this incident the young Maurice is gradually awakening to the identity definitional parameters that operate in the settler society. Rhodesians are the white settlers, mostly British immigrants, who form the core of the Rhodesian nation. Rhodesian Africans are the colonized subjects who occupy spaces of subalternity in the Rhodesian nation. The surnamed identity of Rhodesian African serve the dual purpose of providing a veil of inclusivity that is so necessary in the discourse of the nation as well as distancing the other from the centre of the national discourse. The nation is janus-faced (Bhabha, 1990) and survives on balancing its act between the inner core and the peripheries.

Alternatively viewed, Nyagumbo's usage of the term 'Rhodesian African' in an unproblematized way is an identity marker may also betray how ambivalently Africans in the colonial context tried to fit within the Rhodesian identity categories that in the first place intended to exclude them. This introduces an inherent contradiction where the construction of a Zimbabwean identity

is imbued with inconsistencies that insist on African and Zimbabwean essence while at the same time wanting to belong to the Rhodesian space. The formation and consolidation of a Zimbabwean identity can therefore, in Nyagumbo's narrative, be read as a logical result of a negotiated failure between the identity ideals of Rhodesian-ness and African-ness. What is implied here is that Africans in Rhodesia, especially those who aspired for middle class status, paradoxically sought accommodation in Rhodesian identity categories and only seek alternative modes of defining self and national belonging because of the rigidity of settler views of self identity and nation. What redeems these Africans, and Nyagumbo for that matter, is that as much as they are peripherized and constituted by settler discourse, in Foucault's logic, they remained "capable of critical historical reflection" and thus were "able to exercise some choice" with respect to alternative discourses and practices they could use for self definition (Burr, 1995:90).

The contradictions of self identity formation permits Nyagumbo's narrative to delve beyond the categorization of African and white and to examine the constructions of self and other within the settler edifice. The migration to South Africa provides critical consciousness to the subject narrator as to how different settler groups seek warranting voices that would accord them control of given spaces. Each group constructs itself by representing itself in a way that gives it validity and legitimacy in the contested space, a concept that Gergen (cited in Burr, 1995) describes as seeking "warrant voice". White people of English and Dutch stock contest for legitimacy, both political and in terms of belonging to the Rhodesian and South African geography, and in the process Nyagumbo is able to estimate for himself a relative sense of his self identity from the attitudes of the two settler groups. This leads to the observation that "from the time I had arrived in Kimberley and wherever I had worked in the Cape Province, the white man had always treated me like a human being. But the white man I had seen in the Orange Free State was identical to the white man I had seen in Rhodesia" (p. 65). The point here is that the degree and extent of peripherizing the other is a direct function of the threat posed by this other's claims to legitimacy in the contested space. The African in Rhodesia and in the Free State have entrenched cultural and historical attachments to these spaces and these cannot be dismissed by light acts of discursive engineering.

Violent acts of political and cultural repression are deployed to complement strategies of discursive displacement whose objective is to validate settler claims of belonging to the space.

On the other hand the Cape Province had experienced a sustained and lengthy period of de-rooting of indigenous Africans from the arrival of the Dutch around the middle of the 15th century, thus leaving the Afrikaner as the real threat in that space. Settlers of British stock, in order to entrench themselves in the Cape, had of necessity to supplant Afrikaner narratives of being the first European group to open the African interior from the Cape of Good Hope. On the cultural front this is subtly inferred in Nyagumbo's observation that at the Marine Hotel there was "one thing that could not be accepted by the sailors who came for occasional dances; and this was the Afrikaner language" (p. 66). And at the police camp at Smithfield the Afrikaner hotelier who had a complaint against Michael (Maurice's adopted name) is forced to speak in English by the English police officer in a clear case of culturally privileging one language at the expense of another. Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1981) argues that language is a carrier of culture, and as such, it is a definitive index of self identity and belonging, or at least sharing in a particular culture. Thus the Afrikaner culture is relegated to second order of insignificance and in its place the English one is grafted. A hierarchy of significant cultural identities is constructed where the English belong to the super culture which apparently is the abode of benevolence to the African, while the Afrikaner culture is represented as backward and lacking in any benefits. As a result the Afrikaners are ethnicized as a people who are "oblivious to cleanliness" (p. 56) and who apparently begrudge the narrator who could speak the English language and hence passed to be a "swart engelsman" (p55).

The intrinsic contradictions of assigning self identities explains Nyagumbo's youthful resolution never to "return to the Rhodesia or the Orange Free State but to remain in the Cape Province for the rest of [his] life" (p.65). The declaration is important in as far as it implies similarities between Rhodesian colonialism and the nascent apartheid system that was becoming manifest in the Afrikaner dominated areas of South Africa. It also reveals the emerging radical consciousness that promises to offer options out of the crippling colonial circumstances of Rhodesia. Narrow conceptions of nationalism as expressed in Rhodesiana ideology and Afrikanerdom are therefore imbued with contradictions that give birth to other forms of rebellion or contesting nationalisms. The narrative in this case probes the possibility of a new beginning in self conception, a beginning that is threatening to refuse to be contained by the discursive instruments that are deployed by the Rhodesian and Free State geo-cultural confines. It also probes possibilities of bursting the seams of normative identity processes such as naming which

on the surface give the appearance of consistent and stable identities. The auto/biographical narrative fundamentally suggests that the construction of self identity involves multiple choices from which the individual can choose. This may also entail the alienation of the self from former selves as well as from cultural and physical parameters that formerly signified one's identity. Thus once Nyagumbo arrives in Kimberley he adopts a new name, Michael, and later on in Cape Town, he became Michael Mahlangu, a Zulu from King William's Town. As much as the act of changing names initially was meant to avoid detection by parents who could report his disappearance to Rhodesian authorities, it also complexly refuses to accept an essence that would hold the individual to some permanent identity reference.

Consequently, the new name enables the subject narrator to temporarily de-root himself from historic origins with all their demands for patriotic commitment to ethnic identity and nation and to create individual space with no hard and fast responsibilities in the Cape. For a long time Michael is able to ignore the political and historical imperatives of African nationhood and self definition that are spearheaded by the Communist Party in South Africa as well as the African National Congress as he believed that "it was only in Rhodesia and the Orange Free State that Africans were really suffering under repressive laws" (p. 73), and he had made a choice not to belong to those spaces. If he at all participated in their functions, it was specifically for the "social aspect of the organization" (p.73). Later on the narrator receives the banning of the Communist Party as a blessing that made it possible for him "to go into dancing in a big way without any interference" (p. 80). To this extent Nyagumbo's construction of self identity is interesting in that he, in early adulthood, pursues a normal life of work and pleasure that does not make serious reference to nationalism in terms of political and visible forms of protest. In this way his auto/biography partially occupies the area where the subtle politics of daily existence is probed, thus making the statement that the political in life narratives is not always overt.

*With the People* thus avoids the very limited conception of nationalism in other political auto/biographies, for instance Smith (1997) where settler domination or anti-Rhodesian sentiments define the political in their narratives. Nyagumbo's construction of a preferred and significant selfhood is situated right at the end of his physical and psychological journey that sees him moving from Rhodesia to South Africa and then back to Rhodesia. Essentially then self identities can be said to be kaleidoscopic in nature with the only significant composite image

possible when constructed in retrospect. The formation of a politically conscious self begins to take concrete shape with Nyagumbo's participation in the Social Club consisting of Rhodesian Africans in the African National Congress. The thrust of this club was to "appeal to the black race to unite and fight to free themselves from slavery" (p. 79). It also called for the need for sacrifice by Rhodesian Africans "in order to retrieve their birthright" (p. 83). Such patriotic sentiments triggered a metamorphosis in Nyagumbo that saw him revisiting and interrogating aspects of his identity in relation to the white race both in South Africa and in Rhodesia.

The situation in South Africa had drastically changed with the ascendancy of the Nationalist Party in 1948 as they were quick to remind the population that "this kind of mixture, of black, yellow and white will not be tolerated by the present government" (p. 82). Under apartheid spaces for different racial groups were clearly demarcated and race became the most important signifier of identity. This called for thorough and conscious assessment of self and belonging, and as such, it can be argued that antagonistic circumstances can be a most critical prerequisite for the crystallization of concrete selves. It is at this stage that we see Nyagumbo getting more committed not only to group identity but to matters of his self definition. This budding commitment results in his deportation from South Africa in 1955 when he returned to Rhodesia to focus on a struggle to contest the marginal spaces, both of self conception and belonging, which the Rhodesian authorities had assigned for Rhodesian Africans.

#### **4.2.2 Re-imagining Belonging: Victimhood as Basis of the Nation**

In Nyagumbo's life there are circumstances that splinter assumed stabilities of a preferred self identity and choices of belonging. Such circumstances engage him with questions of his locatedness in the Rhodesian nation project. This engagement also becomes the route through which his own identity becomes subsumed within the narrative of the African struggle in Rhodesia. His life story merges with that of the group as the imperative to re-imagine alternative modes of identity and nationhood outside Rhodesia's exclusionary frameworks become a reality. This re-imagination of nation and belonging necessarily seeks to displace as well as deconstruct the epistemologies upon which Rhodesia is built. Modernity and its claims to science, rationality, and democratic governance as the basis and justification for the subjugation of subject peoples in Rhodesia has to be undermined by the presentation of a more human order that pre-existed the advent of settlerism. Thus for Nyagumbo the possibility of a new nationhood, a Zimbabwean

nation, is in the first instance retrievable from the pre-colonial model where Africans in the land were guided by their own cultural values and sense of humanity. The narrative proffers a supposition that the Africans' cultural values and sense of humanity had been smothered by colonial settlers both in Rhodesia and in South Africa to the extent that conceptions of self and belonging for the African become thoroughly conditioned. The reality of split consciousnesses and mimicry in the colonial context as manifested in the African middle class' tendency to acquiesce to colonial definitions of their identity, underlain by currents of radical resistance and reaffirmation of selfhood, as shown in political/labour organisation in Rhodesian cities as well as the incipient liberation movement, come to typify the existence of the subject. Nyagumbo's life narrative in the last part amounts to a re-awakening that inspires the need to resist definitions of Africans as the insignificant others of the settler.

As such, the narrative imagines an alternative nation which would "allow its people the full measure of self determination in economic as well as political terms they lost with the coming of Rhodes' settlers nearly ninety years ago" (p. 10). Nyagumbo's imagined Zimbabwean nation is defined in terms of both victimhood from colonial subjugation and a shared pre-colonial existence. What is conceived of is a nation project that includes all African tribes in the land who were pushed to marginal spaces by settler authorities. Implicitly the notion of a Zimbabwean nation excludes the white settlers who have no historical or spiritual roots in the land prior to 1890. The imagination of the Zimbabwean nation and the Rhodesian nation are therefore mutually exclusive phenomena, a point that aborts the much credited policy of reconciliation between blacks and whites at Zimbabwe's independence in 1980. In other words, Nyagumbo's narrative effects a symbolical reversal of Smith's narrative in which pre-colonial Africans are imagined as dispersed and only living an unlocateable peripatetic lifestyle.

However, an inherent contradiction in Nyagumbo's imagination of the Zimbabwean nation is that it readily accedes to the spatial boundary determinations of the colonial order as naturally accommodating what should become Zimbabwe. This obviously gives the fallacy that in the pre-colonial order a loose assemblage of African groups that were bound in some recognised geographical boundary existed. Such a thesis presumes the existence of a primordial Zimbabwean nation that was only destabilized by the coming of the settlers. In the construction of nations, their mythicized ancient-ness (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983) is a critical factor in



validating their realness and historicity. This defrays criticisms of nations as imagined and recent constructions which are often forcibly imposed on groups of individuals. Gatsheni-Ndlovu (2009:43) charges that nationalists were often the culprits who “presented and projected a false picture of the existence of “the people” as preceding the period of the nationalist struggle.” His major worry is that such representation has distracted historians of nationalism from engaging with “the complex and concealed processes involved in the making of the people” (ibid). Mbembe (2002:629) adds that such conceptualization of the self and pre-colonial African nation as always cohesive reveal the workings of “faked philosophies (*philosophies du travestissement*).” (original emphasis) He submits that:

As dogmas and doctrines repeated over and over again rather than methods of interrogation, they have led to a dramatic contraction and impoverishment both in the modes of conceptualizing Africa and in the terms of philosophical inquiry concerning the region. Nativism, everywhere actively lamenting the loss of purity, is a form of culturalism preoccupied with questions of identity and authenticity (2002, 629).

Essentially the emphasis in this view is that nations are made and they are only ancient to the extent of their representations. Nyagumbo’s narrative thus seeks to ambivalently gloss over the motley nature of African groups in the land who often shared very little beyond their victimhood from colonialism, and whom the nationalist project intends to forcibly bring under the ambit of the Zimbabwean nation.

Victimhood apparently becomes the rationalizing factor that introduces a shared experience which becomes the basis of national conception accommodating diverse groups such as the Shona, the Ndebele, Tonga, Shangani, and the Venda. Fanon (1968) cites the weakness of the nationalistic project as emanating from the diverse strands that are roped in to confront the common enemy in the form of the colonizer. Such unity cannot be maintained once independence is attained as the intrinsic contradictions in the nationalistic project will begin to unravel. If this logic holds, then the life narrative does not successfully challenge the contention that Zimbabwe, like other African nations, is largely a product of modernity, whose thrust ideologically had the objective of promoting as well as paradoxically thwarting every element of indigeniety amongst the subject people. Mbembe (2001) explores this contradiction by further positing that though state traditions existed in some parts of the African continent before the advent of colonialism, most of the postcolonies reproduced not only European state forms but

also colonial rationality. Thus he asserts that most of the “communities with highly dispersed power structures did have their first experience of the state in the colonial context” (Mbembe, 2001:40). The new nation project thus inherits the totalizing assumptions of the colonial state whose homogenizing agenda saw culturally diverse groups being brought into the colony.

In a letter smuggled from prison in 1979 Nyagumbo’s narrative testified to the imaginative re-creation of nationhood from victimhood. He defined the purpose of the nationalist struggle for liberation by arguing that “the chief object of Chimurenga is the replacement of the present irrational oppressive regime by a revolutionary one” (p. 234). This he envisaged would create conditions for the preservation of “our cultures, ethics, history and traditional ways of life so that a Zimbabwean way of life may evolve in its own peculiar way and time” (ibid). When read critically, the narrative implies that the liberation struggle was the actual birth process that enabled the evolution of the Zimbabwean nation which hitherto did not exist in any meaningful social or political form. The nation is thus the product of nationalistic sentiments that are built around certain shared grievances against a perceived order, myths of origin which in the case of Zimbabwe privilege the Bantu ancestry, cultural values and symbols that capture shared pasts and future aspirations. The fact that the concept of Zimbabwean-ness as an identity and Zimbabwe as a nation both evolve in the process of the liberation struggle suggests that they were not always there in the modern form, and that their imagination is intrinsically embedded within this struggle. In the ultimate this points to the incompleteness of the auto/biographical narrative whereby it cannot resolve all questions of both self and national identity.

#### **4.2.3 The Feigned Opossum Act- Self Propping and National Consciousness**

Maurice Nyagumbo’s construction of his self identity is somewhat intriguing in so far as it refuses to declare open ambitions in the realm of politics. The auto/biography in this way strategically builds the case towards the significance of the self not through aggressive consolidation of individual self identity, but through subtle negotiation whose main weapon is the discrediting of the others around the subject narrator. The ultimate object is the creation of a self who is, as Elbaz (1987:3) infers, “separate from other lives” and has a “history and independent existence quite apart from the lives of other men within a communal setting.” The narrative operates through an intrinsic structure that deliberately delays the entry of the subject into full self awareness and political consciousness. His South African experience is a big lull in

his groping for self awareness and political consciousness which nevertheless allows him ample reflection to be able to pass judgment on those people around him. The criticism that Nyagumbo in most cases throughout the narrative plays possum with the reader of his account “by making himself appear to be a slower starter than he was” (p.181) captures the narrative strategy employed in the propping of the self.

The narrative strategy enables Nyagumbo, when he ultimately gets deported from South Africa, to appropriate the vantage position from whence he diagnoses the problem bedeviling Southern Rhodesia and map out tentative solutions. From this position he clinically announces that “it was high time an African national political party was formed” (p. 103). The impediment to this is identified as the “educated Africans who [he] believed, feared the white man and did not want to lead their own suffering people” (p.103). In these simple statements the self is authorized as uniquely endowed with exceptional vision as to the direction that the Africans must take in their quest to define their political destiny in Southern Rhodesia. The statements go beyond simply discrediting the educated elites to offer the subject narrator an entry point that would enable him to steer the course of the nation. His relevance becomes solidly visible as he moves in to fill in the gap created by the inactivity of the educated Africans who are said to be neglecting the plight of their fellow countrymen.

In class terms, the life narrative is creating a niche for the lower uneducated classes who are tasked with the critical role in the construction of an alternative political order in Rhodesia. Nyagumbo’s limited education is seen as the positive quality that made him the practical man who is not incapacitated by the intricacies of theory. In this way the limitations of the educated African middle class are exposed as a way of stressing the significance of the role played by the subject and his class in the struggle for liberation. Thus when a campaign meeting was called in Harare in September 1957 to moot the formation of an African political party it was the educated elites who floundered. Hebert Chitepo who was supposed to chair the meeting communicated his unavailability just as the meeting was about to begin, creating confusion in those who had gathered at the venue. Chitepo’s eminence as the first African advocate in Rhodesia, and as a member of the class that is expected to carry the burden of national liberation, is contested through this narrative representation. Earlier attempts to organize active resistance to white oppression, such as the 1956 bus boycott, drew criticism from the African intellectuals who

condemned the violence of the rioters (p. 105). The ideological orientation of this class is being interrogated and in the process the narrative is questioning whether this class can be entrusted with the task of imagining a new nation that is different from the one created by their settler benefactors.

In the ultimate, the narrative is able to pronounce that “these so-called intellectuals feared to lose their privileged positions and their employment, and were only concerned to criticize and condemn what was being done by those they looked down upon” (p. 106). The deep seated suspicions between the working class and the educated middle class, which in the liberation struggle manifested itself in the conflict between the Vashandi and the Intellectual wing of the Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army in the late 1970s (Samupindi,1992, Chung, 2006) are thus given an early dramatization in Nyagumbo’s life narrative. In this sense the narrative does not only attempt to identify those that are positioned in contradistinction to the person of the self, but also delineates class conflicts that ideally locates the subject in a particular identity setting.

Once the life narrative firmly locates its subject in the working class, it then proceeds to prop up his rise to significance by highlighting the shortcomings of those others who are also involved in the struggle for liberation. From as early as the late 1950s when African nationalist resistance was becoming more pronounced Joshua Nkomo is slighted so that he does not emerge as the popular, if not pioneering, nationalist leader. During the September 1957 campaign meeting, when Nkomo is eventually asked to chair the meeting in place of Chitepo, the narrative alleges that there is protest from other nationalists such as Joseph Msika, Knight Maripe, Jason Moyo and Francis Nehwati. The narrative sets the stage from which Nkomo’s role in the liberation and construction of the Zimbabwean nation is not allowed a single interpretive vocabulary. What is emphasized is the apparent lack of perceptive vision and inept political judgment in Nkomo’s dealings with the white regime.

The February 1961 Southern Rhodesian Constitutional talks chaired by Duncan Sandys which came to an abrupt ending with Nkomo agreeing to the allocation of fifteen seats for Africans are given as a defining moment of Nkomo’s ineptitude and vacillation in dealing with the British and Rhodesian authorities. Even those who supported Nkomo’s decision such as James Chikerema and George Nyandoro are discredited as having no clear vision for the desired nation project. As

the nationalist struggle gathered momentum, the narrative stresses elements of dissension in the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) with Nkomo being perceived as "dishonesty by most Ndebeles in Gokwe" (p. 157), and with the generality of the people "sick and tired with what they called Nkomo's indecision" (p. 163). As ZAPU faced imminent banning in the course of 1962, the Africans and the Asians as well were disenchanted by Nkomo's lack of clarity as to what course of action he would take in the event that the party was indeed banned and on the question of majority rule. More boldly emphasized is Nkomo's supposed misrepresentation on the issue of a Government in Exile when he submitted that "all the African countries including Tanganyika wanted him and his executive to go to Dar" (p. 168). Nyagumbo takes an opportunity to bolster his self identity by stating that there was clearly no advantage in directing the war of liberation from outside the country. His political astuteness is then readily lent weight by Chitepo's intimation that the actual position was that the idea of a Government in Exile had been opposed by Tanganyika and the other frontline states. On the ground the executive members were given a cold welcome in Tanganyika and Nyagumbo, who was tasked with carrying recruits to and from Tanganyika, realised that Chikerema had not made any arrangements of that nature.

The self identity of the subject narrator is delineated dialectically from the negative portrayal of perceived adversaries. The rise to significance of Nyagumbo therefore is possible when those in the same league as him are blemished to the extent that they discursively defer to him in the story of the nation. The final act of discrediting is given when Nkomo is eventually arrested and restricted at Gonakudzingwa for his political activities. Nyagumbo's narrative on this case betrays contempt and outright dismissal of Nkomo's role in the construction of the Zimbabwean nation. The declaration that "no one can persuade me that Nkomo was arrested and restricted for the national cause" (p. 185) is tantamount not only to an erasure of Nkomo's sacrifices in the struggle, but also to an authorization of a narrative monologue on the construction of the Zimbabwean nation. Nkomo is represented as a self serving individual whose motives were always guided by the need for material benefit. Thus Nyagumbo submits that "it is true that he was arrested because he wanted to save his leadership" (p. 185). Vambe (2009) seems to lend voice to Nyagumbo's misgivings about Nkomo by suggesting that it is possible to contest the almost sacrosanct image that Nkomo is given in relation to the struggle for Zimbabwe and to his contribution after independence. It is also plausible to begin to question whether the vilification

of Nkomo is not a pointer to the ethnicization of the Zimbabwean nationalist struggle that Nkomo (1984) himself complains about at the split of ZAPU IN 1963. However, it is important to distinguish the fact that whereas Nyagumbo's criticism of Nkomo can be described as an attempt to clear leadership space of the struggle for himself, it seems nevertheless, that Vambe's questioning of Nkomo is informed by an acknowledgement that Nkomo's own autobiography is very much tied to Robert Mugabe – the man he so much loathed – that after reading Nkomo's book, there is little sense created that he has an alternative context and values with which to contest his political adversary.

The life narrative clearly builds the base for the edification of the self and its political preferences. The rifts within the ZAPU executive are put into context and with the clear objective of promoting the agenda of the group that Nyagumbo identifies with. Discontent and lack of an effective strategy to contest, both physically and ideologically, white domination is blamed on Nkomo's leadership. When a splinter group, labelled the "dissidents" by Nkomo's group, moots the formation of a new party, Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU), they bill it as a meeting to "revive patriotism" (p.176) among the masses. This is meant for effect as Nkomo and his group are represented as self interested "quislings" (p. 172) who did not promote patriotism among the people. The response by the Nkomo group to the formation of ZANU is seen as illogical as well as lacking in patriotic vision. They are blamed for the violence that erupted between them and the so-called dissident group and thus Nkomo is saddled with the ignoble responsibility of beginning a "black chapter of our history in this country" (p. 176). The narrative pronounces an indictment on the Nkomo group whose popularity and resources were not "effectively used in directing the masses to fight the real enemies of the Africans in the country" (p. 180). What is entailed therefore is that the new party, ZANU, carried the heavy onus of bringing about a new alternative order to that imposed by the whites on one hand, and by ZAPU headed by Nkomo on the other hand.

The People's Caretaker Council (PCC), which took care of ZAPU's affairs after it was banned, is discredited as failing to give proper orientation and training to its cadres. This resulted in the ineffective use of the many weapons that they brought into the country and unnecessary self exposition as they would indulge in rowdy behaviour at beer parties. Insinuations of abuse of money are levelled against Chikerema who had been entrusted with huge sums of money to

“unleash the underground movement” (p. 172). All these shortcomings are highlighted against the perceptive national consciousness, resourcefulness, courage and good judgment of the subject narrator. Thus on one hand, Nyagumbo’s autobiographical narrative is entrenched in the ‘politics’ of mudslinging, which on the other hand points to its limitation in that the narrator has no context of his own to elaborate his own vision outside the compulsion to invoke the weakness of other political contenders in order for him to find political voice with which to insert himself as honest broker in the conflict narratives within the nationalist movements

Representations of self identity gain prominence when defined in contrast to negative representation of those others who inhabit the self’s realm (Hall, 2000). Nyagumbo’s self image, once he awakens to the national cause is cast as uncompromising and aggressive even where his colleagues falter. From the very onset the subject narrator apports negative labels on others as a way of sprucing up perceptions of his self identity. Efforts to awaken consciousness to the national cause in his home area on return from South Africa are stalled because people like Columbus Makoni had little political understanding. The narrative here insinuates that the subject has gone through unique experiences that equip him with a political consciousness that enables him to be the leading political navigator in the efforts to break white domination. Such unique experience fortifies the subject narrator to confront not only the white man, but the fellow Africans who are deemed as spineless. During his incarceration and restriction at Lupane Restriction Camp Nyagumbo alludes to his centrality in the protest against the Native Commissioner who had deducted allowances from fellow restrictees.

The narrative boldly underlines the chickening out of Dzukamanja, Foya, Musarurwa, Matimba, Musowe and Chihota from the planned protest. Foya, Matimba, and Musarurwa are later on portrayed as involved in attempts to scupper efforts by Nyagumbo and his inner group to arrange the first political rally in the Lupane communal area. Foya is further discredited as unprincipled as instead of dedicating himself to the national cause by supporting the rally he courts the wrath of Lupane villagers by cheating with a villager’s wife. Effectively the narrative seeks to sully the images of those figures who also sought political limelight in a way that would contest Nyagumbo’s version. The danger in this is that Nyagumbo’s narrative runs the risk of giving prominence to his adversaries by default as he makes them his point of reference in the effort to prop up his self image.

In Lupane he goes on to credit himself for making the very first political inroads in Lupane in a way that designates the Ndebele people lacking political consciousness. The point is to pre-empt and dismiss any other contesting narratives on who pioneered the nationalist movement across the country. The claim that “up till then, the local people had believed that politics was a Shona way of life” (p. 147) places not only the self in the firm position of a leading political luminary, but also his ethnic group, the Shona, as better disposed politically than their Ndebele counterparts. In a subtle way the narrative continues to undermine the perceived popularity of Nkomo as the natural political leader amongst the Ndebele people. In the ultimate a claim is made to the effect that political awareness across the country was spread by the Shona people and Nyagumbo and his inner group in particular. In matters of self representation, even historical facts such as the concerted Ndebele-Shona resistance acts in the first Chimurenga against white invasion are underplayed in pursuit of personal or ethnic glory. Thus the life narrative has obvious fissures in which it is immensely difficult to account for implied lack of political consciousness among the Ndebeles in the 1960s and early 1970s when in the last decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century their robust resistance is recorded.

Nyagumbo’s construction of his self identity is buttressed by references to what amounts to significant moments of the self both in the individual and public realms. At the individual level the decision to migrate to South Africa constitutes a significant moment at which the self embarks on an exploratory journey leading to political and self consciousness. Subsequently, the deportation from South Africa is a defining moment that sets the subject on a definite course leading to self definition and political emancipation. Nevertheless, the most significant moment that strives to position Nyagumbo beyond other narrative contestations in the story of the creation of the Zimbabwean nation is the claim of presence at the 1966 battle of Chinhoyi. From ZANU’s perspective, of which Nyagumbo was a member, the battle of Chinhoyi marked the beginning of the Second Chimurenga. This arbitrary designation of the battle has symbolic meaning that excludes other participants’ perspectives as to when and where the defining and significant act of resistance to colonial rule was enacted. It amounts to a silencing discourse that appropriates the resistance narrative in favour of one political party and at the expense of other participants. If by being present at the 1966, Nyagumbo is speaking in allegorical terms to refer to the spirit of revolution that he thought he incarnated, then his narrative finds currency in this discourse as it places him right at the centre of this defining moment from whence the practical



and effective imagination of the alternative Zimbabwean nationhood is discursively located. Zimbabweanness and the Zimbabwean nation in the immediate sense were born out of the Second Chimurenga, and Nyagumbo was present at the inception battle. Self identity in this way becomes inextricably bound to the nation and its fate. Those other political players not involved in the planning or actual execution of the defining moment, or loosely could not identify with its cause, are consigned to the margins of the national discourse. The subject of the narrative manoeuvres himself into a position of prominence from a position of relative obscurity and delayed participation in the mainstream identity politics that characterized the Rhodesian society. This manoeuvre is made possible through auto/biography's propensity to exploit both fact and fiction to promote the ego of the self. It also often commands resources that are external to the self to help with the construction of desired images of self and nation.

#### **4.2.4 The Constructed-ness of Nyagumbo's *With the People***

Life narratives make a claim to truth and historical objectivity in a way that fiction has not been able to do (Elbaz, 1987). Yet their dependence on memory for the reconstruction of that truth means that the process of narrating a life story is a fictional and selective one. Beyond this fact is a whole complex of factors that are at play in the production of a life narrative that call for an interrogation of the political economy underlying this process. Zimbabwean nationalist auto/biographies examined in this study invite questions as to why they were produced in the first place, who sponsored the projects and what imaginative interventions were made both to the narration of the life story and its eventual publication. Understanding the political economy of auto/biographical production is critical to grasping the agenda(s) that the life narrative seeks to set from the very onset. The emplotment of a life at the centre of the nation is not a disinterested act, and as such involves both the subject of the text and those others involved in the narrative project.

Maurice Nyagumbo's narrative seeks to trace the growth of his consciousness into selfhood as well as capture his role in the creation of a new nationhood that is distinct from the one he grew up in under colonial Rhodesia. But this narrative had to be produced under severely constrictive conditions, in jail, that its success had to depend on collaboration from others who subscribed to his agenda. Collaboration involved physical smuggling of manuscripts from prison, compilation as well as several interventions of both an ideological and political nature. In this sense

auto/biography ceases to be one man's story of the self, but a communal project whose objective is to construct a self identity whose significance is felt throughout the whole process of constructing a new nationhood. The politics of auto/biographical writing implies the individual's capacity for imagination influencing the writing process and the selection of the vocabulary deployed (Vambe 2009, Ashleigh Harris, 2005). The involvement of John Conradie, a fellow inmate serving a twenty year sentence for "conspiring to use violent means to overthrow the rebel regime of Ian Smith", (p.7) in the compilation of the manuscripts and making explanatory interventions problematizes both memory and objectivity in Nyagumbo's writing.

Whereas at one level Conradie's intervention may serve to authenticate detail about Nyagumbo's life, at another level it may be read as lending ideological and political vocabulary to the subject's narrative meant to portray his self identity as significantly unique and inseparable from the story of the nation. Having also been a victim of Smith's regime, Conradie is an interested part in creating alternative selfhoods and nationhood that is implied through Nyagumbo's life story. There are therefore obvious implications to the process of what details get selected for the life narrative, which ones are conveniently left out or forgotten, and what self identities are to be projected. White (1987: ix) submits that any narrative "is not merely a neutral discursive form" but rather "entails ontological and epistemic choices with distinct ideological and even specifically political implications." Conradie's intervention, to employ White's argument, also authorizes certain preferred alternative modes of nationhood that are essentially a departure from the Rhodesia that both Nyagumbo and Conradie experienced. It can be contended therefore that the notions of self and nation are largely constructions that are meant to advance certain agendas and images which in the colonial context is the creation of a new national consensus for the victims of colonialism. And these constructions are contestable both in terms of detail and perspective since they are representations of life as understood by one man/ author against the background of several autobiographies on nation's sublime reality. In the Zimbabwean context of struggle, perhaps it is what makes the life narratives indispensable as they destabilize official narratives of history. Gatsheni-Ndlovu (2009:21) avers that "contested pasts and contested memories" continue to work as "connecting tissues across the past and present in Zimbabwe."

As much as *With the People* is the life story of Maurice Nyagumbo, Conradie exercised a certain degree of licence which enabled him to focus on the agenda of constructing a self at the centre of

the nationalist struggle to the exclusion of other self-locating details in the subject's life as well as other narratives by the subject's political adversaries. Todd (2007) even suggests that Conradie had an overbearing influence over Nyagumbo's political life that must surely have found expression in the autobiography. The life narrative thus goes through a multi-layered selective process that stretches from the failures of memory to its deliberate omissions up to the editorial excisions of the project's intellectual sponsors. Conradie submits that Nyagumbo was persuaded to accept the removal of four chapters that originally constituted the introductory chapters locating his self identity in the context of his ancestry. The chapters specifically recounted the "history of the Nyashanu clan into which Maurice was born" (p. 9). The importance of such chapters to the life narrative is in that kinship, ethnicity, and gender are primary identities whose robustness gives critical foundational definitions of who we are (Jenkins, 2004:19). Individuals get their first socialization from their immediate societal structures and it is in these structures that their identities get validated or fail to get the validation. Jenkins (2004:18) further posits that as much as individuals are unique and variable, their self-hood is socially constructed in a process that begins from the "primary and [then the] subsequent socialization, and in the ongoing interaction during which individuals define and redefine themselves and others throughout their lives."

The immediate implication of Conradie's intervention on this aspect is that the construction of Maurice Nyagumbo's life narrative is never complete without the location of his identity within the history and kinship ties of the Nyashanu clan. The intervention negates a fundamental aspect of self identity that stresses that "individual identity formation has its roots in our earliest processes of socialization" (Jenkins, *ibid.*). Yet Conradie's strategy apparently is meant to elevate Nyagumbo's identity from the limitations implied in the ethnic and clan allegiance and achieve a constructed-ness of the life narrative that prioritizes the agency of the individual in the formative processes of his self identity as well as in the creation of Zimbabwean nationhood over the primary forms. This strategy of narrative construction tends to privilege the modern dispensation ushered by colonial imperialism as the critical disorientating condition which throws individuals into existential crisis that triggers the search for self identity. Nyagumbo's life narrative begins with the implied conflict of whether his birth should be consecrated in the Christian way, to which his parents subscribe, or the traditional way that is preferred by his

grandparents. Christianity as an aspect of the modern is seen as threatening the stability of the traditional order, as well as the security that this order affords its subjects.

The individual is thus thrust into crisis, a requisite condition for probing for new selfhoods. Conradie thus begins the tale of Maurice's life with a shattering of the traditional that then sets the subject, through his early education in Rhodesia and migration to South Africa, on a journey of self discovery. There is an implied insinuation that traditional identity formation processes such as clan, tribe or ancestry are limiting (Brunner, 2001, Weintraub, 1978) as they keep the individual embedded within the group to the extent of failing to grope out for individual identity. But this may have the inherent weakness of assuming that individual identities cannot exist in pre-modern conditions. Such a formulation tends to ignore the important role played by primary sources of identity and precociously thrust the subject against the white settler regime. In the ultimate, it is the immediate life of the subject that is given prominence, and in the process, the narrative celebrates the exploits of the individual as markedly independent and outstanding from those of its others. The narrative construction, with the effected excisions, thus can be read as one of the versions of Nyagumbo's life that is value laden and narrated from a vested position. To this extent, Nyagumbo's work can be said to reveal more from what was removed than from what remained as text autobiography. Perhaps, it is in the silenced, that the 'authentic' selves of the individual and nation where what is distinctively 'political' about any work, let alone the autobiography, is lodged.

That Conradie, a fellow inmate and victim of the Rhodesian system compiles and edits the life story of Nyagumbo cannot be a coincidence, and on the balance it can be argued that the construction of the narrative from the beginning has certain notions of self and Zimbabwean nation that he wanted imagined. It is only in this light that Conradie's disclaimer that "this work makes no claim to being an accurate historical record" (p. 9) can be engaged as meaning that no historical or fictional work is ever complete. The mediated views of Nyagumbo's life narrative draw attention to the fact that it is not entirely his own account and also to the possibility of mis- or underrepresentation of the self and nation.

The excision of the primary identity orientating details of Nyagumbo's life narrative is compensated for by a contextualizing preface by Terence Ranger. Ranger's intervention is significant in as far as it realises that later life exploits driven by individual agency need to be

located in historical context. Individual identity cannot be imagined in isolation from the entanglement of society and its myths and legends. Thus by rooting Nyagumbo's identity in his clan's history Ranger is able to expose the source from which individual agency is watered. Nyagumbo has at his disposal an oral history that is rich in myths and legends of his ancestors that later on serve as moments of inspiration in his quest for a meaningful sense of self and nationhood. The "greatness of the Nyashanu clan before the white people came into the country" (p.16) is highlighted, while the legend of Nyagumbo's great grandfather, Gono, functions to provide an analogy to his escapades in colonial Rhodesia and South Africa where he carved his identity as the "liberator of his people" and "restorer of tradition"(p.17). Gono is captured in the legend as the hero of the Nyashanu clan who at some point was forced to flee his birth right only to distinguish himself in a foreign land before coming back to reclaim his place amongst his people. His return established him as "an instrument of wider unity among the Shona people of the region" (p.17). This located-ness in ancestry and history allows for the construction of a life narrative that conceptually can imagine the perpetuation of identity modes which are inherited from the past. These inherited identity modes from the past become possible alternatives to the colonial order that seeks to displace the Africans. A new self identity modelled on the independence and heroism of Gono, and a foundation of a new nation based on the cultural shared-ness of the Shona people, as opposed to the settler culture, are thus envisaged and become the raw material for the construction of Nyagumbo's life story. Alternatively though, Conradie's mediation that steers away from an over-emphasis of ethnic historicization of Nyagumbo's identity can be read as an attempt that compliments that of Ranger and Nyagumbo in order to give coherence to a life narrative that is fraught with contradictions.

To this extent, Nyagumbo's auto/biography has proved to be self conscious in the narration of the self. It has privileged the growth of the narrator's private and social person before thrusting him at the centre of the nation. The political-ness of this narrative is thus derived firstly from the day to day social engagements with the Rhodesian and South African social systems, and secondly in the politics of the liberation struggle. The significant selves of Nyagumbo are delineated in the process of his involvement with the overt politics of the Second Chimurenga. It is this involvement that qualifies his claim to have been "*with the people*" in the trenches as well as in prison, despite the apparent contradiction that for the greater part of his youth he was philandering in South Africa. Nyagumbo's conception of his self identities is informed by a

sense of fated destiny that traces back to his ancestry. The ‘political’ of Nyagumbo’s work also manifests in the ways despite his intentions to present himself with all the coherence, he ends up allowing the reader to see, doubt and even experience the contradictory identities of the self that are accentuated by the very slippery nature of the language of self symbolization. These paradoxical modes of self writing, ironically puts him within, beyond and sometimes above contestation from those people around him whom he disparages for various human shortcomings. The fated destiny attaches him to the nation, which nation is conceived in sole terms of the armed struggle against colonialism and the restoration of African cultural values. In this way Nyagumbo, fails to escape the limitations of traditional/cultural nationalism and those of the nationalist armed liberation discourse (Werbner, 1988, Radhakrishnan, 2001). Nyagumbo’s rendition of the self and nation is useful to the understanding of the contradictions that inhere in the discourse of self identity and nation particularly when read alongside alternative versions from different perspectives such as the ones given by Abel Muzorewa in his *Rise Up and Walk*, which is the subject of analysis in the next section.

### **4.3 Abel Muzorewa - *Rise up and Walk***

#### **4.3.1 Denomi/Nation- Institutionalizing Self Identity**

The auto/biography of Bishop Abel Tendekai Muzorewa is a nuanced rendition of a life that controversially straddles both the spiritual and the secular realms in a way that testifies to the complexity of the concept what is ‘political’ in a narrative of self identity and nation. Born of Christian parents and subsequently becoming a man of the cloth, Muzorewa also found himself at the vortex of activities that tied his fate to that of the nation. The evolution of his self identity is first and foremost conceived of within the parameters of the Christian church, and, subsequently through the fusion of this spiritualism with a sense of political/religious duty to the nation.

Denomi/Nation in this sense denotes spiritual orientated-ness in its broad sense and the extension of that as the basis for the construction of the Zimbabwean nation. For Muzorewa the armed struggle to dislodge the colonial settlers, as much as it is necessary, does not provide firm foundation for new nationhood as in Africa internecine conflicts often unravel after the departure of the settlers. Thus in articulating his vision of nation, and the role that he and the church must

play, Muzorewa argues that “I do not subscribe to the romantic and unhistoric view that the liberation struggle is won by armed clashes between the forces of liberation and the colonial army” (p. 91). Mbembe (2001:83) to some degree subscribes to this view as he warns that in the postcolony “armed formations are not simply useful to wage war” but are “also used as a weapon in the re-establishment of authoritarian rule.” Whereas Mbembe acknowledges the ambivalent instrumentality of armed struggle, Gatsheni-Ndlovu (2009) goes for the jugular vein simplifying a complex reality. He chastises those nationalists who always “tended to reduce nationalism to the liberation war to the extent of defining the country as born out of the barrel of the gun” (Gatsheni-Ndlovu, 2009:41). Nyagumbo seems to pin the construction of the new nation largely on the battlefield whereas Muzorewa extends the meaning of the political nature of revolution in ways that encapsulate the spiritual dimension.

Muzorewa’s narrative makes it impossible to imagine its subject’s identity outside the Christian dogma that he advances within his Methodist denomination and its philosophical extensions to an imagined ideal nationhood. It establishes continuities between denomination and nation and grafts self identity in those continuities in a transcendental vector that entrenches the subject in a significant position in the imagination of the nation, albeit contested. Through this process the identity of the self is institutionalized as an indispensable aspect of both the Church and the Nation. The ideal nation is envisaged as only possible if derived from the moral and spiritual integrity of total Christian values. Implicit in this notion is a departure from usual church dogma to a radical faith that refuses the hierarchical innuendos of liberation that comes in afterlife. It is a faith that begins by asking whether God ‘want some people to seize the good land of our country leaving the masses to scratch the dry and sandy soil and starve” (p. 33). Such a faith relocates the church from the dizzy realms of abstract spiritualism to the day to day realities of hunger, colonial violence, economic emasculation, political oppression and racism in Rhodesia. The Church in this way becomes a possible first point of conception of a community of people with shared experiences, cultural values, myths, and broadly, spiritual orientation.

However, foregrounding the conception of community or nation in Christian dogma has its latent problems. Christianity implies a closure of other spiritualisms and a privileging of a monotheistic recognition of a single God. As Mbembe (2001:214) would argue, “the metaphor of monotheism entails the idea of totalization.” Thus the danger of Muzorewa’s premises of nation is in

disinheriting the African traditional spiritualism as a cultural resource that had a significant contribution to offer to the development of nationalist sentiments in Zimbabwe. Mbembe's critique of monotheism continues to have relevancy to Muzorewa's project of nation. He further posits that "every monotheistic system is based on a notion of exclusivity and condensation of sovereignty" (Mbembe, *ibid.*), a point that reveals the Christian doctrine that is Muzorewa's premises of the "total nation" as an ideological weapon to disqualify other narratives in the contest of the nation.

But Muzorewa's nationalism is dressed up as something much bigger, something that involves the making of a desired community based on mutual values and not just the violence that is invoked by battle scenes. As Gatsheni-Ndlovu explains, "the gun alone cannot produce a nation" as it is just "a mere instrument in the service of something else" (*ibid.*, 41). Muzorewa's conception of the Zimbabwean nationhood thus intrinsically calls for the deconstruction of those nationalistic positions that give primacy to the liberation war as the alpha and omega in the construction of the nation. As Gatsheni-Ndlovu hints, Muzorewa stands apart from those "nationalists in the Patriotic Front who favoured violent armed struggle as the only liberation option" (*ibid.*, 141). Total liberation, which entails new nationhood, must, among other things, involve spiritual, moral and mental opposition to settler oppression. This provides a departure from other nationalists' visions by premising the envisaged nation on a higher spiritual and moral ground than the liberation war could provide. It is a departure that also seeks to critique the privileging of ancestral spiritualism in fomenting nationalist consciousness during the liberation struggle. The creation of new identities, both of self and of nation, is shown to reject unilateral trajectories as Muzorewa declares that "I see the role of the Christian Church as vital to the re-establishment of order and peace in post- revolutionary Zimbabwe" (p.185). The auto/biography here declares philosophical positions which, though contested by other nationalists of his time who saw him as a "quisling" of the Smith regime (Auret, 1992, Nyagumbo, 1980, Tekere, 2007), reveal its capacity for imagining the nation differently. Bordering on the verge of essentializing Christian spirituality as the critical foundation on which the nation must be constructed, Muzorewa is nevertheless challenging the privileging of traditional spiritualism in Zimbabwean nationalist discourse as the only cultural resource that could be harnessed towards the creation of an alternative nationhood.



Immersion into spiritual orientation for the subject of the narrative is invoked early in his life as a requisite condition for the formation of an ideal self identity that would come to embody the core values of nationhood at a later stage. This immersion underlines a marked destiny for Muzorewa since its possibility is mediated through forces that are beyond individual willpower or the making of society. There is a hint, through the dreams, of supernatural intervention in orientating him towards the church. Dreams, according to Freud (Jung, 2002), belong to the psychic realm and Muzorewa's auto/biography is making recourse to them as a way of authorizing the intentions of its subject. The psychic is triggered by a number of causes as it can never be accidental. Those causes are part of the deep structure of meanings that can be deciphered from the dreams, but are strategically kept under the surface. As a narrative strategy this positions the subject beyond criticism of mortal wilfulness towards power or positions of domination. At the same time the narrative apports him a special vocation that places him at an advantage over other contestants in matters of moral authority.

Jung's (2002: 4) exegesis on the symbolism of dreams highlights the "individual" element in a dream, that is, it is always "in agreement with the psychological disposition of the subject." As such, rather than Muzorewa's dreams being accidental visitations from the supernatural world, their significance in the projectile of his life should be looked for in the psychological framework fostered on him from birth onwards. Born in a Christian family and raised as such, the psychological inclination towards the cloth was always embedded in his being. When, as a young man Muzorewa claims to have experienced recurrent dreams of a man who would come "dressed in long white robe" who "would give [him] a hoe handle and command [him] to lead the congregation in singing" (p. 25) he is only betraying his psychological disposition that is a product of his psychic past. The interpretation that gains prominent attention in his consciousness is the idea of being called into the ministry to lead in God's work. In Jungian terms this becomes a confirmation of the suppressed, possibly unconscious wish to advance the cause of the ministry. Such a position would complement Freud's (Jung, 2002: 6) observation that "every dream represents the fulfillment of a repressed wish." In the final analysis therefore, dreams are an expression, "in figurative language" of those "thoughts, judgments, views, directives, tendencies, which were unconscious either because of repression or through mere lack of realization" (Jung, 2002: 36).

The usage of the dreams in the narrative as metaphoric signifiers of a possible identity for the subject can be read as a technique in the armoury of the auto/biographical genre. It is a technique that if left to the uninitiated, would allow the dreams to be read as completely divorced from the conscious realm. Yet according to Jung's thesis, dreams are never cut off from the continuity of consciousness since in "almost every dream certain details can be found which have their origin in the impressions, thoughts, and moods of the preceding day or days" (ibid, p. 26). Viewed from such a perspective, it can be argued that in psychical terms dreams are located in what Jacobs (2003) calls the "ancestral mind." The Ancestral Mind is defined as the "reservoir of memories from our childhood as well as those from our distant collective evolutionary past" (Jacobs, 2003:6). This Ancestral mind relies more on the experiential, thus taking it away from the realm of reason or the conscious. And yet the conscious can tap into it to construct desired presences and identity images.

If dreams as psychic signals are beamed in this manner, they thus can reinforce and inspire certain conscious states which the subject can then strive to realize or actualize, making them some kind of "an anticipation in the unconscious of future conscious achievements" (ibid, p.43). Therefore if the narrative enlists the mediation of divinity through dreams in the construction of a desired self identity for its subject, it is an act of appropriating higher moral ground while advancing deep-seated and suppressed ambitions. Given that the spiritual and moral foundations of the church are perceived as critical in the construction of the nation, confluences of the Denomi/Nation point to Muzorewa being called to take the cloth and prepare for a future responsibility to create and lead a nation out of colonial grip. This recourse to the subliminal subconscious reality of dreams is a way of fostering and legitimating a certain desired self identity. In 1947 when the youthful Muzorewa decided to seek for an economically fulfilling profession in Salisbury he experienced a similar visitation in which "ministers of religion, all clothed in clerical garb" (p. 29) surrounded his shabbily dressed and dirty figure. A case for a psychological re-armament towards a higher calling is further reinforced and the subject in gradual steps is headed for a determined destiny. At a certain level the progression towards this desired identity strikes the reader as over determined and contrived as at every turn he is literally shunted back to missionary work. When looking for a job he is told to go back to the mission by a stranger who knew nothing about his missionary background. In the offing a specific role

whose determination and fulfillment is above the affairs of man has been created, and the implication is that he is only a tool in the hands of a higher deity.

The moment Muzorewa takes up missionary work the narrative proceeds to confirm him as the chosen servant of the people who sacrifices personal and family material comforts in the service of the people. His special attributes over ordinary people are highlighted through his healing abilities which again are revealed to him through dreams. Parallels are drawn to the messiah whose ministry on earth was based on direct communication with God. The command that came in form of a dream to lay hands on a sick girl is allowed to materialize later when Muzorewa contacts his first healing act on a very sick woman. The trope of sickness evokes images of a universe in turmoil and which begs for order. The political problems of Rhodesia and the associated marginal existence of the Africans also call for intervention that must result in the restoration of order. This casts Muzorewa in a dual role whereby his “Total Gospel for Total Man” (p.56) places him centrally as the critical agent in the construction of both self and nation. The guiding principle is the rejection of Christian attitudes that preach about spiritual redemption at the expense of physical liberation from colonial oppression. Politics becomes as much the subject of the gospel as it is the subject of secular existence. Thus politics is viewed as “part of the Christian’s duty if he is to serve as Christ served” (p.56). An inherent contradiction is brought to the surface where Christianity is unsettled from the periphery so that it becomes liberatory not only in the spiritual sense but also in the radical and revolutionary sense of restoring independence to the oppressed people of Rhodesia. The Bible in this sense is given a new reading and interpretation that makes it the embodiment of struggles against the physical oppression of one group by another, as well as spiritual redemption. It is thus capable of fomenting nationalism, hence nation can be conceived of, and as anchored in, the faith of the church. Contextualized in the context of spiritual faith the “pitfalls of national consciousness” (Fanon, 1968) are avoidable and the tendency of the nation to degenerate into ethnic and tribal enclaves after independence is contained.

Muzorewa inhabits or appropriates the niche in which his identity is characterized as the vector that traverses the continuum between denomination and nation. His life narrative advances a polemic that seem to suggest that the blood ethnic conflicts during the liberation struggle and the political strife in the early years of independence were a result of lack of a transcendental force

that could take the African people beyond the constructions of race, the ethnic and tribe. The irony of this representation of self is in that on ascending to power in the Zimbabwe-Rhodesia dispensation Muzorewa is viewed as mired in the bloody schemes of the Smith regime that resulted in bombings of liberation fighters and refugees in Mozambique and Zambia (Nyagumbo, 1980, Nkomo, 1984, Tekere, 2007). Thus the political substance of his philosophy is contested in a way that reveals the incompleteness of his narrative in the absence of others who knew and dealt with him in the course of the liberation struggle. Self identity can only be comprehensively defined in the context of others.

As much as Zimbabwean nationalism also drew from Christianity as a cultural resource during the liberation war (Bhebe, 1999, McLaughlin et al, 1996), Muzorewa sees a stronger leaning towards traditional religion. This nationalistic thrust that privileged an armed struggle inspired by traditional mythology and spiritualism is challenged for its failure to foresee the possibility that in the post independence era these could be appropriated, manipulated and localized to serve the interests of narrow political interests. Local myths can be deployed in a selective way to promote particular political interests and often to the exclusion of other interests. A kind of loyalty to a belief that has a claim to universality such as Christianity is thus seen as viable as a basis of national consciousness and unity both during the struggle and after independence. The Christian Church in Rhodesia, particularly the Methodist denomination led by Bishop Ralph Dodge, preferred to approach colonial oppression through the “gospel for the total man” through which they stood against the unilateral declaration of independence (UDI) in 1965 and the detention of nationalists without trial. The Church got deeply involved as more repression became evident with the banning of political parties and the proscription of political gatherings. The cause of the nation had to be articulated from the pulpit as the clergy were “called up to fill a national void in political leadership” (p. 90) due to the detention of nationalists. The aspirations of the people, all expressed in the call for freedom, justice and liberation, and all to be realized in the vision of a new nation- Zimbabwe, had become the catchwords in the wake of aggravated repression in colonial Rhodesia. The Church, and in particular Bishop Muzorewa, did not gatecrash onto the political scene, nor were they invited to serve the political convenience of beleaguered nationalists, but were pursuing a liberatory agenda that in itself had a specific conception of nation. This forms Muzorewa’s defence against those who appropriated to themselves the exclusive right to the term nationalist, and thus accused him of overstepping his

place-holder mandate given to him in Lusaka in 1974 during the formation of the African National Council (Nkomo, 1984).

Muzorewa's narrative maintains that the formation of the ANC came at a time when the African nationalist response to the repressive measures of the Smith regime was chaotic. This is a position that is corroborated by other nationalists (Nkomo 1984, Nyagumbo, 1980) who also subscribed to the need for a united front under a leadership that was neither ZANU nor ZAPU. This leader had to have a national stature and the immediate task was to mobilize opposition to the proposals of the Pearce Commission. The bone of contention is on whether the elevation of Muzorewa to the leadership of the ANC was only a temporary strategy which should have seen him deferring to the detained nationalists once released, or was it recognition of his, and the Church's role in the struggle for liberation. The detained nationalists tended to view him in the former sense, a situation which negated Muzorewa's perceived contribution to the struggle even before the Pearce Commission. Thus he contests, citing his banning from the Tribal Trust Lands, that "if I was considered a threat by the regime, then I must be honoured as a leading Zimbabwean nationalist" (p. 85).

The success of the "NO VOTE" campaign during the Pearce Commission in the absence of the professional politicians entrenches Muzorewa and the Church on the political scene in a way that challenges narratives that claim exclusive ownership of that space. For Muzorewa the formation of the ANC spelt out a new reality, a critical need that also exposed the weaknesses of the pioneering Zimbabwean nationalists. This need is fulfilled through the political unity that the ANC achieved, and which meant that ZAPU, ZANU and FROLIZI had been subsumed under the leadership of Muzorewa. The contention here is that these fractious political parties, with their tendencies towards ethnic and tribal affiliations, whose ugly face often surfaced through assassinations, had become a hindrance to the cause of the nation. Those Zimbabweans abroad who continued to think in terms of the old parties and failed to recognize the achieved unity are thus accused of being "blinded by the exiles' London fog" (p.109). By extension, those inside the country and in detention, and continued to hold on to their fractious parties are discredited as pursuing selfish and narrow agendas, an accusation that is particularly directed at Nkomo. As if to emphasize the new reality to such perceived political detractors, Muzorewa, in a statement to the Organization of African Unity's Liberation Committee in 1976, warned that those who

deviated from the achieved unity would run the risk of losing the people's support and become irrelevant to the cause of the struggle. The ANC is given prime position as the leading liberatory force that inspired youths to leave the country for training as guerrilla fighters owing to its successful strategy "and results oriented approach" (p. 198) that led to the defeat of the Smith/Home constitutional proposals.

The platform on which the nation of Zimbabwe is to be conceived of and constructed is thus appropriated to the advantage of the ANC. Emerging from the success of the NO VOTE in the Pearce Commission the ANC is viewed as transforming from mass protest into a mass party that commanded support from the majority of the African people. The narrative credits its subject for achieving the unity that had been elusive from the inception of African party politics in response to colonial oppression. His vision of a total nation is depicted as having better prospects with the submersion of the traditional political parties. It is based on these prospects that he declares that "for the first time the people of Zimbabwe had an organization capable of total national unity, able to produce results and to overcome the minority regime" (p.119). Haggling between liberation political parties is dismissed as the anti-thesis of nation-building, a point that is meant to give Muzorewa and the ANC an edge over the leaders of ZAPU and ZANU. From this elevated platform Muzorewa is enabled to articulate an inclusive vision of a nation that would also accommodate the white Rhodesian since the struggle was not between races but against the domination of the majority by a minority sector of the population.

Thus in the envisaged nation white Rhodesians would "have the same rights and obligations of citizenship as their fellow Rhodesians of the majority community, without discrimination on the grounds of race, colour or creed" (p. 145). The total nation will be achieved then, and its superior appeal over the chaos of assassinations at the rear bases of the liberation struggle, at the negotiation tables of foreign lands to solve the Rhodesian crisis, the petrol bombings in African townships, and the bloodletting in independent Zimbabwe, installs Muzorewa on higher moral and political ground. However, the ideal "total" nation tends to gloss over realities that point to the fact that beyond the facade of homogenous composition the nation characteristically is defined by its multi-tiers of different groups and interests competing to occupy its inner core. It is from this context that the frictions between the different political groups have to be read, since the nation, whether colonial state or independent, will always have its centre and its margins.

### 4.3.2 Undermining Rivalry, Fortressing Images of Self

The viability of the vision of the total nation at the centre of which is the glorified self is pursued through the exposition of weaknesses of the other political players and their alleged bankrupt visions. Traditional political parties had not only been superceded by the ANC due to their narrow and divisive tendencies, but due to ineffective leadership and political strategies. Muzorewa's narrative, though it is critical of all the African political formations which could not go beyond awakening nationalistic consciousness amongst the masses, identifies Joshua Nkomo as the major stumbling block to the liberation cause. On this Muzorewa agrees with Nyagumbo's assessment of Nkomo's political role as a founding nationalist. The split of ZAPU in 1963, which Nkomo attributes to ethnic manoeuvres amongst his Shona colleagues, is instead blamed on his failure to effectively engage the settler regime in a way that could chalk up some results. ZANU's ascendancy is readily explained as benefitting from the disenchantment with Nkomo's lack of success. Ndabaningi Sithole is said to have gained support both in the country and outside "from those who were disappointed that Nkomo had gained little if anything in his struggle to further majority rule" (p. 57).

Strategically both formations are undermined, ZANU as having no merit of its own to rally people around a viable political programme, hence boosting its numbers from the disenchanting, while Nkomo's leadership offered no hope. In this way the auto/biography settles political scores with its adversaries, an exercise that Nkomo will later on engage in to redeem himself from the insignificance that Muzorewa banishes him to. More than ethnic bitterness, Muzorewa seems to be discrediting Nkomo specifically for the latter's insistence that he, Muzorewa, had been chosen to lead the ANC not because of political astuteness but for the reason that he did not pose any political threat to the jailed nationalists. For this Nkomo is portrayed as amenable to political myopia and vindictiveness that saw him encouraging violence against those who were deemed to be followers of the splinter group, ZANU. The leadership of ZANU is branded elitist, a situation that extended hostility towards ZANU to the educated professionals such as schoolteachers, nurses, doctors and ministers of religion like Muzorewa himself. Thus Nkomo becomes the arch-enemy not only to ZANU but to the general cause for unity amongst the African people irrespective of economic or social station in life. In this way the auto/biography is achieving the

objective of discrediting a major political player who stands in the subject's way to political significance.

At another level the narrative attempts to extricate its subject narrator from the implied similar class fate with those who identified with ZANU as a way of defining its niche from which he seeks to distinguish himself as a significant political entity. The rivalry between ZAPU and ZANU advances his agenda as he notes with concern that these parties' leadership was coming out of detention with attitudes fixated on pursuing political grudges at the expense of liberation. There is open contempt for these formations as Muzorewa characterized the violence that ensued between their supporters by declaring that "that kind of insanity derived from a renascent tribalism and an insatiable lust for power" (p. 148). In this way higher political and moral ground is claimed over the mean pursuits ascribed to the two political formations. The leadership of the parties, especially Nkomo, is denied any positive attributes that could account for their claim to be at the centre of the national liberation. Nkomo is particularly targeted for his refusal to recognize Muzorewa as the embodiment of political unity, therefore the prominent figure to bring about a new order and nation of Zimbabwe. His insistence that he was instrumental in the formation of the ANC in December 1971 is reduced to an unbridled drive for power. By way of contesting Muzorewa thus declares that at the inception of the ANC leadership there "was no mention that I was to be provisional leader until Mr. Nkomo gained release from detention" (p.157). In this way Muzorewa's memory of events as they happened at the 1974 talks is at variance with the submissions of the other participants (Nkomo, 1984, Tekere, 2007). This is one glaring incident where reliance on memory destabilizes the auto/biographical genre as participants can choose to remember, or construct, only those details that would advance the cause of the self from an event commonly experienced or witnessed. Even if Muzorewa's version is the odd one out, it achieves the objective of undermining those narratives that seek to position themselves as official and therefore retaining Muzorewa's claims to significance in the construction of the nation.

Muzorewa's cause is further advanced through a sustained onslaught on the integrity of Nkomo's person and commitment to the liberation struggle. At one level Nkomo is portrayed as one who could not be depended on and a self-seeker, while at another he is seen as a collaborator with the settler regime. Tekere (2007) and Nyagumbo (1980) also register similar suspicions about



Nkomo's political integrity, a coincidence that may be read as establishing common cause to discredit a perceived major contestant in the race for political eminence within the envisaged nation. On the resolution to intensify the armed struggle through the Zimbabwe Liberation Council, a brainchild of the ANC, Nkomo is accused of evasiveness and absenting himself from deliberations towards that cause, often citing his wife's hospitalization though this could not be proven. This stressed either Nkomo's lack of commitment and decisiveness where the question of armed struggle is concerned, or as Tekere (2007) hints, his reluctance to work "under the little bishop." Yet, characteristic of the intrigue of the life narrative, Nkomo contests his party was the only one which committed its army and resources to the Zimbabwe Liberation Council since both the ANC and ZANU had no armies of their own.

The point of conflict is revealed in the fact that Nkomo did not want to surrender his authority over ZAPU and its military wing to the "temporary" arrangement of the ANC. Muzorewa had begun to view both ZAPU and ZANU and their military wings as completely subsumed under his command in the ANC. The formation of the ANC therefore had occasioned his ascendancy to the helm of the liberation struggle, in contrast to Nkomo, ready to go to Mozambique at the invitation of Machel to "join the thousands young ANC men and women who were offering their lives for Zimbabwe's liberation" (p. 172). The image of the self is in this way aligned with the defined resolutions of the ANC which had unanimously decided to "de-escalate talks and escalate the armed struggle" (p. 192). That of the opponent, Nkomo, is tarnished through inferences that he, with the facilitation of President Kaunda of Zambia, continued to hold clandestine talks with the Rhodesian Prime Minister, Ian Smith, thereby undermining the thrust of the armed struggle. As much as Nkomo thought he was giving diplomacy a chance, this was viewed as a tactical drawback by both those in ZANU and Muzorewa. The narrative thus goes on to invest its subject with political currency not only over Nkomo, but also over the ZANU leadership that is viewed as subsumed under the ANC.

The ultimate objective of Muzorewa's life narrative is to construct its subject and the ANC political formation as the total embodiment of all the positive and liberatory values that the new nation would need as its foundations. This agenda is pursued through a series of appropriations, beginning with claims of mass support dating back to the NO Campaign against the Pearce Commission, of creating the vanguard liberation force, up to popular slogans such as the call for

“One person, One Vote” (p. 217). At the 1976 Geneva Conference it is the ANC that is credited with upholding the fundamental democratic principle of “one man one vote” while the rest of the African nationalists, including Sithole, Nkomo and Mugabe opposed. The question at the very centre of the struggle is thus identified with the relatively recent formation of the ANC, suggesting a lack of clear vision on the part of the early nationalists. What this amounts to is a suggestion that the birth of the ANC marks the introduction of a new vision and political programme that is distinctly a new beginning from the old nationalist trends. Muzorewa thus gets legitimated through narrative as the symbol of the envisaged democratic nation.

On the other hand, ZAPU and ZANU, who disengaged themselves from the ANC to form the Patriotic Front and participated as such at the Conference, are deliberately identified with the Rhodesian Front. The narrative constitutes these as an unholy alliance, “an undemocratic front” (p. 222) that undermined the very possibility of a democratic Zimbabwean nation. Muzorewa, the subject, is constructed as a towering symbol of universal adult suffrage that is pitted against the unholy alliance. It is on such premises that Muzorewa builds on his notion of enjoying mass support as the only credible political figure who could unite the nation irrespective of race, colour or religion. Where the ANC is perceived as the one caught up in the tentacles of Smith’s deceptive schemes under the Internal Settlement, the accusations are countermanded by purporting to be searching for a solution that would unite all the people in the nation. Even when the Smith regime exposed its machinations by bombing liberation camps in the neighbouring countries, the narrative apportions blame to other political players both in the Internal Settlement and outside. The Nyadzonia massacre is blamed on a “ZAPU defector who led Smith’s forces” (p. 204), while Chirau and Sithole are accused of condoning the Chimoio and Tembwe massacres by their silence and continued talks with Smith. The self attempts to absolve himself from blame by suspending talks with Smith for a few days, and claims the return to the table was necessary in the pursuit of peace and national unity.

Even if the defence of the self is contrived, the auto/biographical narrative always strives to portray its subject in the best terms possible. The self identity of Bishop Muzorewa is constructed and reconstructed to conform to the historical imperative of forging new nationhood out of colonialism as well as responding to vicissitudes inherent in the nationalistic movement. This identity is consciously given as its raw material the subject’s cultural awareness of the

bastardized status of his people's values, which, in his groping for nationhood, he hopes to redeem and complement with Christian morals to form the basis of the new nation. The refashioning of the land tenure systems occasioned by the Land Tenure Acts meant further destabilization of African social and economic values, defining another critical platform of engagement where the subject begins to assume a national role through mobilization of opposition within church and society at large. The narrative isolates the land tenure acts, as well as opposition to the 1969 Constitution, cuts of government grants to African schools, Smith's tough line to the World Council of Churches, and sympathy with the struggle of the Tangwena people, as well as the banishment of the subject from rural areas as key indices in the formation of a self identity that is inextricably tied to the fate of the nation. In several ways Muzorewa's life narrative complements historical moments that are captured in other life narratives, but more significantly gives an independent trajectory that seeks to offer alternatives from other nationalist versions of self and nation. It boldly duels with Joshua Nkomo and Edgar Tekere's endeavours at authorising monologic readings of the liberation struggle and its significant moments.

Muzorewa's major offering is the vision of the total Nation that promised to bring all the people irrespective of race, gender or creed into the nation whose underlying philosophy is informed by Christian humanism. The prospects for cementing a solid entity that is not characterized by interparty violence between the liberation movements and bitterness against the colonial order are attractive. But Muzorewa's vision must also be taken within the context of the contradictions that are implied in his political activities and associations in the Internal Settlement that led to the birth of Zimbabwe- Rhodesia. That the massacres of liberation fighters and refugees in neighbouring countries were authorized during Muzorewa's tenure as Prime Minister, and that disparities between white and blacks persisted during that period, has opened him to criticism of something worse than compromise. If Zimbabwe-Rhodesia is the prototype of the Total Nation, then it amounted to callous betrayal of the African cause. In the next section Nkomo's perspective of the nation will be analysed so as to engage with the limitations in both Nyagumbo and Muzorewa's narratives.

#### **4.4 Joshua Nkomo -*The Story of My Life***

##### **4.4.1 Telling the Story of the Self from the Pedestal of Political Sainthood**

Joshua Nkomo's *The Story of my Life* traces the life of its narrator right from the childhood days in the rural areas where traditional culture is beginning to show strains from the exertions of the incoming colonial order. It pursues the social exploits of its subject as he migrates to South Africa for education, as a social worker in the Rhodesian Railways company and through his groping political consciousness that entangles his life with the African nationalist movement in Rhodesia. Beyond its nationalist character, Nkomo's narrative departs from the conceptions of self and nation that are advanced by both Nyagumbo and Muzorewa. He departs from Nyagumbo fundamentally in that he goes beyond reverence of the traditional spiritualism as an influence in the forging of the nation to claiming himself as an anointed figure in direct liaison with the oracles. He also claims a higher moral order and vision of the nation that transcends divisions of ethnicity and race, something that he sees as giving impetus to his adversaries in ZANU. This is also essentially different from Muzorewa's project that is removed from the plane of traditional spiritualism and steeped in Christian humanism. Muzorewa does not give much premium to the armed liberation as he argues that this does not reduce potential armed conflict in future. Ironically he is implicated in the mass murders of liberation fighters during his time as leader of Zimbabwe-Rhodesia, thus leaving a yawning gap in his envisioning of the nation. This section will examine to what extent Nkomo's agency, spiritual and political, which he brandishes from a position of professed persecution, will steer the course of the nation towards better understanding of the nature of the 'political' that inheres in the autobiographical mode.

The act of narrativizing the life of the self, and in the process giving it form and identity, implies tactful positioning of that individual life in a perceptibly unassailable space with regards its perceived competitors. In this way the life narrative reveals its political entanglement where its main function is to justify and rationalize the claims of the individual to certain public domains and claims of entitlement to political superiority or office. Joshua Nkomo's *The Story of My Life* negotiates as well as buttresses his claims to political significance in Zimbabwe through, first, situating the self in the genealogy and history of nation and second, an early critical consciousness of the political situation in colonial Rhodesia, and third, through claims of political persecution both by the colonial governments and the new government of independent

Zimbabwe. In this way the narrative achieves voice or authority, albeit contested, to licence the subject narrator to appropriate a central space in the story of the nation in which his life is intimately involved. The life story seeks that political pedestal from which any other narrative that contests it is discursively dismissed as distortion or deliberate vilification of Nkomo's role in the construction of the nation of Zimbabwe. Strategically his self identity and its political achievements are not only celebrated but proffered as intrinsically tied to the nation.

Nkomo indexes his self identity in a pre-colonial historical period when his people's values were informed by indigenous systems and custom. The narrative thread achieves this by making possible the link between an unconscious self and its erstwhile ancestry (Javangwe, 2009). An ancestry steeped in its own customs is arguably critical in giving the initial identity co-ordinates of the subject narrator, a factor that sees him assume an adversarial stance against the values of the incoming colonial system. The reflection that the parents were born when the country was still free and when the "government was in the hands of the people, directed by custom and tradition" (p.7) is intended to locate Nkomo within that very same custom and tradition. Essentially the allusion to tradition and custom points to the existence of a cultural, if not political entity that the narrative posits as the basis of the envisaged nation to which the individual subject is to become a critical figure. Once Nkomo is located in his immediate group, the narrative strategically expands the basis upon which national conception is to be imagined. The advent of the white settlers in the geography is viewed as upsetting the cosmos not only of Nkomo's ancestors, but also of those other African groups within the same geography. The reference to a "combined resistance of the Shona and the Ndebele speaking peoples" (p.7), a fact which is historically attested, functionally brings the two groups together as sharing some commonalities which make the imagination of a common destiny possible. The hinted commonalities may be lodged in Bantu culture or in victimhood from a new colonial reality. Either way, Nkomo's narrative attempts to step astride the conundrum in nation construction where the occupation of the core space is always viciously contested. By registering the fact of participation in the resistance efforts, even if that resistance is only occasioned by victimhood, the narrative gives equal legitimacy to both ethnic groups in the claims to occupy the core space of the nation. The basis upon which Nkomo's grievances against his political colleagues in the Second Chimurenga is thus laid, where upon he builds a self image of a persecuted political saint belonging to a perceived marginal political ethnic group.

Nkomo apparently, more than anything, places the issue of victimhood from colonialism as the critical factor, even if only an expediting one, in the imagination of a new Zimbabwean nation. In the old pre-colonial set up there is lack of meaningful cohesion that could approximate to feelings of belonging to a national community. He observes the vagueness of custom in matters of defining boundaries and common interests as a constant cause of internecine conflict between the various indigenous groups. Nationalistic sentiments could not thrive under such conditions where the ethnic feeling reigned supreme. The advent of colonial settlerism is thus viewed as a boon as “it defined, once and for all, our national borders”, and “now there was no reason why all of us should not unite and develop an unquestioned sense of national identity” (p. 7). This suggests a clear lack or absence of national feeling in the pre-colonial period, and the imagination of a new nation only becomes possible at a time when the various ethnic groups faced a common fate under colonialism. Nkomo, just like Nyagumbo in *With the People*, concedes to the limiting nature of ethnic allegiances and identities in the imagination of nation. The Zimbabwean nation thus is conceived within the postcolonial theoretical framework in which its emergence is not primordial, but a result of a deconstructive process whose thrust was to oppose the globalizing metanarratives of western civilization, both discursively and physically. What is retrieved from relative antiquity are the symbols through which the new nation is to be imagined, such as the ancient ruins which give the new nation the name and command common identification with most of the groups in the land.

Nkomo accedes that the name Zimbabwe is “that of the ancient court and palace built by the rulers of the nation before any non-African intruders had appeared within our land” (p. 99). Beyond the symbolic value, the narrative glosses over the political composition of the nation whose centre was at the ancient court which, historically, existed before the arrival not only of White settlers, but other African groups. A paradox is introduced whereby the narrative suggests both absence of national entity as well as presence through reference to the state at Great Zimbabwe. There is further complication where Lobengula is referred to as “the last ruler of our nation”, (p. 13) suggesting continuity from the state that existed at Zimbabwe. The point of entry into the national moment for the various contesting African groups remains obfuscated, a fact that betrays both the ambivalences of the life story as well as the Zimbabwean nation project. Nkomo’s story is at pains to explain how the name Zimbabwe, which symbolized the ancient nation that excluded recently arrived groups, embodies the new national sentiment. Underneath

this symbolism lie the intrinsic contradictions that Nkomo's narrative tries to address, such as tribal loyalties in the course of the liberation struggle and ethnic persecution in the post independence period. The complexity of self identities and their mutual situatedness in group identity, mean that for African groups allocation of spaces, between inner spaces and outer spaces in the new nation project, is left largely unnegotiated during early resistance to white intrusion and the subsequent liberation struggle. National sentiment is built around a sense of common victimhood as a race, and it is this consciousness that the narrative privileges in positioning Nkomo as a political pioneer in the imagination of a Zimbabwean nation.

Nationalism creates the illusion of a single and common space that will accommodate all those who imagine that they are bound by a common fate. In this way it often leaves members within the community unprepared for the often violent uncoupling of group interests in the new nation. Mbembe (2001) argues that the postcolony is never made up of one public space. As such, the postcolonial subject is urged to "learn to bargain in this conceptual marketplace" (p.104) that is characterized by several public spaces with entangled logics of their own. The conflicts in the Zimbabwean postcolony are testimony of the illusions that typify the nation project, even though it strives through its representations to give a semblance of being real. In order to survive these contradictions, the subject of the political auto/biography has, to borrow from Mbembe's argument, "to have a marked ability to manage not just a single identity, but several – flexible enough to negotiate as and when necessary" (ibid).

Nkomo's *The Story of Life* sums up the life mission of its subject as "the struggle against minority rule" (p. 7), a point that broadly conceives the rallying of the majority African people into a new form of nationhood. Central to this awakening consciousness is the marginalization of African people in all civic and political spheres by the minority white settlers. Questions of citizenship, of participation in the civic and political processes of the country, constitute the early idioms of African oppression under colonial rule, and the narrative strategically defines Nkomo as an early conscious opponent of white domination. Nkomo's resolution to struggle for a new order in Rhodesia was a result of his realization that the settlers were determined to exclude the Africans from the conceived nation state. In the project of the colony, the situation of the African is aptly captured in Mbembe's observation that the native is "consigned unilaterally to a sort of minority without foreseeable end" and therefore "cannot be a subject of politics, a citizen"

(Mbembe, 2001: 35). With this awareness the subject thus transcends the limitations of accepting his circumstances as individual fate and begins to locate himself within the common experience of the African group. He becomes not just an element of the history of his people, but one who determines its course and whose story will always be told in connection with that of the nation. Thus the story is commissioned as “the personal record of a life that has played a part in history” as well as a “work of an active politician who wishes to see things change for the better in the lives of the ordinary people in his country” (p. x).

A political life narrative in this sense more than just inserts an individual’s identity into the annals of anti-colonial resistance, but lays claim to making that history and forging national consciousness. From such a vantage position Nkomo, through his narrative, is able to contest for a position of political significance both during the anti-colonial struggle and the post-independence period. It is through his participation in the creation of a new order from the early days that he is able to declare that “I have earned the right to speak up for freedom while it is still endangered- this time not by far-off colonial rulers, nor by a settler population who will, I hope, now play their full part as citizens of the new nation, but by my former colleagues in the liberation struggle” (p. xv). This becomes an act of self-positioning through narrative whereby the subject is elevated over and above the other contestants on the political arena and his version of events and vision of nation is presented as beyond assailability.

Like in other auto/biographical narratives, Nkomo’s story invokes solid family values as the basis of an incipient consciousness that in later life will distinguish the subject as possessing a strong and outstanding self identity. Nkomo’s identity is moulded in youth as he benefitted from the example of industrious, prudent and morally upright parents. His development both cognitively and socially is attributed to positive influences of Christian teachings from the mother. Nevertheless, his own agency is allowed to thrive as the Christian teachings are critically assessed in view of the prevailing traditional realities amongst his people. This process entailed negotiating his self identity inside the limited space of a Christian family and a largely traditional community. Self identity cannot evolve outside the gaze of those others who surround the self, and as such the young Nkomo found himself not only critiquing some of the Christian teachings, but conforming, without his parents’ knowledge, to traditional custom. The submission that oftentimes he would carry his “amabetshu” hidden in the satchel on the way to school so as to



dress like the rest of the children (p. 11) is a revelation of how the self is a product of its environment as much as it is of the inner essence. The self at all times is aware of its surroundings, and enriches itself by constant interaction with it. For Nkomo the traditional folktales or “insimu” began to assume an equally important influence as the bible teachings as they imparted important moral teachings. These folktales more than the bible, immerse him within his people’s culture and social realities, thus enable the emergence of a self identity that is not in contradiction with the community. Insimu is valued as “the oral history of our people, passing our knowledge down from generation to generation” (p. 12).

In this way the narrative reinforces the claim of political figure to be able to be more than just a self, but the embodiment of his community’s values. The balance between integration with group and the need for self individuation is a delicate one, but nevertheless a critical one in defining the dynamism of self identities. The integration with one’s socio-cultural group ushers in a critical consciousness that begins to interrogate received biblical morals that are in contradiction with social realities faced by the subject and his group. Thus in early life Nkomo begins to understand Christianity, especially as practised by the settlers in Rhodesia, as an aspect of the imperial grand narratives that sought to mute all other alternative ways of apprehending reality. This relocation into the realities and cultural values of his group enabled Nkomo to gradually realise that “the Israelites’ occupation of Palestine resembled that of our country by white settlers and began to become disenchanted with the story that told how that occupation was sanctioned by God” (p.10). With this realisation the link between Christianity and nationalism became clear as the role played by the likes of Robert Moffat in facilitating the treaties that dispossessed Lobengula of his sovereign lands are put into context.

What the life narrative achieves here is to claim an early engagement with critical nationalist and cultural issues for the subject narrator. Childhood experiences exposed him to the humiliation of those figures he held in such high esteem, such as his father, thus awakening him to the peripheral space that black people were pushed into by the settlers. The self is endowed with a precocious disposition to grapple with and understand complex matters that normally lie beyond the realm of children. In this way he ceases to be an ordinary life, but one destined for the greater challenges of life such as shaping the destiny of one’s group. It is a revealing statement that early in life Nkomo had discovered that the whites “had taken our country” and thus declared that

setting that wrong correct had “become the ruling passion of my life” (p. 17). A life commitment is consciously made to merge individual fate with that of the nation, and such entanglement is meant to make it near impossible to imagine the Zimbabwean nation without conjuring the image of the subject who is at the centre of its conception.

In conceiving the new nation, the narrative elevates Nkomo to the higher spiritual echelons where he communes and receives sanction and guidance from the supernatural as to the fate of the black people in Rhodesia. The visit to the cultural shrines of the Matopos, whose patronage is common to the major Shona and Ndebele groups, enables him to posit a mythical basis for the construction of a new nation that accommodates the groups covered within the colonial boundaries. In this way the fractious nature of the nation project is given a semblance of mytho-cultural homogeneity.

By physically receiving the counsel from the shrine Nkomo is strategically privileged to articulate the kind of nation to be created and the groups who should belong to it. The net effect is that his vision of the nation cannot be contested since it is sanctioned by the spirits of the land. It is Nkomo and his companions who become privy to the reason why the ancestors have forsaken the people and when they will redeem them. They are advised by the ancestral voice, “I told Lobengula not to fight against his cousins who were coming into the land, his cousins without knees. But Lobengula ignored my instructions..” (p. 14). The land was to be restored to its owners “after thirty years, and after war” (p.14) as a result. The fact that the consultation with the oracles was in the 1950s and independence obtained in 1980 and after a war places Nkomo beyond contest as the prophetic political annointee of the spirits of the land. Nkomo’s narrative attempts to bring about a concordance between the nation that the oracles envisaged and the one that Nkomo conceived of. Those “without the knees” were to be part of the nation, and Nkomo’s thesis of unity between the races in the new nation is meant to uphold this. This is later on enunciated from restriction at Gonakudzingwa where Nkomo and his group stated that “the country belonged to all the people who lived there” (p. 128). Nkomo’s encounter at the Mwali cult is intriguing when read alongside Smith’s (2001) own interpretation of the oracle’s meaning on the nature of nation to be created. Yet what is clearly imprinted on both readings of the oracle’s meanings is the quest for supernatural sanction that would put one beyond contest from other participants in the political project of constructing the nation.

Throughout the whole political career the narrative strives to maintain Nkomo above the ordinary political activist agitating against colonial oppression. He is cast as destined for the greater responsibility of superintending over the birth of a new nation, and as such the spirits of the land preserve him from the harm that may be directed towards him by the settler regime or the feuding African political opponents. Spiritual intervention in the form of dreams and visiting apparitions ensure that he carries on through the struggle for liberation. When he is taken from Gonakudzingwa to Victoria (now Masvingo) with a tooth problem his departed father appeared in a dream and advised, "They will give you whiskey, you must not drink it" (p. 140). The meaning behind this cryptic injunction is revealed when in hospital where he is asked to agree to the use of a general anaesthetic instead of a local one. In this the narrative invites the reader to perceive a potential conspiracy by the Rhodesian authorities to assassinate Nkomo during the operation. Two things are achieved by this act. One is that Nkomo is identified as the only and real threat to the longevity of Rhodesian nation project, and conversely, the real embodiment of the nascent Zimbabwean nation, and therefore had to be eliminated. The second is that such a symbol of the new nation is so important for the spirits of the land to allow him to be dispensed with.

Such a construction of one's life and self identity effectively places them on a higher spiritual plane from whence they can claim higher moral and political authority over their counterparts. This contrived construction of self identity is further reinforced during the frantic efforts by the Frontline States to bring about a political settlement between the jailed African nationalists and the Smith regime. On the night before Nkomo is released from prison to meet the Zambian emissary facilitating the meeting with the Frontline Heads, Nkomo is visited by a woman apparition in his prison cell who announces, "Joshua, I have come to tell you it is all over now. Get out of here" (p.149). Contact with the ethereal world privileges Nkomo with knowledge of major developments that are afoot which cannot be known by his counterparts in the struggle. If what is implied by the ethereal figure is the impending demise of the Rhodesian political edifice, then the narrative empowers its subject to have a head start on strategies to wrestle political power from the settler authorities. Political auto/biography in this sense endeavours to carve an image of a chosen one, whose life mission is enmeshed with that of the envisaged nation.

Ideally the narrator of political auto/biography constructs his identity in a way that suggests compulsive submission to a higher calling. For Nkomo this involves achievement of feats that are way beyond what ordinary characters can do and foregoing the comforts and conveniences in the pursuit of the noble calling. The desire and pursuit for an education in South Africa is foregrounded as a preparatory phase for the roles to be performed by the self in the construction of a nation. Studies in social work steeps Nkomo in the life challenges of Africans in a colonial situation in a way that no other black person had done previously. The studies enhance his eligibility as the most qualified African in Rhodesia to articulate African grievances and to create a socio-cultural fabric that in due course would become the basis of nationhood. His placement in the National Railways of Rhodesia, a major employer of African labour of the time, strategically positions him at the nerve centre of the Rhodesian economic activity where its nefarious economic and political exploitation of Africans could be observed. Nkomo assuages his self ego in this context by noting that “I was probably the first university-trained person, black or white, whom the Railways had ever employed” (p. 42).

University education is thus an asset that gives the subject an edge in the analysis and conscious understanding of social relations in the colony over not only the African counterparts but also the white settlers too. Thus when whites in Rhodesia stuck to racial discrimination as a rule, Nkomo was already committing himself to “creating a single community in a nation where they [whites] and I would be equal members, no more, no less” (p. 43). The self in this case is constructed as charting new ground that would make society and nation better entities than ever before. In pursuing this noble cause momentous sacrifices in the form of security and personal dignity and comforts are made on a scale that hints of a heroic selflessness in pursuit of better humanity in the context of a new nation. The self is consistently cast as the pioneering agent in the African cause and better relations with the whites. Nkomo declares this perception of himself as a way of propping up a specific and desired self identity. He sees himself as “a sort of spearhead for the employment of black people” and was not bothered by the “insults that went along with that” (p. 44). Later on when it became imperative to answer the call of duty through more political involvement he accepts the inevitable insecurity and material deprivation of his family with a stoic sense of heroism. Matter of factly Nkomo admits that the “terms we served in prison damaged us and disrupted our families” (p.139) but as an individual he was prepared “to stay there for as long as was necessary, until things began really to change” (p. 151).

To this extent the narrative has delineated the identity indices of a self that is firmly woven into the social and cultural fabric of his community. To confirm this identity that makes the individual an integral part of itself, society also awards recognition and acknowledgement of the unique personal qualities of this individual. This subtle and delicate process is critical in the negotiation for prominent roles in society, political or otherwise, without exposing unbridled ambition or aggression where advantages are perceived on the part of the subject individual. Throughout the narrative political office or community leadership is not sought after. It is society that awards it, often to a reluctant recipient who only obliges as a matter of duty. Effectively this works to parry criticism in the event of shortcomings in the individual's execution of public roles and duties. Nkomo's election to President of the African Railways Employees' Association in 1948, and his co-option into the leadership of the "weak" (p. 44) Rhodesian African National Congress in the same year are acts of recognition of a unique personality. It is a humble beginning in which his person is thrust into the thick of nationalist politics that would see him at the helm of the Youth League, National Democratic Party and its successor the Zimbabwe African People's Union.

From the platforms of these organisations the subject is afforded the space to consolidate his political identity as the leading figure in the advancement of the black people's aspirations and in the articulation of a new nation. Challenging the deprivation of blacks of their ancestral lands engendered by the influx of European migration after Second World War, forced livestock reductions enforced through the 1951 Land Husbandry Act, racial discrimination in social and work places and Britain's dereliction of duty in condoning minority domination in Rhodesia, Nkomo's story intends to command an aura of political indispensability around himself. It fosters an identity of one who has come to embody the African people's future. Amongst the African social fraternities he represents himself as the nation builder who discouraged divisive developments where social organizations were built along tribal lines. The Matabeleland Home Society for example excluded those who were not Ndebele, resulting in the Bakalanga Kwayedza Society being formed in response (p. 69). To firmly entrench the self within the life and discourse of the nation, the narrative lays claim to massive political support as evidenced on one occasion at Salisbury Airport on returning from an overseas trip where he was received by the "largest crowd ever seen in Southern Rhodesia" (p. 93). This, together with the perceived appreciation of his diplomatic efforts to win international support by the people, became the

basis for the conception of the self as having become “the symbol and the leader” (p. 93) of the people’s aspiration. When this pinnacle of achievement is reached in the emplotment of a desired self identity within the context of the nation, the narrative indulges in self glorification, hence the declaration that “by now I had become a bit of a celebrity” (p. 82).

The political life story as a rule has endeavored to create ample latitude for the chronicling of the manifest achievements of its subject. These achievements are by nature groundbreaking in a way that takes them beyond the realm of ordinary credit such as would be challenged by other political players. With the belligerent White regime trifling African grievances and pushing the agenda of a white dominion in Rhodesia, Nkomo claims the first score in organising and effecting armed resistance to white rule in Rhodesia. The first arms of war for purposes of advancing the cause of African nationalism were physically brought into the country by Nkomo. This counters claims by contestants such as Nyagumbo who claim the same and who were beginning to distrust Nkomo’s vision and commitment to liberation through armed struggle. In the wake of the banning of the NDP other political players were concerned that Nkomo would move towards the formation of another political party instead of putting into motion an armed underground movement. The narrative carries an insistence that the armed struggle started as early as 1962 “when the government of Southern Rhodesia formerly rejected the possibility of progress by peaceful means” through its banning of ZAPU (p. 106).

Versions of the history of the armed struggle are thus registered, each capturing the perspective of the competing political players. The splinter group from ZAPU, ZANU would not recognize Nkomo’s claims to triggering the armed struggle at that time as the lack of it, among other perceived shortcomings of Nkomo, was the reason for the split. Their version to this critical historical aspect is that the armed struggle only kicked off with the Battle of Chinhoyi four years later in 1966 when their cadres engaged the Rhodesian forces in a landmark battle (Nyagumbo, 1978). By positing an earlier onset of the armed struggle spearheaded by ZAPU elements the narrative hamstring any claims to political and military significance by the rival ZANU. This is particularly so since the beginning of the armed struggle marked a new momentum and decisive effort to create the new nation. The armed struggle that the narrative alludes to is informed by the unitary concept of nationhood that is characterized as the hallmark philosophy of ZAPU. The leadership of ZAPU was always drawn “without distinction from all the areas of the country (p.

118), thus providing a firm base for the construction of the nation. Any deviation from ZAPU and its leadership constituted a distraction from the quintessential values at the core of the envisaged nation. ZAPU and its leadership is elevated to incontestable legitimacy while the other political formations are relegated to mutinous and sectarian interests with no solid vision of nation. There is open contempt for parties such as ZANU and FROLIZI, which as late as the 1970s are dismissed as simply nonexistent as “political parties” (p. 156).

The organizational capacity of ZAPU is amplified in a way that is meant to overshadow the activities of the so-called dissident formations. The victories of its military wing, even where contested, are strategically associated with the decisive moments that weakened the resolve of the settler regime, therefore were the effective medium to the birth of the new Zimbabwean nation. The bombings of the oil storage tanks in Salisbury and Bulawayo are described as rare but “conspicuous triumphs” and “a symbol of our success” (p.171) that could not be paralleled by any other effort from the rival formations. By the time of the Lancaster House conference in 1979 ZAPU had laid out a strategy that was calculated to bring the settler regime to its knees militarily. The so-called “turning point” strategy aimed to transform ZIPRA tactics from guerrilla warfare “into a full scale conflict in which we would match the Smith regime’s armour and air cover with armour and air cover of our own” (p.202). Implicit in this is a claim to better if not superior capacity to transform into a conventional army that would not only bring about the defeat the Rhodesian army, but would be ready for the onerous responsibility to defend the sovereignty of the new nation.

The ZANLA and other participants in the liberation war are by inference incapable of transforming from rag-tag guerrilla movements and thus their role in bringing about a new order and in the envisaged nation is questioned. Through all these buttressing attributes the life narrative clears the discursive space and carves a pedestal from which its subject is constructed like a moral, political and military colossus, albeit begrudged for its achievements by political rivals. On Independence Day in 1980 the consignment of this colossus to the relative shadows of political obscurity is regretted as the machination of those who had cheated their way to power. Otherwise the narrative contends that the recognition of the political stature of its subject was a grunted matter as “many of those in the crowd at Rufaro Stadium, of all parties and colors, would not have grudged [him] the name of Father Zimbabwe” (p.220). The more than three

decades of political, military and diplomatic activity for the cause of the nation become the basis for the claim to recognition as patriarchy of the nation.

#### **4.4.2 In Defence of the Edifice: Redeeming Concepts of self and Nation**

Both self identity and nation are constructed entities that need continuous scaffolding if they are to stand the test of time, space and competing narratives (Berryman, 1999). Their transient nature means that the desired form and content of these constructions imply that they demand something more than singular, essentialized presentations. They need narrative propping up as well as barricading from those perceptions that seek to challenge their implied moral and political currency. In political life narratives the self and nation are subject to constant subversion that at all times threaten to unravel their pretension to stability and contrived naturalness. Subversion intrinsically has the capacity to yield versions, often undesired, of the proffered and preferred constructions. In the case of Nkomo's life story the implication is that the self identity that he ascribes to himself, and the nation that he envisages, together with the mediums for its creation, convey different meanings in different spaces and time. When he was convinced, in the early days of his political career, that the cause of the African grievances needed to be sold to the outer world, and therefore called for extensive travel, he is subjected to negative perception at home.

The lengthy absence from home between 1957 and 1960 that saw him in the capitals of Ghana, Egypt, Britain, United States of America, Guinea, Liberia, Ethiopia and Nigeria at a stretch led to questions about his political credibility and commitment to the cause of the struggle for liberation (Nyagumbo, 1980, Muzorewa, Tekere, 2007). Self identity is vulnerable and cannot enjoy absolute independence from the parallel gaze of the other persons. The apprehension of a self identity therefore constantly competes with perceptions about itself generated by those around it. The desired image of the self as a visionary nationalist is subverted with a public perception of an irresponsible leader who abdicated nationalist duty for the lavish life of the Western capitals. In the wake of these oppositional representations of the self, the life narrative stands in defence of the edifice, justifying the activities of the self. It is in this vein that Nkomo parries the criticism by insisting that "it was the work that I set for myself, because I thought it was essential if my country was to get her freedom" (p. 87). Instead of the comforts implied by his detractors, the narrative goes to consolidate the image of a selfless liberation cadre who



sacrificed the welfare of his family and when travelling depended on the mean charity of often slow to co-operate foreign governments.

Such implied sacrifices constitute the first line of defence when preferred representations of self and nation are under siege from contesting narratives. The nation as a construction is inconceivable without sacrifice from those who belong to it (Smith, 1998). This sacrifice assumes physical, emotional and spiritual forms, and this means that evaluation of nature and degree of sacrifice is relative and often indeterminate. And yet its deployment in connection to nation may authorize huge claims of infallibility where duty calls, and hence beyond criticism. From this the political life story appropriates its licence to explain away every perceived weakness of its subject, faulting others where necessary, and thus scaffolds the super hero identity. During the 1961 constitutional talks the Rhodesian regime proposed that it was prepared to increase African representation in parliament to 15 seats. The talks came to an unexpected end as Duncan Sandys announced that Nkomo had agreed to the proposal, much to the disappointment of other African nationalists in detention (Nyagumbo, 1980). Nkomo's version of events contests the veracity of Sandys' report and blames the political debacle that ensued on the diplomatic dishonesty of the British. Nkomo's explanation of the British role in the matter, as much as it failed to clear suspicions from other black nationalists, is corroborated by Smith (2001) on several other occasions when he sought British consent on Rhodesian independence. The auto/biography of necessity plays a countermanding role in which it rationalises, justifies, defends and even attacks those perceived to threaten the integrity of the self. The self is often portrayed as a victim of betrayal, misunderstanding, ingratitude and vindictiveness from those for whom it made sacrifices. This position becomes the protective bunker behind which Nkomo not only tries to consolidate his self identity, but from where he launches salvos aimed at perceived enemies of the self. From the time of the split with ZANU Nkomo refuses to take responsibility, instead blaming external factors for meddling and lack of confidence in the founding black nationalists in Rhodesia as well as on tribal loyalties of those who ended up in ZANU.

President Nyerere of Tanzania is isolated for much of the attack as deliberately misdirecting frustrations with the intransigent settler regime amongst the Rhodesian Africans towards Nkomo's person and political organisation. As such, Nyerere becomes an object of narrative

reductionism throughout the text to a point where he is depicted as undeserving of the Pan African stature that he generally enjoyed. To redeem the self from the pale of criticism from Nyerere, who seemed to view Nkomo and his group as “bloodthirsty”, the narrative counters by accusing him of lacking “confidence in the ability of Africans to rule themselves” and of having “requested the British to postpone his own country’s independence” (p.114).

The net effect of this statement is that the liberation movement in Rhodesia had nothing to benefit from such bankrupt vision and lack of commitment to one’s own land and freedom. By extension those Rhodesian African nationalists under the political influence of Nyerere are adjudged visionless. They are dismissed for being susceptible to an African leader who “always sought to dominate the policies and the personalities of the liberation movements to which he gave hospitality” (p.114), a situation that potentially endangered the prospects of independence. This defensive strategy leaves Nkomo and his party as the only true embodiment of the Zimbabwean liberation.

The parrying strategy of the auto/biography is further employed to cast bungled policies and political strategies to conform to a desired perspective. When Nkomo instructed his executive to proceed to Dar-es-Salaam to form a government-in-exile that would direct the execution of the war it was understood that the government of Tanzania had extended the invitation. But on arrival in Dar-es-Salam, Nyerere advised Nkomo and his group that their “place was in Southern Rhodesia organising the people” and that he would not have them. The presentation of this confusion suggests the cunning treachery on the part of Nyerere that was meant to discredit Nkomo’s leadership of the liberation movement. Yet contesting narratives (Nyagumbo, 1978) suggest that Nkomo had acted against the advice of Nyerere and thereby bringing about unnecessary political embarrassment. What could be construed by those critical of Nkomo’s leadership, and reasonably so, was an attempt by Nkomo to run away from the battlefield in Rhodesia, thus deserting the struggling masses for the relative security of a foreign land. It is therefore imperative that the auto/biography invents and propagates a sustained conspiracy theory that would defray criticism of political bungling that proved the final straw in the ZAPU camp, leading to the formation of ZANU. The core of this theory rests on undesirable meddling by leaders of the Frontline States, especially Nyerere. The ultimate strain of these purported underhand activities to discredit Nkomo’s leadership is given as the 1963 inaugural meeting of

the Organization of African Union at which Nkomo, as leader of the liberation movement, was to be afforded an opportunity to address the world press and sell the African cause in Rhodesia. At the time of the press, Robert Mugabe who, as secretary –general, was supposed to avail the statement for presentation did not turn up. Nkomo was convinced that Mugabe’s absence was deliberate, and possibly a result of Nyerere’s influence, and was meant to embarrass him and to sabotage “our chance of publicity” (p. 117).

A key characteristic tendency of Nkomo’s political life narrative is that in its defence of the subject narrator it identifies and subsequently labels the perceived adversaries. Vambe (2009) argues that there is a danger to the self when this is overdone because the self that is set out to be projected is overshadowed by the story of the adversary. The adversaries, for instance ZANU and Mugabe in particular are made the context without which Nkomo’s life narrative cannot make much meaning, hence Vambe’s question as to whether it is Nkomo’s story or Mugabe’s story as told by Nkomo. In the ultimate analysis it is Nkomo’s own vision of nation that is not well articulated. So far Nkomo’s story has endeavoured to put the formation of ZANU into the narrator’s desired perspective of a politically ambitious ethnic group. Its version amounts to the point that the genesis of ZANU was a negation of the values that Nkomo and ZAPU stood for. Those in ZANU are stuck with the label of dissidents reneging on the nationalistic imperative and drifting towards petty tribal affiliations. Their alleged pettiness is captured in the campaign to bring “the majority tribes” to the leadership of the party and to get rid of “Zimundeverere” (p. 117).

If this is ZANU’s basis for the construction of the nation, then the narrative has successfully grown Nkomo’s self image as the real nation builder and pan-African on the Rhodesian scene. As if to confirm this recognition, the reader is immediately appraised of the fact that the August 1963 ZAPU Congress voted him, on James Chikerema’s proposal, its life president. Political legitimacy is thus conferred by the people of Zimbabwe and it would have been betrayal to decline such recognition. On the contrary the ZANU group is dismissed as having no membership within Southern Rhodesia since its “self chosen leadership was based over the border out of contact with the people” (p. 121). The haunting appellation of absentee political overlord that Nkomo is associated with is re-assigned to the perceived enemy. Tactically the violence that erupted between ZAPU supporters and the so called ZANU dissident group in the

urban locations at the time is rationalized as pitting those who stood for legitimate political representation, ZAPU, and those who were bent on mayhem since they were not representing anyone, ZANU. If ZANU later on commanded massive support in the eastern areas, it is attributed to forced political mobilization at night vigils (pungwes) enforced through their military wing, ZANLA. What the narrative cannot grant is the possibility that this perhaps was an effective political strategy under the colonial circumstances in which a belligerent settler regime was refusing to budge. Instead this is viewed as underhand manoeuvring by a political party that had no legitimacy. The tag of illegitimacy is maintained into independence where ZANU is accused of cheating to victory during the independence elections and subsequently bullying ZAPU into submission through strong arm tactics in the early 1980s.

Nkomo's narrative also strategically creates an aura of political primacy around its subject by discrediting the claims to political significance of Abel Muzorewa. The entry of Muzorewa onto the political scene is through the African National Council (ANC), where he was co-opted as a compromise figure to continue to engage the Smith regime while the more radical nationalists were in imprisonment. As much as this is contested by Muzorewa (1978), who claims that he was elected by popular vote to lead the united nationalist struggle from the time of the Pearce Commission onwards, Nkomo insists that he was "merely appointed by us as a mild and respectable figure to be the figurehead of the ANC while we remained behind bars" (p. 149). A figurehead in a strict sense is only a place holder for the real object, and hence Muzorewa is accused of nursing illusions of political significance in the struggle. The net effect of this depiction of Muzorewa is to show him as abusing the trust vested in him by the jailed nationalists in order to usurp the nationalist project from them, especially from Nkomo. Having been allowed to use the title of Commander-in-Chief Muzorewa is accused of going on to claim authority over all the liberation fighters despite the fact that he had never formed any army himself. Beyond the "NO CAMPAIGN" of the Pearce Commission the narrative exposes Bishop Muzorewa for apparent political inexperience and naivety in his engagements with Smith, resulting in his co-option by Smith into the 1979 Internal Settlement Talks through which Smith hatched a devious plan "to fool the world" (p. 193) about the Rhodesian crisis. Smith's charade included salaried chiefs whose tokenism he intended to use as evidence of multiracial settlement. Essentially this amounts to labelling Muzorewa as having no political acumen to discern the intentions of the Smith regime, even to the point where he believed that with the internal

settlement he had become in charge of the nation. In the ultimate Muzorewa's antics are equated to pathetic buffoonery as shown in the allegation that at the Lancaster House talks he "talked like an old time settler... threatening to break off and go home" where he had "country to run" (p. 201). By consigning Muzorewa away in terms that place him within the ambit of settler epistemology, the narrative advances its own objective of entrenching Nkomo's self identity right at the centre of the nation.

*The Story of My Life* in the ultimate redeems the project of the Zimbabwean nation through the highlighting and celebration of the political martyrdom of its subject. The impetus towards the liberation of the country is shown as hijacked from the foundational values that had informed the aspirations for new nationhood. Unity of all the people in the land irrespective of tribe or race is systematically undermined as shown in the military segmentation of the country according to tribal loyalties in the 1970s. The east and central parts of the country, which are largely Shona speaking, fell under the influence of Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army (ZANLA), and ZANU, while the western part was under the Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army (ZIPRA) and ZAPU. This situation is squarely blamed on ZANU's sectarian political and military strategies that emphasized tribal affiliations at the expense of unity as the basis of the nation. An earlier political arrangement to bring the two parties under the banner of the Patriotic Front so as to forge united resistance to the settler regime and prepare the base of a united Zimbabwean nation is rendered unworkable by ZANU. Mugabe and his party had ditched their undertaking under the Patriotic Front agreement and went on to announce that ZANU was going into the elections as a party. The opportunity to cement the rift between the two parties was thus lost, foreboding the failure of the project of the nation that Nkomo symbolised and had sacrificed his life for.

In this Nkomo appropriates higher, if not holier ground from which he can pronounce that even at the Lancaster House Talks Mugabe had shown that "national unity was not his top priority" (p. 209). From such a vantage position he dons the garbs of the political high priest preaching "of reconciliation" and "the need to forget the past and start to build a nation in peace" (p. 210). Even in the wake of unfair conduct during the elections, and the subsequent defeat to ZANU in "fraudulent" electoral activities, Nkomo "never seriously doubted what to do" (p. 217) as he committed himself to give more sacrifice for the sake of the nation instead of contesting the

results. Ambition for political power rather than deep-seated commitment to solid nationhood is made the characteristic hallmark of the party that claims victory at independence. Such adverse characterization of the other functions to endow the subject of the narrative with a marked purity of intention, a degree of political sainthood that enables him to stand persecution, provocation and political marginalization in a country for which he offered his whole life. The definitive element of his self identity is thus constituted in this claim to be an intrinsic part of the nation that cannot be disoriented by short term political benefits. A huge premium is gained for the self in terms of its relationship to the nation through the declaration that he could not be provoked into “disloyalty towards the nation I had struggled to liberate” (p. 2).

Essentially, the narrative discusses the post-independence political turbulence especially in the Matabeleland and Midlands regions of the country within the discourse of the persecuted versus irresponsible power. In advancing the agenda of the nation the narrative refuses to acknowledge postcolonial realities where contradictions glossed over in the nation’s formative stages erupt to the surface. Ethnic differences that were only apparent during the struggle become even more magnified in the early years of the postcolony. Mbembe’s (2001:108) analysis that “conflict arises from the fact that the postcolony is chaotically pluralistic, and that it is in practice impossible to create a single, permanently stable system out of all the signs, images, and markers current in the postcolony” reveals the complexity that underlie the nation project. The new Zimbabwean nation is rocked from underneath by this lack of harmony, this conflict between heterogeneous interests and significations vying for the same space in the postcolony. Nkomo’s story privileges the nation as a higher order, with which the self is associated, that should necessarily transcend the tribal/ethnic, ideological and political differences that become evident at independence.

Yet in these postcolonial realities is where what Mbembe (2001) calls the “mythologies of power” are negotiated, written and rewritten, all hidden under the thin membrane of the nation’s facade. Gatsheni-Ndlovu’s (2009) perceptive exegesis of what he terms the issue of the “Matabeleland particularism” is useful in understanding the forces at play in the construction of the nation. Making use of the Foucauldian concepts of subjectivation and interpellation, which both entail the making of the individual into a subject who fits in the nation project, in this case a Zimbabwean, he posits that the people of Matabeleland and the Midlands were regarded by the

ZANU-PF led government as interpellated into the ZIPRA/ZAPU project during the liberation struggle. Evidence for this in the post independence period is drawn from the election result patterns which saw ZAPU scooping seats in the regions in 1980 and 1985. Thus they had to be re-interpellated back into the nation project “as imagined by ZANU-PF and Mugabe” (Gatsheni-Ndlovu, 2009:153) by force of arms. As much as electoral statistics can show a semblance of political allegiances, it nevertheless can be an oversimplification to assume that ZANU viewed everyone in Matabeleland and Midlands provinces as belonging to ZAPU, or alternatively those in Mashonaland as belonging to ZANU. Thus Gatsheni-Ndlovu’s proposition has its inherent pitfalls.

Nations are fragile, and force of violence is often deployed to make subjects conform to the imagined order. Gatsheni-Ndlovu locates the pretext to the Matabeleland problem in its nascent nationhood under Mzilikazi as well as in the political rivalry between ZAPU and ZANU in the liberation struggle. In the former he cites the robust and well-defined cultural and political structures of the Ndebele state that had consolidated itself through conquest, raids and assimilation of other groups in what is now Zimbabwe, aspects that qualified it into a state in its own right. Yet paradoxically the imagination of a territorial nationhood meant that this Ndebele state now had to be subsumed within the Zimbabwean nation. Such is the totalizing character of the national discourse which would not allow the existence of “a nation within a nation.” In the latter point the contention is that ZANU has privileged its own memory and history of the liberation struggle almost to the exclusion of the other participants. Gatsheni-Ndlovu (2009:22) asserts that “the memory and history of the national liberation struggle has been converted and consolidated into a myth of foundation of the nation with ZANU-PF leaders putting themselves at the epicentre of this epic struggle.” This echoes Nkomo’s concerns in the post independence dispensation where Matabeleland and the Midlands, regions associated with his party, are subjected to violence as a way of bringing them into the national fold as conceived by ZANU-PF.

Nkomo is throughout the narrative the persecuted nation builder who also rises to be an indictment on his counterparts in ZANU-PF who opt for violence as a means to nation building. The narrative painstakingly keeps the conflict between him and Mugabe, or between the majority Shona group and the Ndebele as manifested in the ZANU/ZAPU dichotomy, outside possibilities

of disloyalty to the nation on the part of its subject or ZAPU, hence the starting point in the redemption of self is the act of distancing from “the armed bandits operating in the western province of Matabeleland” (p.1). This act is meant to effectively pre-empt perceptions of that nature being levelled against the self. The isolation of armed bandits also builds the premise on which the self would achieve higher moral ground by speaking against the collective torture, murder and starving of the people of Matabeleland and Midlands. It is noted that “whole villages had been burnt to the ground, cattle slaughtered, women raped” (p. 1) all in the name of pursuing the bandits. In this way the people of Matabeleland and the Midlands are pushed into conditions of subalternity and their treatment exposes “the baroque character of the postcolony” in which the major highlight is the “violent pursuit of wrongdoing to the point of shamelessness” (Mbembe, 2001:115).

The violent acts in the Western parts of the country in the early 1980s are then seen as wanton activities by perpetrators who were bent on settling old political scores by inflicting massive suffering on those perceived as supporting the otherwise noble nationalistic ideals of the subject. The subject is also made target of a number of assassination attempts sanctioned by a ruling party whose irrationality and disregard for national unity is at all times highlighted through juxtaposition to its own integrity and allegiance to national duty. The legitimate government of Zimbabwe is absolved of this wantonness as Mugabe, through his party and the secretly trained Fifth Brigade, is apportioned the responsibility of shattering hopes of national unity. A veritable objective of the state sanctioned terrorism in the regions is the destruction of the very symbol of national unity, which the narrative invests in the person of its subject. The preservation of Nkomo’s life thus becomes a condition synonymous with the preservation of hope for the nation. His escape into exile, contrary to official allegations of betrayal and cowardice, is imbued with Christ-like meanings of temporary retreat to a foreign land so as to fulfill the higher mandate of national redemption at a later stage. Christ had to take refuge in Egypt for him to carry out God’s mission on earth, and likewise Nkomo saw it as “my duty to go, since only if I survived would there be a hope of peace and reconciliation” (p. 4).

Such a construction of self identity sits Nkomo on a lofty pedestal that befits those who belong to the realm of political sainthood, beyond human contestation in the matters of the nation. This is contested by other nationalists who participated in the struggle and viewed it from their



entrenched ideological and political perspectives. It also raises questions about the possible silences and suppressions authorized by this narrative where the ugly things about the person of Nkomo, and the intra-party conflicts in ZAPU, are not talked about. Nkomo's narrative shares this loophole with both Nyagumbo and Muzorewa who apparently gloss over those negative experiences and policies they effected but highlighted those of their adversaries. Mbembe has warned that the paradox or the tragedy of African modes of self writing is that sometimes they gravitate towards an ideology of nativism that insists on purity and lack of internal contradictions in the very political narratives that individuals authorize, or insist on the "narrative of loss" in which "a manipulation of the rhetoric of autonomy, resistance, and emancipation serves as the sole criterion for determining the legitimacy of an authentic African discourse" (2002, 240-241). For Mbembe, a narrative such as that of Nkomo that relies for its affective power on invoking suffering emphasizes the "violence of falsification" (241), because beyond protesting at maltreatment there is no clarified political agenda suggested outside the political ambience of the adversary. As a result Nkomo depicts himself as not responsible for some of the catastrophes that have befallen him, ZAPU and the people of Matabeleland in particular and those in Zimbabwe in general. These paradoxical ways of indexing one's identities are also evident in Edgar Tekere's *A Lifetime of Struggle*.

#### **4.5 Edgar Tekere - *A Lifetime of Struggle*.**

##### **4.5.1 Locating the Self on the Historical Continuum- The Past, Present and Future**

In contrast to Nkomo the story of Edgar Tekere's life is one that is narrated after its subject has gone past his most active political days and is an attempt to order, in retrospect, space, times and characters into perspectives that conform with perspectives of the self. Typical of all auto/biographies, life experience and phenomena revolve around the subject narrator, and is interpreted from the point of view of the same subject. Life experiences and their meanings are mediated through memory, cultural and ethnic perceptions, history and personal disposition at the time of writing. The intervention of all these factors in the recounting of life narratives mean that the fictive element cannot be dispensed of as the subject of necessity negotiates between desired selves and historical facts. Omissions, embellishments, understatements, creative constructions of both self and event, and objective fact thus become the raw material of the life narrative. Yet the motive to give a rendition of one's life is always dominated by the desire to

project and entrench a self identity, or identities whose relevancy and essence spun from the past to the future. The present self (or selves) is often projected in an aura of predestination that draws from a great and incorrigible past and a fatalistic sense of mission both in the present and future.

The life narrative of Edgar Tekere can be read as an effort to locate his self identity on a veritable continuum whose beginnings speak of pedigree attained from royalty, and the middle of heroic resistance and the immediate strives to uphold the past and take it into the future through the subject's acts of heroism that are also advanced through progeny. Plotting self identities on such a linear continuum, rather than simplifying, involves the self in complex engagements with matters of the nation and previous acts of narrating the self attempted in other political autobiographies. Thus the narrative *A Lifetime of Struggle* implicates Tekere in the construction of the nation from the perspective of his family history and participation in the liberation struggle.

Tekere's self identity is in the first instance indexed in the historically significant. He is the descendant of the Mapungwana, whose links are traced to the "Zulu people and their chief Mzilikazi" (p. 27). In this way the self's identity is not only ensconced in the history and grandeur of a great people, but also firmly locates itself in the political geography whose definition has also been a consequence of the descendants of Mzilikazi. Mzilikazi's people, the Ndebele, migrated from Zululand and established their state in the western part of Zimbabwe in the 1830s, and have since been a political factor in the equations of the modern nation state of Zimbabwe. The subject's historically significant identity is further buttressed through his mother's lineage. The mother, Lydia Maidei Nyang'ombe, was a senior princess of the Makoni people of Eastern Zimbabwe. The narrative stresses for effect that Tekere's mother was "a descendant of Chief Chingaira, of the House of Makoni, who took part in the 1896 rebellion against the British colonialists, known as the First Chimurenga" (p. 28). In this way the subject of the narrative is not simply presented as the significant other, but as the progeny of royalty who could not escape the imperatives of national duty without blemishing ancestral honour. The 1896 rebellion is, in terms of history, a recent nationalistic feat in the effort to construct a Zimbabwean nation. This background bestows on him a sense of predestination as "mwana wa Muzvare" (ibid) (son of the princess) to play a pivotal role in the creation of a new nation. The lineage links to both the Ndebele (though diluted as rather remote throughout the narrative) and the Shona is

an attempt to bring about an ethnic fusion that should be the epitome of the envisaged nation. The obvious bias towards the mother's lineage betrays the preferred order of perking in the nation project where the narrative implies that the Shona ethnic group should form the core of the nation. The auto/biography, in retrospect, seems to be justifying and strategically positioning its subject at the core of the nation project.

As a young boy Tekere is ensconced within the shadows of royalty and heroic resistance to colonial oppression. There is apparent pride in the observation that at St Faith Mission, where he went to primary school, "we lived under the shadow of Gwindingwi, in whose caves Chief Chingaira took up residence, commanding war from there" (p. 28). Gwindingwi is raised to folkloric significance as the abode of determined resistance to colonial rule, and its spiritual effect to those who are encapsulated by its aura by virtue of lineage links to gallantry it hosted, is celebrated. From an early age Tekere acknowledges that he immersed himself in the history and traditions of the Makoni people. The auto/biography in this way is identifying the local history, traditions and ritual sites of the Makoni people, even if only invented, as the basis of the imagination of a common community and/or nation. Such imagination is premised on the fact that Chief Chingaira, as much as he carried the Makoni people to heroic recognition, pitched his struggle on the national level. It is in that role that he becomes the exemplar for Tekere who reveals that he "longed to emulate the proud fighter of the first Chimurenga in [his] role in the second Chimurenga" (p.29). Self identity is thus premised on precedence, on a historical continuum that keeps certain desired traditions and identity images alive. Elements of self identity are thus retrieved from the past, recast to conform to present circumstances and then projected into the future as a matter of tradition. Intrinsicly therefore, every self identity, with all the inherent instabilities, has a degree of essentialism to it. That Tekere should be tasked to retrieve the head of Chief Chingaira from Britain where it was taken after he was captured and beheaded, underscores the extent to which symbols, both human and metaphysical, are invested with meanings for the present and future, as well as for desired self identities. Chingaira's head is critical heritage that inspires not only the development of a particular identity, but a sense of belonging to a particular history of resistance as a community. It is this sense of community that provides the fertile seedbed for nationalistic sentiment.

The life narrative, once it has appropriated a critical footage on the historical continuum, determines the formation of future identities by making them largely consistent with precedence. The essence of identity is rendered in hereditary terms whereby the Chingaira gene runs through his descendants. Agency is acknowledged but predicated on biology and history. Thus at the moment when Tekere's self identity is formed within the context of his ancestry and the history of struggle against colonialism, the tradition is carried on through his son, Farai. Farai is characterized as having a rebellious character which destines him for the battlefield of the liberation struggle where he "acquired the nom-de guerre of Tito" (p. 38).

In the guerrilla army Farai became a fighter of repute who earned his name as an expert in anti-aircraft artillery. The auto/biography in this sense presents self identities as mutative versions of an original master copy, that is, later generations of the legendary Chingaira are made to uphold the tradition of the Makoni people. And yet under the surface the same narrative suggests that self identities are too complex to be determined by biology alone. They are a product of a wider social process that enables them to refuse permanent essentialisms. Rather than Tekere's rebelliousness, and that of his son as well, being hereditary dispositions, the narrative makes an admission that a general rebelliousness "was beginning to emerge among the young people" (p. 33) during that time. A possible reason for this attitude is given as the indiscriminate oppression of blacks by the whites under the colonial system. Given such a context, the rebellious character can be explained as a generational response to prevailing circumstances of the time. Self identities thus acquired are products of time and space. They are therefore socially constructed even if it is true that every identity has to have a degree of essence for it to have substance. Therein lies the complexity of self identities in the sense that they are characteristically dynamic even as they always have an underlying essence, temporary as it might be.

That self identity is largely socially constructed is attested to by the Tekere's revelation that for him anti-colonial consciousness began with his family. He was socialized into resistance against white domination, and this later on becomes the hallmark of his self identity. The mother had a serious aversion for the whites arising from the beheading of her grandfather, Chief Chingaira. From an early age the immediate environment of the subject is such that it instills a distinct sense of being whose definitional parameters are imposed by the antagonistic nature of colonial values. This accounts for the precocious awareness in the subject that exhibits itself in his refusal to

swear allegiance to “God and the King”, preferring to give his allegiance to serve “God and Mambo Makoni” (p.36) at the scout sessions. He is valorised for his identification with his own past, and thus family and society encourage certain identity traits in the individual. Much later on when Tekere is arrested on allegations of murdering a white man, Oberholtzer, a victim of the Ndagana- led Crocodile Gang, (Godwin, ) the mother celebrates what she sees as the revenge of Chingaira. The net effect of such reception of value-laden action is to provide psychological scaffolding for the construction of a self identity that is oppositionally defined from the perceived negative values of the colonial system. Once society has shown approval and support for the normative identity traits, the narrative proceeds to show how the subject consolidates the desired selves and highlight points of convergence with the national destiny.

#### **4.5.2 The World Revolves Around the “I” Axis**

The power of political auto/biography is essentially in that the world is ordered, at least narratively, from the perspective of the self. To read an auto/biographical narrative is to see the world and its phenomena through the eyes of the subject even if one does not suspend his or her critical and cognitive processes completely. In *A Lifetime of Struggle* Edgar Tekere places himself at the centre of every significant event in the cultural life of his people and in the politics of the liberation struggle. By so doing the self is elevated while its others are pushed to the periphery where their voice in important matters is discredited or reduced in stature. At the level of the nation the self is tactfully placed in the confidence of the guardian spirits of the nation as a way of authenticating its perspective. Tekere’s association with the Makoni resistance history and shrines, as well as Chief Tangwena is thus a strategic appropriation of discursive tools that would enable him to construct a world whose axis is the self and community.

The less significant others of the self such as Mugabe are not allowed into the intricate world of the guardian spirits, which disqualifies them from being serious contenders to the core spaces of the nation. An apt example of this claim to the confidence of the ancestors is underscored when Tekere claims that when, as they were crossing into Mozambique with Tangwena, a loud lion-like roar was heard and Tangwena fell to the ground. Tangwena’s interpretation of this was that the spirits were guiding them on their journey. What Tekere particularly notices about this incident is that, “most strangely, considering the loudness of the growl, was that Mugabe did not hear a thing” (p.74). The subtle implication of the narrative is that Mugabe did not belong to the

world of the initiated, making him unable to receive, let alone decode the messages from the spiritual world. Ancestral spiritual intervention was greatly revered in the liberation struggle and reception of such intercession by individuals bestowed on them special roles in the execution of the struggle. Conversely, the inability to receive such spiritual intercession relegates individuals to peripheral roles in the process of forging the new nation. It was widely held that “traditional religion was what sustained” (p.78) the liberation effort. Tekere, by claiming closeness to the spiritual realm, positions himself in line for a more prominent role in the nation project compared to Mugabe. This is also a process of claiming licence for the self to stand in judgment over not only Mugabe, but all the less significant others of the self whose interpretation of the world is hamstrung by perceived lack of communion with the ancestral world. Only the subject of the narrative, as embodied in the “I” is authorized to interpret and give meanings to events, thus commands the world to revolve around its own perceptions.

The self or “I” consolidates its vantage position by claiming presence at all politically significant events, vision in all critical matters, bravery and astuteness at critical moments, and even notoriety earned from vexing the enemy. Where this self could not be present at the defining moments of the liberation struggle, such as the Chimoio massacres, its larger than life symbolic figure is grafted on the scene. Though he was in Maputo at the time of the bombings, Tekere recounts that he was told that “a helicopter was hovering over [his] hut, calling on [him] to come out” (p.86). The narrative accords significance to its subject in two ways; first by hinting on the notoriety he has gained with the Rhodesian enemy as the prize liberation fighter to destroy, and second, by suggesting notability of self among the ZANU military hierarchy. Mugabe is depicted as losing heart after the massacres, and it is implied that Tekere’s astute military strategies enabled the struggle to continue. The execution of the liberation struggle is almost reduced to the military tactics of this larger than life figure who straddled both the military and the political functions of ZANU like a colossus. Messages intercepted on Rhodesian military radios often referred to the “Tekere style of fighting” (p.91), a claim that is meant to suggest that the whole hue and tenor of the liberation struggle was influenced by this single individual. This perception is strengthened by the declaration of the subject that “I belonged to the war, I was part of it in a way that Robert Mugabe never was’ (p. 107). As Vambe (2009) has argued, this propensity to diminish others and project self can compromise elaboration of the subject’s own vision as the

preoccupation becomes the imagined antagonist found not only in the opponent but ironically also in the selves of the self.

Tekere's narrative pivots the world so firmly on the self that it is not only Mugabe who is subject of negative judgments, but also the military leaders such as Tongogara who though acknowledged, are largely locked in the shadows of Tekere's exploits. At some point a whole shipload of critical arms from North Korea could not be offloaded at Maputo because all the boxes were marked "Tekere" (p.109) and Frelimo would not allow the other ZANU top leadership to sign for them. Similarly, at the death of Tongogara, President Machel ordered to wait for Tekere who was in Lusaka, to come and identify the body despite the fact that the whole ZANU leadership including Mugabe was already in Maputo from the Lancaster House talks. Auto/biography shows here a self in the act of self consecration as the ultimate hero in the creation of the Zimbabwean nation. In the process political scores are settled and perceived adversaries are discredited and portrayed as inconsequential to the imagination of the new nation.

The definition of self identity is always achieved in relational terms to others who exist in the same domain with the self. Its articulation is given form through passing judgments that in the ultimate make the self a distinct entity from the rest. From early on in life Tekere's narrative delineates for himself a selfhood that is removed from the ordinary and predestined for great role in the creation of a nation. The declaration is given as if to prepare the readership for an individual not carved out of ordinary stuff. It is asserted that "all my brothers and sisters lived conventional lives, but I was destined for another type of life, full of hardship, marked by the pain that is Zimbabwe's continuing struggle" (p. 27). The subject's destiny and that of the nation are entwined from the beginning, and this marks him out as unique compared to his siblings. On the national platform further distinction is attained through evaluations of other characters and their contribution to the liberation struggle. Nkomo's leadership is discredited on the grounds that "he travelled too much and did not consult with the party" (p. 52), just as Nyagumbo argued that Nkomo was sent into restriction not for the cause of Zimbabwe but his self interest. On the other hand Chitepo in those early days of the struggle is despised as "something of a liberal" (p.52) who initially agreed with Nkomo on the matter of the fifteen seats that Smith had conceded to the Africans. Nkomo is further chastised for bungling when he allegedly misrepresented Nyerere's position to his executive on the issue of the government in exile that

was to be hosted in Dar es Salaam, a point that Nyagumbo also corroborates. The act of highlighting these shortcomings has the effect of portraying Tekere as relatively more perceptive and politically astute compared to his colleagues. On Nkomo's blunder on the government in exile debacle, Tekere pronounces that the whole thing did not "make sense to [him], and neither did it to Julius Nyerere" (p. 53). Subtly the subject of the narrative is raised to the level of statesmanship as Nyerere, far beyond what can be credited to his fellow nationalists.

The critical direction of the liberation movement at this stage rested with the actions and decisions of the subject. He took the responsibility to table the motion to ouster Nkomo from leadership with the resultant formation of ZANU in 1963. This was indeed a significant moment in the creation of the Zimbabwean nation, with far-reaching consequences of ethnic strife that reverberate right from the struggle into the post independence era. Mugabe, who was later on to assume the leadership of ZANU after the ouster of Ndabaningi Sithole, is pushed to the background at these critical moments as he is accused of always deferring to his leaders, contrary to common perception that make him the radical nationalist. Placing the "I" at the centre of the critical moments in the construction of the nation is a deliberate strategy used in the narrative to locate the subject firmly within the nation project.

From the time of split from ZAPU, the narrative manoeuvres its subject into indispensably influential roles in ZANU. Once Sithole is pushed out, it is Robert Mugabe who receives constant undermining as a way of enhancing the attributes of the subject. The opening up of rear bases for the fighters in Mozambique marked another critical phase in the liberation struggle as well as in Mugabe's ascendancy to political leadership of ZANU. Mugabe in this way became a threat to the political significance of the subject whose ego aspires for the honour of being the preeminent figure in the struggle. Thus as they crossed into Mozambique with instructions from ZANU to organize the armed struggle, Tekere takes exception to Mugabe's intention to introduce themselves as coming from Muzorewa's UANC. Mugabe is depicted as going for the political expedience of the 1974 Lusaka Accords when circumstances demanded a radical departure from earlier strategies of peace conferences and moderate armed force. In view of his pending rise from secretary general of the Party to the presidency, his political vision is put under political scrutiny. As someone who would assume the critical role of Commander in Chief of the liberation forces of ZANU, Mugabe's military credentials are thoroughly rubbished to the



point where the little salvation that comes his way is attributed to Tekere. Even President Machel of Mozambique is purported to have raised concern that Mugabe did not measure up to the scale of “military operation and planning” (p.90) that ZANU needed to embark on.

In propping up his own identity image the subject launches a sustained act of distancing Mugabe from the key figures who determined the course of the liberation struggle through diplomatic and military assistance. It is Tekere himself who claims excellent relationships and confidence of Machel, Nyerere of Tanzania and Ceausescu of Romania. Assistance to the liberation movement is invariably channelled through him, making him the most important person in the ZANU hierarchy. Strategically the implied elevation of the self is used to project a humble deportment that casts the subject as a natural leader. When Frelimo offered office blocks and equipment to ZANU and presented these to him instead of Mugabe, he accepts with “extreme embarrassment” (p.93). There is an inherent paradox of accepting the recognition that places him above his party Chairman while at the same time salving one’s conscience by observing the embarrassing anomaly. What is underlined in the final instance is Frelimo’s lack of confidence in Mugabe and the recognition of Tekere as the de facto leader of ZANU.

This negative perception of Tekere’s rival is reinforced by the revelation that up to 1977 Mugabe had not learned how to use a weapon and did not have a military uniform despite the fact that he was the Commander in Chief of ZANLA forces. Such statements are used as evidence of his lack of commitment to the liberation war, which is contrasted to the subject’s self acclaimed involvement both in the political and military organization of the struggle. Tekere is also raised to the higher ground where he assumes the responsibility of redeeming Mugabe by teaching him to use weapons and how to conduct himself as the commander of the forces. All initiative is taken away from the perceived adversary, thus undermining his leadership credentials. The ultimate image painted of Mugabe is that of a “civilian bureaucrat” who paled into insignificance when juxtaposed to the subject’s exploits both on the political and military arena. Mugabe is consistently juxtaposed to Tekere, the militant who singlehandedly conducted the war when most of the ZANU military men were in detention, the strategist who took the bold decision to go into the elections as a separate entity from the Patriotic Front in which Nkomo was viewed as a “political burden” (p. 115) who had met Smith secretly in Lusaka.

The narrative strives to create a dwarfing effect on Mugabe that would then project Tekere's integrity, astuteness and heroism as beyond any contestation. This image is further enhanced by casting him as a victim of betrayals who is the first object of assassination plots from those who champion narrow interests in the struggle. The ethnic Karangas led by Henry Hamadziripi, Crispen Mandizvidza, Rugare Gumbo, Mukudzei Midzi and Cletus Chigowe are accused of drawing up a hit list with Tekere at the top of that list. Beyond propping up the self, or even establishing veracity, such claims also reveal the contradictions inherent in the nationalist movement and the process of narrating the self. The group's role in the process of imagining a new nation is trifled as they are identified as a tribal grouping. At the same time Tekere's importance is emphasized by being accorded the status of a prime target. The self lifts itself out of the narrow identity of the ethnic, and even implies that it is only the other, the adversary, who is ethnic. In the post independence era, in addition to the alleged attempts on his life by one Jerry Nyambuya and one Senior Assistant Commissioner Svaruka, the subject continues to be the object of the assassination plots as he claims to be a victim of a slow killing poison allegedly administered by the Central Intelligence Organization.

From victimhood the narrative resurrects the subject to political sainthood where nationalistic vision and moral integrity is crystallized. It is Tekere who pleads with the Dare reChimurenga to spare the plotters as Mugabe did not intercede on their behalf. Mugabe is suspected of hard-heartedness, while Tekere, who should have been the first victim of the plot, is lifted above the common frailties that his adversary is amenable to. The credit for initiating the removal of the death sentence in the liberation movement is attributed to the humane intervention that served the plotters from execution. The subject's interventions spun from the political where the likes of Nathan Shamuyarira are discredited and exposed for their petty jealousies in maligning Edison Zvobgo as an agent of the American CIA, to the social where Dzingai Mutumbuka is thoroughly disciplined for insinuating that Tekere had a part in the former's messy relationship with Nyasha Chikwinya. All social and political processes that work towards the definition of the new nation coagulate around the person of Tekere, and this identity is painstakingly sought after in the independence era.

With the demise of the settler regime in 1980, Tekere's narrative positions its subject as the custodian of the values that had inspired the liberation struggle. He is portrayed as grappling with

colleagues who were inclined on betraying the cause of the struggle. The vision of ZANU to create a new Zimbabwe, which they envisaged as “an African country in the context of the African continent in various stages of the relentless process of overthrowing the yoke of colonialism, imperialism and settlerism” (p.54) is seen as under threat from self-seeking individuals. The constructedness of the nation is underlined, in a way that highlights Tekere’s notion that the new nation was born out of struggle and as such it needed to be defended from the corrupt opportunism of some of those who participated in the struggle. What this analysis seems to miss is the stubborn reality that the rhetoric of anti-colonial nationalism loses its efficacy at the moment colonialism collapses.

Sivanandan (2004:42) notes that the postcolony is characterized by “increasing division and oppression on the basis of class, ethnicity, religion, and gender,.. and a lack of democratic participation by the masses in the political sphere.” The drive towards one party statism that Tekere is so much against signals the closure of the political spaces that can also explain the early 1980s Matabeleland crisis. In the postcolonial sense, and as Sivanandan stresses, nationalism “signifies all sorts of undifferentiated beliefs and practices” (ibid, p.45) that the subject of the political life narrative must content with at all stages of the liberation struggle. The nation demanded sacrifice by its subjects as evidenced by ZANU’s resolution at the 1964 Gweru inaugural congress that “no foreign blood shall be spilt on the Zimbabwean soil in the process of liberating Zimbabwean soil” (p. 55). In this conception of nation there is recognition of indigenuity as the element that qualifies one to the inner circle of the nation, and conversely demands patriotic dedication to its values and institutions. For Tekere the nation’s institutions needed to reflect the “will of the African people who formed 96% of the population” (p.54). But the post-independence dispensation is rife with corruption, tribalism, nepotism and marginalization of the people by the political elites.

Mugabe and the ZANU hierarchy are portrayed as negating the core values that inspired the imagination of the nation, and Tekere through his narrative assumes the responsibility of the sole defender of the nation. Other nationalists such as Nyagumbo, Muzenda, Munangagwa, Shamuyarira and Nkala are dismissed as amenable to manipulation by Mugabe, thus leaving Tekere the lone fighter in defence of the nation. Tekere is able to appropriate a higher moral stake in the cause of the nation by claiming to have maintained a spiritual closeness to the

ancestral guardians of the land. He blames Mugabe for failing to appreciate the need for ritual cleansing after the liberation war, a sure sign of his alienation from the values of the land. This positions Tekere in a special position where he enjoys spiritual communion with the guardians of the land as manifested by the insistence by Chief Tangwena's widow that he was the one to announce the death of the chief.

Tekere is elevated to the status of traditional leader, who as the chairman of Manicaland, is presented with a walking stick, "a traditional symbol of authority" (p.147). His stature as a dedicated nationalist is acknowledged in ways that were not extended to any other liberation fighter besides Tongogara. It is himself and Tongogara who had houses bought for them when they returned from the war. The death of Tongogara thus left him as the lone combatant in the "crusade against corruption in the Party" (p. 120) as he surely would have supported him. Tongogara is also appropriated through the narrative's claim that if his death was due to foul play he would have communicated to Tekere in his sleep. In the same act Tongogara is distanced from the perceived corruption of the government of independent Zimbabwe, and defended from allegations of sexual impropriety to female cadres during the struggle.

The integrity of the self is defended vicariously even when confronted with apparent blemishes or shortcomings. When he faces allegations of murdering a white man in the early days of independence he alleges that the man who had wanted to gatecrash to the party had said he belonged to ZIPRA. Incidentally he claims to have been warned that some ZIPRA elements wanted to assassinate him alongside other ZANU members. The actions leading to the shooting are described as a military operation to mop out remnants of the hostile forces still harboured in the farms, thus a necessary move to protect the newly acquired independence. As much as this contradicted the much vaunted hand of reconciliation announced by Mugabe as Prime Minister, the subject takes a defensive position by insinuating that the policy was never discussed in party structures and thus he had little respect for it. This constitutes a veiled attack on Mugabe who is depicted as development tendencies of dictatorship that would jeopardize the well being of the new nation. Thus even as Tekere is sacked from the party he maintains the positions that he was the sole figure in ZANU who still represented the core values of that party and nation. The declaration that "my sacking from the party indicated a rejection of the founding principles of ZANU" (p. 159) is to be understood in this context. The only constant custodian of party and

nation is the subject of the narrative as testified by Nkomo's response to the expulsion. Nkomo is alleged to have burst out in parliament that he wanted out of the Unity Accord as he "had agreed to this unity agreement because we were convinced by one man, the only one we understood- Tekere" (p. 168). The very premises on which the nation of Zimbabwe was constructed after the tempestuous early 1980s are shown as shaken by the expulsion of Tekere from ZANU. It is through such claims that the auto/biographical project promotes personal agendas that are intrinsic blocks in the construction of self identities.

In the ultimate, Tekere's auto/biography proceeds by way of self glorification while simultaneously denigrating and trifling all perceived adversaries. It does this to a point where it flagrantly refuses to self- introspect, to reveal the blemishes of its narrator as a way of re-orientating it. Accusations of recklessness and irresponsible drinking, erratic behaviour are either conveniently left out or converted to strengths or blamed on others. It is also difficult to determine how much of Tekere's story is his own due to mediations from the editor of the work, Ibbo Mandaza. The narrative claims that Mandaza grew up under the political tutelage of Tekere during the liberation struggle. The extent to which it is possible for him to maintain disinterest in the narration of the subject's life is subject to questioning. The "auto" element in auto/biography is often politically involved with other selves that are outside it. Auto/biography as a discursive project seeks to authorize a set of statements that are attributed to the narrator but nevertheless may have originated from those others involved in the project. Mandaza's mediation through interviewing the subject and transcribing the text, editing and identifying points of emphasis makes the auto/biographical narrative offer itself not as a rendition of objective truth, but an amalgam of desired effects that can be called fiction, and real facts. Tekere's story, just like Nyagumbo's, are heavily tinted by the brush of those others who participated in their narrative projects. To some extent this is always present in the other nationalist political narratives, Todd (2007:133) satirically congratulates Nicholas Harman "on the good job he had done ghostwriting Joshua Nkomo's *The Story of my Life*. She bases her accusation on the fact that most of the photographs in the text are credited to Harman, and seem to be implying that since Harman did not protest at the accusation it meant that he had made substantial interventions in Nkomo's narrative.

Interestingly therefore, Tekere's autobiography, just like Nyagumbo, Muzorewa and Nkomo's works are 'political' autobiographies in the basic sense that all deal with overt political issues and actions carried out by politically visible leaders who imagined themselves as having the political will to construct a political nation called Zimbabwe. Each of the narratives invoke the "authority of presence" (Chennells, 2009) that implies factual presentation of experience and events. The emphasis is on the truth that can only be apprehended by the one who experiences the event and not transmutable in equal measure to those who are not present on the scene of the event. To some extent, this claim is justifiable since some of the things alluded to in auto/biographical narratives are verifiable through cross-referencing or even in archival and historical records. However, for auto/biography to make such a claim is political as this forecloses other interpretive voices on those particular experiences and events in the subject narrator's life.

Their works are also 'political' in the sense that despite their attempts to prop their identities as the most authentic compared to each other, all the autobiographies ironically manifested contradictions in individual's narrating the self and the nation. Expressed differently, although Nyagumbo, Muzorewa, Nkomo and Tekere are all black nationalists championing the freedom of Zimbabwe, they do so from different ideological stances or perspectives that produce versions and sub/versions of each other's narrative. This is the most political act revealing the fact that any narrative is a symbolical act and as such rejects attempts at forcing it to imitate the formal coherence of self and national identities that writers foist on life. Most significantly, the works, reveal another 'political' dimension of the autobiographies that arises from their failure to elaborate an alternative vision outside the influence of those who the narratives perceived as adversary. The autobiographies have therefore been prevented from saying something fresh by the limitations of political vocabulary to name the self and nation in new ways. The insistence on the narrative of loss, suffering and persecution has not been balanced with an attempt to generate an alternative epistemology or an offer of a different trajectory that the self and Zimbabwe as a nation could have taken had the imagined adversaries not acted in the ways that thwarted the ideas of the authors. All the four autobiographies reveal that their protagonists have been acted upon by other forces that they could not contain. What then emerged was a poetics of blame and protest which in a fundamental sense reveals the entrapment of their discourses by a firmer epistemology that their works either shied away from or failed to unravel its all too powerful dynamics. But we grant in this study, that even the effort to protest or criticize each other's ways

of narrating the self and nation without necessarily suggesting a 'clear' alternative is itself political; it implies imagining difference in a contest where the tendency is to enforce homogeneity.

#### **4.6 Conclusion**

This chapter has examined how political auto/biography constructs the self and nation from the vested perspectives of African nationalist writers. The four works examined thus share the salient commonality of first and foremost defining their political-ness in relation to organized political movement that seeks to challenge a perceived oppressive order. The works also broadly construct the identities of self and nation from condition of implied victimhood and persecution either from the colonial order or from the post-independence political dispensation. Nevertheless, this is not to imply that the four life narratives represent concepts of self and nation in homogenous terms.

Nyagumbo's *With the People* explores the multiple selves of the narrator by initially immersing him in the not too politically conscious realm of social life where his major concern is economic security and self gratification. The narrative in this way only manages to infer to the politics hidden in race relations and modes of distribution of wealth. The late blossoming of the subject in terms of political consciousness then emphasizes the shared experience of victimhood amongst African groups that then forces the narrative to construct both the narrator's self identity and nation within the context of a nationalist political movement. Nyagumbo makes his ancestry and African cultural values the major referents in his conception of himself and the nation of Zimbabwe, a quality that is also shared by Nkomo and Tekere. This in a way limits Nyagumbo to a narrow cultural nationalism that Muzorewa's *Rise up and Walk* challenges.

Muzorewa's constructing of self and nation is premised on intersecting Christian dogma and nationalist sentiment in a concept that I have called Denomi/Nation. Denomi/Nation as a concept derives from the "Total Gospel for Total Man" principle that proposes a holistic inclusion and prioritization of Christian spiritualism in all facets of life including in politics. It is on the basis of this principle that Muzorewa advances his notion of "Total Nation" that challenges the privileging of revolutionary violence against the Smith regime and traditional myths as the most important ways of constructing the nation. However, Muzorewa's grand vision is undermined by

his practical associations and underhand activities in the politics of the Internal Settlement that revealed the entrenched contradictions which made the “Total Nation” an illusion. Nkomo’s *The Story of My Life*, while also constructing the images of self and nation from within liberation politics, trashes Muzorewa and Nyagumbo’s visions while sanctioning the image of the martyred self as the centre of the nation. The concept of the martyred self goes beyond the colonial victimhood implied in Nyagumbo to construct the perennially persecuted figure of the self, always equated with modern Zimbabwe, in the post-independence era. Nkomo’s narrative constructs its identities in terms of perceived adversaries to the point where it fails to clearly map out or define its own vision of Zimbabwe.

Beyond envisaging a non-racial, non-ethnic nation of Zimbabwe, Nkomo allows the narrative to be obsessed with Mugabe’s omissions and commissions to the extent that it can be read as Mugabe’s story written by Nkomo (Vambe, 2009). This trend is repeated in Tekere’s *A Lifetime of Struggle* in which the subject employs the politics of disparagement to relegate his perceived adversaries to political insignificance. Self glorification of the narrator’s ancestry and political achievements, coupled with a conception of nation to which the image of the narrator is indispensable is the most significant strategy in Tekere’s constructions. The obvious limitation of the two narratives is that they narrow down the scope of nationalism to a point where it is equated to individual agency in the liberation struggle. The ‘political’ dimensions of the four autobiographies arise from that the protagonists were present or claim to have been at the centre of the events they describe and influence. Also, any difference whether in accounting or explaining a small event such as that Nyagumbo was one of the seven fighters at the Chinhoyi battle (when historically he was not there) and how this is interpreted differently by other authors and even rejected also underscores the ‘political’ nature of the works; differences of narrating the selves intensify the multiplication of versions of the same story, and this is politically liberating as it would be no longer possible for a reader to be bound up or trapped in the meaning of one narrative threatening to lay claim to exclusive truth. The next chapter will focus on life narratives by white female writers to explore how their constructions of self and nation interrogate and/or confirm the limitations so far exposed in the narratives dealt with in this study.



## **CHAPTER 5: Contradictions in White Rhodesian/Zimbabwean Auto/biographers.**

### **5.1 Introduction**

Chapter Four of this study focused on constructions of self and nation from the perspective of black male nationalist autobiographies. It explored how concepts of both self and nation are configured from complex conditions of victimhood as well as from spiritual/cultural spaces that stubbornly resisted eradication from the colonial onslaught. The general trend in the texts of Maurice Nyagumbo, Abel Muzorewa, Joshua Nkomo and Edgar Tekere is that the political in life writing is conceived of in the narrow sense of involvement in nationalistic movement/s. All the four writers without exception sketch their self identities and that of the nation within the matrix of Zimbabwe's liberation struggle. Self location within this matrix is given historical credence through claims to great ancestry or lineage in all cases. However, despite the common premises upon which these writers construct their own identities and that of the nation, they vary in terms of how the desired identities are to be achieved. Nyagumbo complicates involvement or participation in the nationalistic movement by showing that individuals had alternatives that could take them away from the nationalistic cause. Thus his involvement in nationalistic politics was deferred for much of his early life as he chose to work in the hotel industry in South Africa. When he finally took up the nationalist cause, he conceives of a Zimbabwean nation that would replace the settler authority and would be built on sound ideology and cultural nationalism. Muzorewa bases the construction of a new nation on a fusion of Christian spiritualism and cultural nationalism. Underlying this philosophy is a humanizing logic that would take both the self and nation of the perilous route of the failed state in Africa. Nkomo, in much the same way as Tekere, envisaged the new nation that to a large extent drew from cultural/nationalist struggle and revolved around the strong personality of the individual at the centre.

This current chapter will focus on white female life narratives that paradoxically shatter as well as confirm some of the constructed identities given in male black nationalist autobiographies. The ideas of Vambe (2003, 2009) and Chennells (1995, 2005, 2009), among others, will be used to help explain the dynamic and provisional nature of identities, be they of the self or of the nation. The chapter itself argues that unlike in male white and black life narratives where the organized political narratives are what mainly defines the self and nation, in white female life narratives, by Doris Lessing, in *Under My Skin* (1995), Fay Chung's *Reliving the Second*

*Chimurenga* (2007) and Judith Todd's *Through the Darkness* (2007) what is emphasized as the most political element is the contradictory insertion of female subjects and subjectivities in the making of the self within the Zimbabwean nation.. Analysis in this chapter is therefore informed by postcolonial criticism on the nation from such feminist writers as Chatterjee (2005), Eriksen (2005 ), and Appiah (1993), while on gender nuances in nation construction, the chapter draws largely from Mayer's (2000) work.

Lessing's text explores constructions of early settler identities at a time when they had just arrived in the land and were laying the foundation of a settler nation. Her conception of self identity is informed by a keen sense of criticism of the ideologies that underwrote settler sense of self identity and nation. As such she stands out to some degree as a renegade to Rhodesiana ideals, though limited to the extent that her vision does not meaningfully accommodate Africans in general or black women in particular. Chung's *Reliving the Second Chimurenga* straddles the colonial and post-independence eras and approaches questions of identity from the complex condition of a minority migrant who acquires some influence from within the echelons of ZANU's liberation struggle hierarchy as a wife of an important ZANU political cadre. In this way she differs from Lessing who chooses to rebel from mainstream group ideologically while retaining connections through race identity. Chung thus constructs her identity and that of nation in close relation to the African nationalistic dynamics to which she felt closer by virtue of her exclusion from European settler conception of self and nation identities. On the other hand, Todd's text also straddles the colonial and the post-independence eras. Firstly, she writes from a 'privileged' liberal position of being a daughter of a former white Rhodesian prime Minister and this allows her to maintain an elitist approach to questions of identity. In as much her constructions of identity are critical of Rhodesian colonialism, they, in a way refuse to read closely the fundamentals of the Black Nationalist movement. Secondly, Judith Todd also presents herself as a post independence subaltern to the politics of the nationalist government in power since 1980. While she strives hard to equate her plight to that which is experienced every day by ordinary black woman, Todd remains the privileged critic of both the colonial constructions of identity as well those of the ruling authorities in independent Zimbabwe.

## 5.2 Doris Lessing- Under My Skin

### 5.2.1 Entrenching the Self in Opposition in Doris Lessing's *Under My Skin*

Doris Lessing is a prolific Rhodesian/Zimbabwean writer whose fiction, *The Grass is Singing* (1950), *The Golden Notebook* (1962), *The Four Gated City* (1969), among others, revealed her radical questioning of settler constructions of the African and the African geography. These works of fiction subtly bring out the contested nature of identity construction and projection. Her first autobiographical volume, *Under My Skin* (1995), is a courageous attempt to piece up complex notions of self identity and belonging through a process of extricating the individual from established and orthodox institutions of Rhodesian society that normally play critical roles in identity-making processes. Concrete definitions of self identity are conceived of and sometimes enabled as only possible if and when the individual is set apart and in opposition to time-honoured and legitimating structures of authority, such as the family, the church, tradition, ideology and the state. Admittedly, identities do not obtain in a social and cultural vacuum, (Weintraub, 1978). Lessing's narrative posits the evolution of an 'authentic' inner self that is a result of reflexive experience. This inner self interacts with its multiple other selves that are critically important for the social conformity of the individual to different circumstances and relational dictates of the kind of how individuals relate to each other (Javangwe, 2009). But the inner self remains an entity separate, though often enjoying protection, from its other selves. The construction of identities in Lessing's life narrative therefore involves an appropriation of vantage spaces of relative marginality from whence both images of self and nation are projected. Marginality and/or opposition in other words constitute the epistemic conditions for the possibility of the construction of both self identity and images of nation in Lessing's narrative.

*Under My Skin* captures the birth of Doris Lessing in Persia and her subsequent movement, at a young age, to the frontiers of settler Rhodesia. It traces Lessing's formative years in terms of consciousness to the point where she positions herself in opposition to settler institutions, Christian orthodox, settler ethos and even family. The life narrative highlights the act of birth, both in the physical and metaphorical sense, as a critical marker of the beginning of a new existence, and therefore of a new identity. Birth normally entails deliverance of the new arrival into existing and institutionalized conditions where immediate socialization of the individual would begin. The objective of socialization is to achieve conformity to society's norms, which

for the new arrival means fitting within certain approved identity modes of the receiving society. However, for Lessing the retrospective element of the autobiographical narrative allows her to revisit not only the events surrounding her birth, but also those of her immediate genealogy, and to expose how the individual- that critical genus for the existence of self identity- is born into alienating conditions. Her mother was born and brought up in “a tall, narrow, cold, dark, depressing” (p.2) house presided over by a father who was a strict disciplinarian. The moral and socializing authority of the family is immediately cast in question, and the individual is estranged from the very instance of birth. Elements of a conventional autobiography that usually emphasize the linearity and stabilized representations of a well made story with beginning (birth), middle (growth of consciousness) and an ending that is unified are, from the start of Lessing’s story, disrupted by internal family histories. Immediately, the narrative is forced to acquire aspects of a polemical political autobiography that demands the recognition of the individual with the social setting. For instance, the nourishment of an unfettered individual identity is not guaranteed in the basic unit of society- the family, and in this way the narrative deploys genealogical history to buttress its thesis that authentic self identity is realisable at the margins of society’s structures. The family constricts the individual’s self explorative potentials and throughout the narrative, characters, including the subject’s own parents, are seen as unwitting victims of oppressive societal structures. A context for the construction of a self identity that experiences and responds to society’s demands on the individual, and thus nurtures itself in the marginal spaces of that society, is created.

The birth of the subject in the auspicious circumstances of 1919, towards the end of the raging World War One and the accompanying scourge of influenza that claimed hundreds of thousands of lives, is revisited by the adult eye in an exercise that seeks discursive self-positioning. Those conditions of 1919 become, in retrospect, some kind of a precocious definitional turning point that sets the subject on a self exploratory course that takes her further and further away from the society and its avowed structures. Humanity is both fickle and wanton to the point of self destruction. The momentous mistakes of 1914 to 1919 that had left “half of Europe a graveyard” (p. 8) and millions of other people dying the world over, constitute also, in retrospect, a milestone in the development of the subject’s individual identity. The trips that are made in adult life in the provincial towns of France, Scotland and England, “where every town or village was a memorial” (p. 9) invoke a sense of individual antagonism to what society stands for. The

desolation the First World War visited upon Europe resonates with images in T.S. Elliot's *Wasteland* (1922), where the title of her first novel, *The Gras is Singing* (1950), is derived. This suggests that Rhodesia was not spared by the convulsions of the time, and that Lessing's imagination of self and group identity is also shaped by this era.

To imagine, narratively, being born in these circumstances of 1919 engenders a powerful feeling of disgust and refusal to belong to the Rhodesian society that offers no guarantees for the protection and nourishment of the individual. It also engenders a sense of permanent injury, almost a natal scar, which defines the identity of the subject right into adulthood. The subject confirms that her difficult birth had scarred her and that the "war does not become less important to [her] as time passes" (p.8). It continued to influence how she conceived of her own identity and perceived the identities of those people around her. Her birth circumstances constitute the source of the "raging emotions of [her] childhood, a protest, an anguish: my parents" (p. 9). The bigger situation of a Europe smouldering from the effects of war are brought to bear more acutely on the personal and basic, the family, where the parents, its pillars, have become a source of anguish. The father, who has his leg amputated as a result of war injuries, and his bleak prospects for a fulfilling future, and the mother's stoical endurance of the supposedly exportable 'superior' English civilization, provide immediate sources of disenchantment with the Rhodesian society as it exists. The condition of the father particularly conjures up potent emotions over the marooned children "brought up in families crippled by war" and had the "same prison running in their veins from before they could even speak" (p. 10).

Both the local Rhodesian world of 1920s and Europe are constituted as locus of war; physically and spiritually emasculating to the young Lessing. Two modes of modernities (colonial and industrial Europe) have failed to provide fulfilling frameworks of individual identities. The disorienting effect is that Rhodesians professed loyalty for the queen although at home they were claiming to be white Africans. The paradox is that the white community of Rhodesia denied itself claim to the space that they occupied by continually identifying with Europe and British culture to which they were no longer entitled because colonialism created new allegiances and interests for local white. This failure to identify with Rhodesia in a spiritual sense haunts future generations of whites. Constructions of the early Rhodesian nation as depicted by Lessing are ambiguous because of the ambivalent attitudes of the whites who wanted to both belong to

Rhodesia and Britain. The irony that Lessing hints at is that the whites subsequently failed to effectively belong to both. Negotiating for the elusive sense of belonging amongst the white settlers is the political feat that Lessing's narrative foregrounds.

The narrative thrust of *Under My Skin* from the onset seeks to achieve a position of moral authority for its subject by constructing birth circumstances that are couched in preternatural terms. The very being of the subject is narrated as something that was given birth to by the war, and the "poison-like gas," an effect of the war, enveloped her early childhood. The conditions of this war, even when lived only reflexively through constructed memory, provide the critical props for the subject's self identity in later life. The memory of the war is privileged over any other, and this is deliberately meant to remove the subject from the run and mill of ordinary life. What is enabled through such a construction is an endowment of a superior moral conscience on the subject narrator who then is afforded the latitude from where the shortcomings of society are highlighted. Throughout this process the subject emerges the lone voice of reason that humanity has kept at the margins. The marginality is constituted both in temporal and spatial terms in the sense that historically the subject glides over limitations of childhood memory to re-enact powerful images of circumstances of birth, and physically she is located at the outskirts of the empire.

The autobiographical narrative in this sense reveals its capacity to transcend physical and temporal limitations as through it the narrator is able to engage, and even criticize, the meanings that are generated by the core institutions of society. With the benefit of retrospection, Lessing pronounces from high moral ground that the American Civil War that had taken place less than half a century before the First World War "had shown what the newly invented weapons could do in the way of slaughter" (p. 10) but no lessons had been learnt. Society is thus characterized as doomed by its collective amnesia. It is so doomed that individuals are afforded no security for growing their sense of self. Collectively the human race is "stupid" (p. 10) and the only hope for the individual is in conscious self alienation from the entrapping world.

Lessing through this self positioning advances the auto/biographical mode as a powerful and emotive mode for the expression of the experiences of those who occupy the peripheral spaces of society. It is a mode that permits them to contest and demand recognition for their individual existence in society. Auto/biography allows for a rebellion against an adult world order that

insists upon and authorizes memories that promote the collective interest at the expense of the individual. The construction of the individual self is done over a political minefield in which personal identities are negotiated and sketched in the context of broader societal expectations. Conscious recognition of the existence of conflict between individual interests and society's demands is a requisite condition for the exploration of the self and its final resolution within the structures of that society. The subject awakens to this need and declares that "clearly I had to establish a reality of my own, against the insistence from the adults that I should accept theirs" (p. 13).

The establishment of the subject's own reality is achieved through narrative means and for her the auto/biographical mode becomes an act of "claiming one's own life" (p. 14) from the public realm. Yet it is imperative that there be a public dimension to every individual identity, for individuality only makes sense when conceived of from the general and public. The process of individuation is thus complex and delicate to the extent that the so-produced individual must not always stand in contradistinction to the public without the risk of being labelled a pariah. In Lessing's case the auto/biographical narrative tactfully constructs multiple selves that are deployed in different contexts and for different purposes. The existence of personality versions to the subject's identity in the form of the Hostess and, later on, Tigger is a necessary narrative rapprochement between the individual and the public. Both the Hostess and Tigger are socialized public fronts that are "bright, helpful, attentive [and] receptive to what is accepted" (p. 20) by society. Behind them they harbour the cherished self that should be protected from the crushing demands for conformity by society. These contingent characters are on call to ring-fence the invaluable space reserved for the existence of the "I", the "me" who constitutes the core of the subject's individuality. The "I" strategically retreats to take refuge in this "ultimate and inviolable privacy" whenever the subject feels that her "life will be under public scrutiny and there is nothing [she] can do about it" (p.20). This inner abode of the self provides the fort from which the individual can stand "agin the government" and its "venal motives" or in general against the "establishment, the ruling class, the local town council, the headmaster or mistress" (p. 16). Institutions of society arbitrarily demand conformity from the individual, and as such the individual strives for its existence from a position of marginality.

A life narrative such as the one produced by Lessing intrinsically entails (re)-construction of self identity in conditions of adversity. Necessarily only those memories that buttress the subject's case of moral aptitude as opposed to institutional arbitrariness are privileged in the narrative. The subject is aware of this politically inspired selective process of memory in the reconstruction of her identity. She acknowledges that the act of narrativizing the self is continuously ambushed by stubborn rhetorical questions about which truths recovered from memory include as well as omit other memories. The mediation of memory is further undermined by the vast gaps of what can no longer be remembered and therefore is completely left out of the narrative. In the final analysis the past itself is a constructed artifice that has as its central theme the promotion of the subject's image. Thus Lessing declares that "we can make our pasts...taking a little fragment of fact and then spinning a tale out of it" (p. 13). The past is a 'fiction' or an imaginative recreation that is constructed not only once, but several times over. What is recovered from this past are desired selves whose hue and colour keep on changing depending on the aspect from which the subject chooses to observe her past from. In this sense the self can never be conceived of in terms of fixity. The self is subject to shifting perspectives and it takes different shapes when viewed from different stages of life. What seems to give life stability and consistency in Lessing's construction of her self- identity is the delineation of the contradictory structures of her society that circumscribe her individual emotional and psychological growth as opposed to her own quest for individual space.

The family, because of its biological immediacy, offers the primary materials that the individual utilizes in the early processes of self conception. It also provides the early perspectives into life and society and prepares the individual in terms of how they will relate with their surroundings. For Lessing those very immediate pillars, the mother and father and their circumstances reflect a miniature world order that is alienating as well as predatory on the individual. They are mired in victimhood even as they strive to uphold the standards and civilization of their era. The mother is bound in what she believes are the best values of middle class English civilisation to the point where she threatens to obliterate the individuality of the daughter. As such, the subject is set adrift from the centre of the critical unit of the family. To the best of her memory she was always "in nervous flight" (p.15) from the mother since the age of fourteen and since then had embarked in a "kind of inner emigration from everything she represented" (ibid). The identity of the subject is therefore constructed in terms of alterity to that of the mother. The mother is viewed not only



as the biological link in family relations, but as the embodiment of those structures of English society that typically stunted the growth of the narrator. The mother had lived those stunting conditions and in the process internalized them, making her a critical source for the reproduction of those conditions and values in the younger generation. It is the possibility of having such conditions, or even identity modes, reproduced in her that Lessing rebels against. She is against the patriarchal values that tended to regard women in utilitarian terms where their most valued attribute is the perpetuation of male dominancy. Such values are reproduced through the mother who did not welcome the birth of the narrator specifically because she would have preferred a boy child. The subject is the unloved one in the family, while her brother is loved “unconditionally” (p.25). She is therefore not just born into the uncertainties of a morally bankrupt and jingoistic Europe, but into the margins of a gender-repressive European order.

The identity of the subject is constructed against the reality that in her era, “women often get dropped from memory, and then from history” (p.12). The narrative becomes, if not a way of refusing to be dropped from male-authored history and memory, an expression of an independent and alternative selfhood.. Women, even when they are apparently in positions of authority, have their identity and roles determined by men in a way that does not threaten male dominancy and interests. Often they assist in writing themselves out of history by upholding those values that buttress men’s privileges in society. Auto/biography thus becomes a challenge to the dominant narratives that seek to define history as only steeped in the remembering processes of the male members of society. It is embroiled in the politics of representation where its function is to demand that the voice of the narrator and that of her gender be recorded at a personal level, the auto/biographical narrative becomes a process of weaning oneself from the male-dominated value systems as well as from those symbolic figures who represent such values. For Lessing narrativizing her life provided a practical route for distancing herself both emotionally and physically from her parents and the society they represented. She captures this rhetorically on the occasion of the death of her cat when she reminisces whether she had felt “anything as bad as when my mother, my father died?” (p. 38). She confesses that from childhood she had become one of the “walking wounded” (p.25) and that this experience had deadened any emotional attachment to her parents.

The adult world in the English society is constantly apprehended as a tyrannical and senseless regime that thrived on depersonalizing the individual in the narrator's memory. What the narrator privileges as the memories of her childhood are consciously chosen events and societal practices that amount to an indictment of the colonial society. Doctor Truby's nursery guidelines which were adopted by colonials in all parts of the British Empire are criticized as nothing more than a regime that aimed at reducing babies into mechanical creatures who would fit into the existing gridlock of English society. The training for the infants is not meant to promote conscious individuality as the infants grew, but to impress upon the fragile minds the need for conformity within the existing order. Lessing highlights the emphasis of the guidelines that "the baby must learn what is what and who is boss right from the start" (p.23) as a contrived way of underscoring the baby's dependency on the adult world. The feeding regimes that are spread at two or three hour intervals, and the injunction that the baby should be left unattended in between, are critical forms of training during the child's formative years that nevertheless may ignore individual needs and dispositions. In that sense the guidelines, and the fanatical adherence to them in the colonies without regard for varying conditions, climatic or otherwise, become tyrannical and injurious to the wholesome development of individual character.

The British Empire is seen as overbearing to the extent of imposing values of cleanliness, often associated with Godliness, right across all its subject territories. Empire thus brought with it a roller coasting order that refused to recognize all other forms of order in the subject territories (Hall, 1992). This grand narrative of order operates both at the political and personal level. It defines what constitutes order in monological terms and declares its intention to rail-road every society, every individual, to kow-tow to its definitions. At the personal level there is no room left for alternative ways of apprehending reality and defining it. The subject is therefore engaged in a self defining battle against the all-assuming values of the Empire. In this battle individual personality is prized as the point of engagement is the personal, with the narrator declaring that she was no candidate for obsessive cleanliness, tidiness and order. This radical submission is important for its insinuation of the possibility of a different kind of order in disorder, which becomes a postcolonial critique of the Empire's homogenizing conception of order. In this way, even though at a personal level, Lessing occupies and uses the fringe space to question teleological assumptions of the dominant discourses of nation and Empire. If disengagement from society's legitimating structures is the first level of political engagement that the

auto/biography performs, taking on the grand narratives of empire in essence constitutes the second level of political narrative contestation offered by Lessing's narrative.

### **5.2.2 Narrating the self From the Fringes of Nation and Empire in Lessing's *Under My Skin***

The nation as an outpost of empire, as was the case with Southern Rhodesia, and at least at the beginning, owes its imaginary and "real" existence to the authorizing narratives that are generated from the metropole. The authorizing narratives work both at the discursive and physical level. At the discursive level the narratives create conditions of possibility, of expansion, of exportation of values of metropole to the hinterland. These conditions of possibility are in stages minted into an avowed mission to redeem the hinterland that is imagined as reeling under the scourge of barbarism and superstition. At the physical level the imperial narratives are critical in psyching the population of the metropole to get ready to physically go and "people" the new space at the outposts. Through various forms of propaganda and exhibitions the population of the metropole is exhorted to participate in extending the frontiers of empire and to partake of the adventure and fortune hunting that this entailed. More important was the fact that the outpost was only imaginable with a cadre of citizens from the metropole who would form the core of the new outpost nation.

The substance of the imperial narratives amounted to images of the British Empire as the "boon" and "a benefit to the whole world" (p. 50). This has an immediate bearing on the practical modalities of effectively exporting the imperial values and growing them in the hinterland. One of the serious implications of this practice is lodged in how the colony as nation was then "imagined." To probe into this would provide an explanation not only to Lessing's rebellion against both constructions of empire and settler society, but also to the imagining of alternative nationhoods amongst the Africans. Chatterjee's (2005) problematization of Anderson's (1983) concept of nation as "imagined community" exposes two fundamental points of departure. The first, which Lessing's narrative seeks to deconstruct, is the assumption that the concept of nation had to be exported to the colonies in its modular form from Europe. In this thrust, Lessing's misgivings about the settler state are borne out by Chatterjee's submission that the colonial state as an agency was "destined never to fulfil the normalizing mission of the modern state because the premise of its power was a rule of colonial difference, namely the preservation of the alienness of the ruling group" (2005:243). This is to say the settler state never had intentions to graft

itself spiritually into the physical space that it occupied, and Lessing sees its construction as driven by blind hypocrisy and pretension. Lessing's rebellion thus can also be read as hinting at the alternative imagining of the African nation model that grows out of the spiritual/cultural space from which the settler is kept in abeyance. This is the second point of departure that Chatterjee posits as the premises upon which the female subject peoples of the Third World were able to imagine their own forms of nationhood. The colonial nation therefore has a generally deterministic structure that in a way recreates the Empire in that it preserves the centre space for the settler population while relegating the subjects to the periphery. Both as a white woman, and as a Rhodesian, Lessing realizes that her position within the imagined community is unstable; she is not expected to write of the politics of empire, particularly when to write is to criticize the empire, and then she is aware of the indignities of colonialism that she does not condone. These facts invite to her the wrath of a white dominated colonial machinery angered by the belief that its evil and exploitative tendencies are being exposed by one who appears like their own, at least racially, in appearance.

Primorac (2006:66) comments on what she refers to as the Rhodesian chronotope by observing that colonial space, through appropriation and domination, "turned African space into a functional network of discrete fragments divided by boundaries." She further posits that colonial identities achieved material reality through the erection of boundaries between the races, or worst still, by striving to erase "from the land all traces of natives as well as separating their bodies from the spaces that they inhabited" (ibid; 67). Conceptually this was done through European academic discourses such as anthropology and ethnography and physically through forced removals to native reserves or other marginal spaces marked as African areas in the colony. The importance of Primorac's comments is in showing that the construction of identities in the colony, in both time and space, is dependent on the reproduction of the imperial conceptions of Europe and its others. Settler identity is achieved through the process of physical and discursive displacement of the native.

Yet according to Chatterjee (op cit), the displacement was only partial as the subject peoples preserved their cultural and spiritual space from which they continued to imagine their own nations. The alluded to recourse to cultural resources of the past in order to confront challenges of a present time resonates Cabral's (1966) call for a return to the source where "daily contact

with the popular masses” (p.5), who are the repository of such values, can be established. Such a partial retreat constitutes a strong bastion for the alternative imagination of nation as long as it is borne in mind that “any return(s) to the past(s) of any African culture(s) must emphasize the plurality of perspectives brought to bear on those processes” (Vambe and Zegeye, 2009:3). Thus Lessing’s narrative somewhat undermines the colonial constructions of nation by invoking possibilities of an African world that the Rhodesian settlers sought to suppress.

Identities are constructed to satisfy certain social and material imperatives, and for the settlers in Rhodesia, the racial regimentation in the first instance was defended as necessary to facilitate the functioning of the capitalist order and- , in the second instance, to impose order and civilization on to unruliness and chaos (Primorac; *ibid*). The binarisms that buttress settler conception of identity are thus mapped out as between the civilized and the savage, with the latter being designated the spaces at the periphery. Lessing’s life narrative engages these premises upon which settler identities establish themselves, and specifically with a view to deconstructing them. As such, the narrative is lodged within the spaces of contradiction in this racially deterministic structure of assigning identities. It thrives from the interstitial spaces that are a result of the binary logic of the Empire discourse. It foregrounds the marginalized existence of the settler community at the outpost, but most critically that of an individual self who refuses to abide by the ethical considerations of an all assuming colonial civilization.

Lessing’s narrative undermines the very foundations of the Southern Rhodesian nation by deconstructing settler mythologies of race and white civilization. Through this discursive strategy the misrepresentations upon which settler society was founded are exposed. It exploits the disparity between the received myths about the outpost in the metropole and the realities experienced in that outpost to make an authoritative statement that those nations are fantasies that originate in the imagination of their inventors. The Empire Exhibition in London had as its objective the creation of images about the empire that would persuade prospective settlers to migrate to Southern Rhodesia even if their claims were not based on fact. Lessing’s own family made the decision to migrate to Southern Rhodesia on the basis of information obtained from the Empire Exhibition. Prospective settlers were made to believe that in Southern Rhodesia they would get rich “in five years growing maize” (p50). The early settlers who formed the core of the conceived Rhodesian nation were therefore lured into the project of the Empire on the basis of a

cocktail of misrepresentations. This is proved false in another of Lessing's text, *The Grass is Singing* (1950) in which Dick, the white farmer, fails dismally to domesticate both the land and its black people.

In *Under my Skin*, the narratives of Empire also sustained themselves through conjuring up metaphors of vacant spaces. The interior of Africa was imagined as unoccupied and waiting to be peopled by the civilizing armies of Europe. As Lessing's family moved into the Lomagundi area of Southern Rhodesia it was on the explicit understanding that the "area was still being opened up for settlement" (p.50). There are no references to the fact that those lands belonged to the indigenous blacks who were native to it and had over the years evolved political and social structures that gave them control over those resources. The narrative in *Under My Skin* in this case is contradicted by some Zimbabwean fiction such as Ndhkala's *Jikinya* (1979) which firmly show the Africans in charge of the land resources as well as their cosmology before the advent of colonialism. In this sense, Lessing sees settlerism and the subsequent Rhodesian nationalism as belligerent concepts that from their very inception aimed to discursively and physically empty the targeted spaces in the interior of the indigenous elements. Such indigenous groups were never to be allowed full civic participation in the imagined settler nation, and hence could only remain subjects to be ruled and not citizens (Mamdani, 1996). This conception of the settler nation and civilization antagonizes Lessing who as an insider is aware of the hypocrisy and injustice of the order that the settlers were imposing on the indigenous groups.

Lessing's contention is that England and its cultural values could not be replicated into Rhodesia as a basis of self and national conception. She refuses to acknowledge the moralizing authority of England as the basis upon which settler Rhodesian identities could be constructed. She charges that this England that the settlers of her mother's generation talked about, with "all that green grass and spring flowers and cows as friendly as cats" (p. 82) had nothing to do with her existential realities at the frontiers of Rhodesia. Life in the colony demanded iron will to subdue nature and harness native human resources to the service of white civilization. Contrary to the imperial narrative, Rhodesia did not offer a "life of dinner parties, musical evenings, tea parties and picnics" (p.58). As such Lessing observes in the representations of the first settler generation a denial mode that only works to emphasize their temporality on the new geography. The national community they seek to establish refuses to accept any deep commitments, physical,

spiritual or cultural, nor to accept the reality that the English values were out of place at the frontiers. In a revealing observation Lessing hints that the whites both at home and abroad did not want to think that settlers in “British Southern Rhodesia ever lived so low and fearfully” (p. 65), something that would upset their sense of racial superiority and mastery over the subjects. Auto/biography in this case engages in politics of discourse, which at one level is fed from imperial propaganda, and at another feeds into the propaganda, as a way of sustaining desired perceptions of British progress in the hinterlands. It is a politics that must be conceived of in terms of the competition to extend spheres of influence into Africa by European powers.

Early settler nationalism is therefore self-entrapping in the sense that it locked up its subjects in a paradox where lived reality was not consistent with the desired imagination of being representatives of a superior civilization at the frontiers. What Lessing posits in the narrative of nation and empire is the existence of a Rhodesian trap that is reducible to a human condition in which individuals are victims of a grander imperial scheme and circumstances that they cannot escape. In this thesis can be gleaned the notion that nations are perhaps always entrapping, whether in racial dogma, ethnicity or any other such ideology. Religion is focused on as one of those aspects of early colonial settlerism that imposed limiting conditions to the individual. Through its dogma and the images that it deploys religion is seen as denying especially the young the space for self exploration and expression. Young girls at the Convent are more or less victims of the strict and selfish doctrines of religion. Since religion cuts across nations, Lessing’s quest for freedom makes her conclude that there was something inherently wrong with the human race that always sought to curtail the individual growth. The convent relied on ‘horrific statues of tortured Christ’ (p.91) for the instruction of young children. The net effect of such instruction at an early age is to ingrain in the young minds the permanent condition of human suffering. It is this entrapment in the narrowness of both Rhodesian national conception and Christian religion that Lessing seeks to extricate herself from through auto/biographical narrative.

The act of writing a life narrative is a complex situating exercise. The act imposes certain demands on the narrator who should construct an authentic identity. Yet this somewhat rigid generic schema is riven with contradictions where conception of the authentic identity is shaped by the public gaze in much the same way it reproduces alternative selves (Coetzee, 2006).

Nevertheless, the subject narrator is able to appropriate certain spaces from which the self and nation are ideologically and discursively delineated. This inner self is embodied as well, and for Lessing this is an important aspect that guarantees her individuality. The ever present consciousness about the embodied self “under my dress”, “strong and fine” (p.204) and the exulting pride that declared itself in the presence of others announces the distinct individual as she claims an own space in her society. Awareness of the individual body and consequently the unique inner essence that it harbours triggers the process of groping for alternative selfhoods. For Lessing the alternative selfhoods are accommodative of those others who are at the periphery of the Rhodesian settler community. The route to alternative selfhoods is initially at the level of consciousness where she confides that she had began living “utopias, part from literature and part the obverse of what I actually lived in” (p. 156). Literature and experience become creative processes of reconstructing nation, self and society. The ideal society that is created is a transcendental one that is situated above the imagined Rhodesian nation and hence enables the nation to “fit black people, particularly black children” (ibid) in it. In this way the narrative elevates its subject narrator morally as to be able to envisage a nation and society where “no one went to war, black, brown, white people, altogether” (ibid). Through this vision the subject reveals herself as situated outside the mainstream white conceptions of nation and self identity. Her vision is an indictment of the racial categorization upon which the Rhodesian settler nation is built.

From the idealistic abstractions of consciousness Lessing’s narrative further implicates her in a physical way that identifies her, even if it is only by way of social empathy, with Rhodesia’s marginal spaces. Socially, when she finds herself in the company of blacks at a fete at Old Umtali (now Mutare) she announces that she “had never been with black people as an equal in a social situation” (p.159) before. Her delight on the occasion speaks of a realisation of possibilities, of alternative conceptions of nation. It is also an escape from the rigid confines of the Rhodesian settler epistemes of self and national identity. Once located outside these epistemes she is able to explore other ideological possibilities such as those implied in communism and racial harmony.



### 5.2.3 Black Subaltern Narrative in *Under my Skin*

The Native Question, as well as the Color Bar, assumes a critical position in Lessing's groping consciousness which seeks to delineate new parameters for self and national identity. The moral weapon being deployed through the life narrative is intended to expose the ideological and conceptual bankruptcy of Rhodesia's racist ideals. *Under My Skin* in this way is able to proffer a sub-narrative that undermines the official constructions of racial identity that are refracted by the settler institutions of family, church, and government. For Lessing, the absence of figures and facts does not dilute her "strong feeling that there was something terribly wrong with the system" (p.179). The baseline of the argument lay in the impoverished and pathetic existence of the Africans who were made to work on the white farms for so little that white privilege could not be justified. The alternative beckons the narrator away from this White civilization that insisted on "keeping a big gap between even the poorest paid whites and the best paid blacks" (p.307). It is a civilization that thrived on assigning negative identities to its others to the point of denying them their humanity. Even the possibility of an African civilization that might have developed independently of European influence is denied, thus as Lessing observes, "Zimbabwe itself- the ruin- in those days was supposed to have been built by the Arabs" (p.383). The narrative problematizes such feigned institutional superiority that sought to portray native communities as only resurrecting into existence at the time they came into contact with their subjugators. In the ultimate, it is the subject of the narrative who is seen to overcome the limitations of racial bigotry and conceive of a society that is capable of accommodating all and sundry. Thus on leaving her husband Frank and kids, Lessing is still able to claim higher moral ground. Her conviction affords her a grander and noble purpose that overshadows the negative implications of abandoning family responsibility. In fact family is depicted as one of those arbitrary societal structures that stifle the individual's ability to discover other possible inner selves. Hence it is the act of leaving family that liberates Lessing so as to embark on the noble mission to "change this ugly world, [so that] they [the kids] would live in a beautiful and perfect world where they would be no race hatred, injustice, and so forth" (p.262).

In *Under My Skin* Lessing therefore positions herself outside the legitimating structures of settler authority so as to construct both images of the self and Rhodesian nation. Extrication from the established and orthodox institutions of Rhodesian society such as the family, settler state

ideology and the Christian church and its morality enables the conception of a self identity that is ambivalently removed from mainstream expectations of settler ethos, and yet fails to meaningfully approximate to the imperatives of the liberation of the majority Africans in Rhodesia. This narrative of the self remains entrapped in an in-between-ness that in the ultimate retains Lessing's self image within the broader political epistemes of colonial discourse. The life narrative is subtly caught up in the politics of contesting authorized modes of being, of opposing organizational regimentation within the Rhodesian society. At the level of the self, Lessing privileges reflexive experience as the core of her identity formation. As much as this is critical for the realization of her self identity, this can be politically nuanced in the sense that there is no room for the accommodation of those others who are the subjects of the Rhodesian political system. Thus Lessing can be said to be enjoying some kind of voluntary marginality which offers her space to critique the settler society from within, and exile in the metropole when the settler regime thought she had overstepped the limits of settler ethos. This does not estimate to the marginal condition of the Africans who are victims of a vicious colonialism. The Rhodesian nation itself is also conceived of as drawing its imaginary and real existence from the authorizing narratives of the metropole. Such a construction of the Rhodesian nation is limited to the extent that it fails to read possibilities of a Rhodesian nationalism that is rooted in the colony and that adamantly refuses the entry of black African nationalism especially after the Unilateral Declaration of Independence by Ian Smith in 1965. The next section of this chapter will therefore explore how another life narrative cum memoir; Fay Chung's *Reliving the Second Chimurenga*, negotiates self identity and imagines concepts of nation from outside the Rhodesian epistemes of self and nation. It will also explore how such identities are complicated by their implication in Zimbabwean nationalist politics.

### **5:3 Fay Chung- Re-Living the Second Chimurenga**

#### **5.3.1 Mountain Dogs and the Condition of Double Marginality: The Fate of the Migrant in Rhodesia in Chung's *Reliving the Second Chimurenga*.**

Whereas Lessing's *Under My Skin* largely defined the identity of the self in reflexive terms, this section will seek to argue that in Chung's memoirs the identity of the self is complexly shaped by reflexive responses as well as the impact of circumstances in one's life. It will seek to show how identities are complicated by circumstances of migrancy and alien-ness, as well as

participation in organized political movement. The memoirs provide a peephole into “racially segregated Rhodesia from the special angle of a Chinese minority, which was so small that it did not figure within the state’s categorization of population groups” (Chung, 2007:8). In this way Chung goes beyond Lessing by not only locating her life narrative within organized political movement, but by also destabilizing both Rhodesian concepts of identity and African nationalist narratives of belonging. *Reliving the Second Chimurenga* (2007) narrates the life of Fay Chung from the point where her grandparents migrated into Rhodesia from China. It traces the growth of the narrator in racially sensitive Rhodesia that religiously adhered to the Color Bar in the economy, (p.27) residential and education systems, (p.32). It also traces her broadening awareness to the injustices of the Rhodesian system right up to her conscious decision to participate and provide ideological articulation to the African nationalist movement. By middle age Chung admits that “working in the townships in the 1960s made me more aware of the social and moral problems faced by black people” (p.53). As such, the identity of the narrator and the images of nation are delineated as she traversed through a maze of defining experiences both in colonial Rhodesia and independent Zimbabwe.

### **5.3.2 Chung and the narrative of marginality from China**

*Re-living the Second Chimurenga: Memories from Zimbabwe’s Liberation Struggle* (2007) provides complex insights into both the ‘nations’ of Rhodesia and Zimbabwe. The life narrative is somewhat located outside Rhodesian discourses that refuse to accommodate all those who are not of Caucasian race except where they are in relationships of subordination. However, just like Lessing, her condition cannot approximate the absolute marginality that characterized the life of Africans. The family’s economic activities, albeit in the restrictive environment offered by Rhodesia, placed her in the relative comfort of middle class life. Thus she experienced the Rhodesian “from a position of both relative privilege and oppression” (p. 8). On the other hand, her life is at one level thoroughly implicated with, and at another, uncomfortable with, the processes that coagulate into what became the nation of Zimbabwe in 1980. Chung belongs to a minority racial group. In the construction of Zimbabwe it is her socialist ideological inclination that makes her a part of ZANU’s ideological thinking. However, despite being part of ZANU leadership her position as a woman made her occupy ‘marginal’ spaces designated for women during the liberation struggle for Zimbabwe. In the post independence era, Chung, as much as

she is complexly a voice from within Zimbabwe's ruling elite, inhabit the nation's critical outer space from where she articulates versions of what the nation could have become.

The memoirs refer to historical circumstances in order to invoke a case of double alienation. The narrator was born of Chinese migrants who had come to settle in colonial Rhodesia. Migration entailed physically wrenching the subject's family from the mainstream Chinese culture and social geography. The identity implications for the offspring who are born in foreign lands involve skillful acts of negotiation to belong to new spaces as well as maintaining cultural and spiritual links with the original homeland. Movements away from places come with a spiritual and cultural detachment that in varying degrees sets the subjects apart from those who remain behind. Chinese people who grew away from the mainstream Chinese society were looked down upon as the outcasts who grew up outside the Chinese value system. As Chung submits, these were disparagingly referred to as the "uncivilized mountain dogs" (p. 28), a reference that effectively excludes them from the critical processes that define Chinese identity and nation. It is a symbolic descriptive that marks the core of the Chinese nation and its peripheries, and those so thrust onto the periphery of their original communities have to contend with the challenges that the condition of migrancy places on them. These subjects often have to negotiate for accommodation in alien and often hostile societies.

In the case of Chung, her grandfather attempts to ameliorate at least the intensity of alienation from Chinese values by insisting on the education of the estranged offspring (p.28). This effort nevertheless remains token in nature as beyond the edifying sense of maintaining links with Chinese culture, it is largely overwhelmed by the physical reality of being an insignificant minority in a foreign land. Settler Rhodesia offers little space for the minority Chinese community, whose obscure location in the nation is only overshadowed by that of Africans. The appellation of "mountain dog" assumes a deeper significance of a condition of existence not only at the edges of Chinese society, but also of the receiving Rhodesian society. The memoirs therefore constitute a remote, yet incisive commentary on how those at the centre of the Chinese nation imagined of its peripheries. This conception of the Chinese nation makes the perpetuation of this condition for its outcasts very much conceivable in the racially sensitive context of colonial territories in Africa.

The projection of the Rhodesian nation in Chung's account is achieved through a gradual process of unmasking the near impervious racial barricades that protected a settler minority at the centre of the nation. Rhodesia was a "haven for whites only, with a small modern economy able to cater for the needs of only a fraction of the total population" (p.60). The subject narrator's youth is a phase of self discovery which is carried out in relationship to white settler attitudes and policies towards other racial groups in the country. As she reminisces in retrospect, "it was impossible to grow up in colonial Rhodesia without becoming aware from one's earliest age of the deep hostility between the races" (p.27). In this way her experiences afford her a particularly special angle from which, as a member of a Chinese minority, she was able to read the Rhodesian nation. This also enabled her to understand how her community was positioned in relation to the settlers who formed the core of Rhodesia. Race was the criterion of first importance in determining common and shared values that enabled the imagination of the Rhodesian national entity. Those who did not belong to the Caucasian race, and particularly to the English stock whose common destiny in the country was epitomized through the genius of Cecil John Rhodes, were accommodated as racial inferiors in the mytho-culture that inspired the Rhodesian nation. The Rhodesian race psychology is also imposed in a way that impinges on the formation of individual identities of those subjects within its boundaries. As a consequence, coloured children in Rhodesia "placed a premium on white skin and straight hair" (p.36) and their image of perfect beauty was Caucasian. Chung's thesis is therefore tantamount to saying the nation of Rhodesia based its existence on what Kwame Appiah (1993) has dismissed as an *a posteriori* determination which attempts to use biologically determined differences that in some way define race as the natural force that cleavage people into nations.

Appiah's argument is pertinent to the extent that such a supposition assumes that there is intra-racial harmony within such a biologically determined group and that this makes the conception of solid nationhood possible. This runs against the noted observation that "the differences between peoples in language, moral affections, aesthetic attitudes, or political ideology- those differences that most deeply affect us in our dealings with each other- are not to any significant degree biologically determined" (Appiah, 1993:35). To build a nation solely on the basis of race is thus to base it on an illusion and Chung's memoirs effectively deconstructs the white settler's conception of the Rhodesian nation. Chung interrogates its logic that insisted that other racial groups could only be placed on such peripheral spaces of the nation as to allow it at convenient

times to represent itself as inclusive of all those found in it. Thus as much as the Chinese community was physically present within the boundaries of Rhodesia, they were excluded from all practical considerations as a critical factor in the composition of the Rhodesian nation. The superstructure of race enabled the exclusion not only of the Chinese minority, but of the numerically superior Africans in the country. In this way, Chung's autobiography is political par excellence, dealing as it does with rebellion to enforced identities of racial inferiority status in Rhodesia.

Rhodesia in essence is constructed on the basis of a discursive narrative that seeks to naturalize race as a scientific reality on the grounds of which so called inferior groups could be excluded from the nation. Laws were enacted that reserved the best lands for the white settlers, and the worst, semi arid areas for the Africans. The complete exclusion of the Chinese community from the Rhodesian nation project is underlined by the revelation that "those who were neither black nor white were not catered for by the land laws" (p. 27). Access to the critical resources of the nation is an intrinsic signifier of belonging to that entity, and in the case of Rhodesia, the distribution of land resources in many ways reflected how the different races were placed within the nation project. Where concessions were made to the prohibitive property laws, strict segregatory laws were put in place to ensure that the margins were at all times well defined from the core group. The Chinese, and Africans as well, were proscribed from acquiring properties in the designated European areas. The Ahtoy's, neighbours to the Chung family, faced resistance from white neighbours who did not want them in the neighbourhood where they had acquired a home from a white debtor (p. 30.) The creation of "green belts" (p.30) between European residential areas and those of other races served to demarcate, both physically and metaphorically, the inner core of the nation and its margins. In the ultimate analysis, Chung's narrative exposes the nature and character of the Rhodesian nation to the extent that, for those not of the English origins, no cultural ameliorations could negotiate their entry into the mainstream constituency of the nation. Education and other forms of acculturation to the Rhodesian ethics could not guarantee qualification into Rhodesianess. The barricades, both cultural and political, erected against the Chinese and people of other races, account for the subject's negotiation towards the possibility of an alternative being that would overturn the viciousness of race politics in Rhodesia. Experiencing open forms of exclusion in Rhodesia made Chung realise that "peaceful evolution was not going to be possible" (p.64) as a means to

alternative selfhoods. Political autobiography here elevates its subject to a higher consciousness where new and better modes of both self identity and nation are explored.

### **5.3.3 Chung and the Narrative of radical transformation in Rhodesia**

The articulation of a distinct image of self identity for Chung took place in the context of a white dominated politico-social environment that stubbornly refused to acknowledge the presence of other race groups in Rhodesia. The Rhodesian nation extended certain rights and privileges to those it considered its inner core, and withheld them from the margins. An inclination towards the cleavage of the elements of the margins was a logical development which in practical terms saw Chung identifying with the circumstances of the African majority. Despite her middle class background, she realised that just like the Chinese, the Africans were viewed as an inferior race that had to defer all their rights to the white race. In certain spheres like education, the settler governments deliberately did not provide meaningful facilities as a way of stunting the growth of consciousness amongst the Africans. Education was seen as a “dangerous tool in the hands of the Africans” (p. 57), and as such the Smith regime was so determined to curtail its availability to Africans by proscribing missionaries from establishing any more new schools in the African sector. The minority Coloured and Asian groups also faced serious inhibitions in this regard as there were very limited provisions for the education of their children. On the contrary education was made free and compulsory for white children. These institutionalized discrepancies could only foster a strong sense of unbelonging to the Rhodesian nation amongst the peripherized groups, especially the Africans, who began to revive imaginations of pre-colonial nationhoods.

Chung on her part immersed herself in the African communities through her teaching appointments where she acquainted herself with the political and socio-cultural challenges that these people faced. Her experiences resulted in a radical self- transformation from her middle class liberalism into a proponent for a new order in Rhodesia. The experience in the African communities exhumes a deeper inner self conviction in the subject which is declared as the right cause and life goal for her. She had become convinced that “only the armed warfare would bring an end to colonialism” and that “Zimbabwe would be born out of blood” (p.63). Implicit in these declarations is the notion that nations are products of bloody sacrifice and of necessity involve spirited efforts to dismantle other competing, often well vested, nation interests. The political life narrative here shows its capacity to allow for identity shifts that are occasioned on the individual

by radical events or experiences in one's life. What is mirrored in this instance is Chung's conscious shift from the circumscribed identity of a marginalized minority migrant to that of a nationalist vanguard. Through political autobiography she is able to construct a transcendental identity that raises her from critical observer of Rhodesian injustice to an active participant who began to "personally accept responsibility for what was happening in Rhodesia" (p.68).

In the case of Zimbabwe, the conception and construction of a new nation order demanded the socio-political synergies of the disparate race and ethnic groups who were assigned the underdog status in the Rhodesian socio-political order. Chung's vision of the Zimbabwean nation therefore is premised on the possibility of a wider democratic space which defies race or ethnicity as the basis of founding a nation. Removing skin pigmentation as the criterion of belonging to nation was requisite to enable all those "born in the country" to assume "equal responsibility for the liberation of the country" (p. 68). In this sense, new nations justify their being and claim to existence by making radical departures, even if it means only at the level of rhetoric, from their predecessor states. Nations are thus often born out of revolutions. Thus the envisaged Zimbabwe would avail equal opportunity to all regardless of race, ethnicity or creed, a situation that provided a direct antithesis to Rhodesia. Nevertheless, the realities of nation construction through the liberation struggle and post-independence efforts would pose serious questions to these assumptions as Chung often found herself being treated as if she belonged to the wrong side of the colour line by fellow liberators (p.174).

Chung's narrative view, once it has characterized the Rhodesian nation as obscenely narrow and limiting on racial grounds, becomes largely implicated in ZANU's ways of conceiving an alternative Zimbabwean nation. As much as this involvement is characterized by internal turbulence and ambivalences that often set her at the edges of the mainstream political and ideological processes in the party, she essentially remains an insider who is critical of other ways of imagining the new Zimbabwe. This means that she maintains an open hostility to other political movements such as ZAPU, the ANC and FROLIZI during the liberation struggle and those post-independence democratic political endeavours such as the Zimbabwe Unity Movement (ZUM) and the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). The memoirs are weaved and bound into a monologic narrative that imagines the realisation of the Zimbabwean nation as a *fait accompli* of the political and military manoeuvres of ZANU. It is this overt political



partiality that has attracted the accusation that the memoirs” are a partisan statement” (p.25) that has to be weighed against other versions of the construction of the Zimbabwean nation. Chung declares that the early decisive engagements with the settler regime convinced her that “it would be ZANU other than ZAPU that would one day rule a free Zimbabwe” (p. 75). In this way, the subject can only be interpreted as a member of the inner coterie of ZANU and for whom to be an outsider means to remain within the privileged, though marginal circles of the ruling party. However, in other ways she inhabits the outer space of the nation’s centre and from that vantage position is able to give critical views on the direction the nation is taking.

#### **5.3.4 Ideological Ambivalences in the Construction of Self and Nation in Chung’s *Reliving the Second Chimurenga*.**

Fay Chung’s vanguard party, ZANU, was not an ideologically homogenous political movement as its recruitment drive was often determined by circumstances often beyond its control. Its political leadership from the time of the split from ZAPU was largely dominated by the university trained intellectuals who nevertheless were brought together by their common situation of victimhood at the hands of the settler regimes than by any clear-cut ideological persuasion. Samupindi (1992) makes detailed allusions to ideological disjunctures leading to physical hostilities between the educated and socialist-oriented Vashandi group and the military oriented rank and file in ZANU’s liberation movement. The political narrative thus unbundles the idiosyncratic nuances embedded in the liberation movement in a way that makes it refuse to be disciplined in monological interpretations. It exposes the causes of the liberation war in their complexity and identities are formed in accordance with the exigencies of the political circumstances. The major grievances that drew the African nationalists into concerted political action were “the land that had been taken away by the settlers in the 1890s and the denial of education to the black majority” (p. 174). There was therefore the dearth of a deep and well articulated ideology that would inform and inspire the formulation of a solid value system that would act as the basis of the nation. Chung’s argument is that ZANU never espoused the ideologies of Marxism and Leninism beyond populist pretensions since there was never serious efforts to harmonise the propagandistic slogans and praxis. If anything, what she reads in the political programmes of ZANU in the 1960s and 1970s was that the socialist rhetoric was never “born out of conviction, but simply in order to gain support from important allies” (p.173). It

was critical for currying favour particularly with the Soviet Union and China and the states that fell within their axis and whose support for the liberation effort was crucial. On the home grounds the appeal of the socialist rhetoric was also critical currency for the mobilization of mass support though this had to be balanced with respect for traditional value system, some of whose aspects conflicted with the tenets of socialism. Traditional religion was one such sensitive matter which socialism treated as superstition when it was so fundamental in the direction of the war effort.

The central narrative of Chung's memoirs in this regard invokes critical questions on the significance of ideology in the delicate process of nation construction. In a very much understated way, she interprets her own alienation from the centre of the political party to which she belonged in ideological terms. For her socialist convictions, she admits that she was "obviously considered a very dangerous person by the right wing of ZANU" (P.187). On the other hand, she views ZANU's formulations towards the creation of a new nation as defective right from the days of struggle due to its failure to propagate and articulate a clear ideology that would cement the disparate constituent elements in Rhodesia into a cohesive nation. She cites the "long conflict that dogged ZANU and ZANLA throughout the formative years of the liberation struggle of the 1970s between the privileged and educated elite and the less educated freedom fighters" (p.286) as resulting from an ideological disharmony. Althusser (1970) elaborates on the role of ideology in ordinary life in a way that is applicable to the life of the nation. The central thesis in Althusser's argument is that "all ideology has the function of "constituting" concrete individuals as subjects" (p.31). What this means is that the construction of the nation of necessity needs a consistent, enduring ideological narrative that, while going beyond the obvious limitations of nationalism, and among other factors such as common myths of origin and history, calls individuals into a community of subject citizens. In other terms ideology is the crucial factor whose function is to recruit individuals who are then converted or better still, transformed into subjects through what Althusser refers to as the process of interpellation or hailing. A nation is inconceivable without subjects, and the failure to turn individuals into subjects, or succeeding with only a section of the population, is a measure of failure in the grand process of nation formation. Chung thus presents the Zimbabwean nation as fissured right from its core due to a lack of a coherent ideological conviction in the ruling party, which means, implicitly, that there was never any effective interpellation or hailing of individual interest groups into the nation

either at independence or after. The absence of an ideology that could transcend the limitations of nationalism, ethnicity or tribalism and other myths of common belonging thus to a large extent explains the violent methods employed in the early years of independence and in the new millennium as the ruling party tried to bring the people into the fold of the nation. The propagation of nationalistic ideologies is often buttressed by a degree of force, but what Chung seems to query is the predominant use of this force in a situation where no coherence is attempted between ideological articulation and praxis. Violence became a desperate attempt at interpellating individuals or groups of individuals into subjects, a situation that has resulted in the new nation being viewed largely as a politically failed state.

### **5.3.5 Chung and the Narrative of Socialism in Zimbabwe**

The roots of failure in the Zimbabwean nation from Chung's perspective are traceable to what Chatterjee (2001) sees as the fascination of third world nationalism with "the baleful legacies of Eurocentrism and Orientalism". The meaning of this observation is hinged upon a perceived inability by the developing world to conceive of their own nationalist cultural ethos that is independent of the essentialized epistemologies of the Occident and the Orient. Radhakrishnan (2001:198) poignantly submits that "third world nationalisms are forced to choose between "being themselves" and "becoming modern nations." Typically, they waddle in confused limbo, a situation that explains the ideological ambivalence of the emerging new nation. In moments of political ineptitude, the West is called upon to provide a model for the new nation despite the fact that there may not be the remotest link to the obtaining situation in the emerging nation. The only consideration is that the Western model is readily retrievable from history, never mind its irrelevance. The adoption of the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme is an example that Chung cites as constituting the hollowness of the new nation in terms of ideology. Such an adoption never arose from considered nationalistic interests, but rather was a panicky response to a restive population that was beginning to awaken to the ruling elites' ideological deficiencies. The professed socialist orientation that had held promises of a nation community elevated beyond the immediate constrictions of the primary identities of gender differences, ethnicity and race had proven to be an unsustainable illusion. A new narrative of turning around the economy, of an ideological re-orientation especially in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union, was taunted as an existential imperative for the new nation. Chung's characterization of the

Zimbabwean nation at this stage coincides with what Radhakrishnan (ibid.) has termed the “real tragedy” of postcolonial nationalisms. This tragedy is constituted in the internalization rather than the problematization “of the Western blueprint in the name of progress, modernization, industrialization and internationalism.” All this takes place despite the reality that the Western model was always already defective in its agency as it evolved in different circumstances and in the service of specific historical imperatives. The new nation is thus caught up in a state of ideological dithering as both the traditionalist model and the socialist experiment are only rhetorically deployed in the construction of the nation.

What further undermines the cohesion of the Zimbabwean nation even at the stage of conception is the absence of this common ideological trajectory amongst the externalized forces of the party that Chung identifies as the ruling party of the imagined future nation. In ZANU there is the fractured co-existence of the Traditionalist/Militarist forces, fronted by the military leadership and the combatants who joined the armed struggle in the early 1970s, and the university group that comprised university and high school dropouts who espoused the Marxist/Leninist ideology. The latter group was known as the Vashandi group for their socialist outlook. These groups represented deep-seated and diverse interests that the political leadership either had no capacity or was unwilling to resolve under a common nationalistic vision. The imagined nation therefore never coalesced into a solid entity whose various constituents had found harmonious accommodation in it. Both the Traditionalists and the Vashandi maintained some kind of contractual relationship within the nationalistic movement with a view of securing a niche in the new Zimbabwe. ZANU’s political leadership conveniently avoided serious ideological commitments in support of either the Traditionalists or the Vashandi group. Rather, the differences in ideological orientation of these groups were exploited in the battles for political turf by the political leadership. Chung perceptively hints that because of the power balance that favoured the Traditionalists/Militarist group led by Josiah Tongogara, the ZANU military supremo, the political leadership withdrew into a cocoon as the Vashandi were ruthlessly suppressed during the Nhari Rebellion. All this was despite the inherent shortcomings of the Traditionalist group which included their fixation with tribal theories of conspiracy which if allowed to blossom were sure to undermine the solid foundation of the imagined nation. Conflicts within the movement were always interpreted by this group along tribal allegiances resulting in the friction between the Manyikas and the Karanga led military leadership during the

Nhari rebellion, or the suspicion of a Zezuru conspiracy at the formation of the Front for the Liberation of Zimbabwe (FROLIZI). What Chung's narrative interrogates from within is whether ZANU as her preferred dominant political force of a future Zimbabwe ever built a solid foundation for the postcolonial nation. Her thesis exposes a deliberate and strategic management of difference that reduces a nation to an illusion that nevertheless, for its own existence, represents itself in emotively real images. Yet this does not abolish difference, or ameliorate the circumstances in which it occurs, and hence the homogenizing rhetoric of the nation project is exposed as a sham. With the advent of independence, Zimbabwe has clear marginal spaces which Chung, because of her insider position, depicts as undermining the core. In this adopted position dialogue is smothered, the "them" and "us" dichotomies that come to typify the Zimbabwean body politic become entrenched. Nationalism becomes narrower and thinner as to exclude all those who are viewed as challenging the hegemony of the centre. Paradoxically, in the name of the nation, at this stage nationalism "fails to speak to its own people", and opts to suppress "the politics of subalternity" (Radhakrishnan, 2001:200). It thus can be argued that Zimbabwean nationalism as projected by ZANU had inherent contradictions which militated against the integration, first of its liberation forces, and then various ethnic groups in the post independence era, into a democratic and all accommodating nation. It is just as Radhakrishnan maintains that as a mode of narration nationalism falls short of representing its own reality and its own people.

A further paradox of Chung's representation of the constructedness of the nation of Zimbabwe is that while she refuses to acknowledge the legitimacy of the other liberation forces such as ZAPU in the struggle, and the unconditional participation in the nation project of ZAPU's support base, the Midlands and Matabeleland, in the independence era, she also strategically distances herself from the apparent inimical tendencies of the Traditionalist/militarist group and the ideologically bankrupt political leadership. She carves her niche within the Vashandi group, where as a university lecturer and later as an educationist within the movement, she propagates the critical need for a liberation that is buttressed by a clearly defined ideology. By taking such a position in the context of the liberation war, she identifies with a persecuted group, a group that is viewed with suspicion and exists at the fringes of the militarily dominant force in the ZANU liberation effort. She is consciousness of her existence in the marginal zones of the liberation movement, and even confirms that "it was a serious disadvantage for me to be both socialist and not black"

(p. 174). Even within her chosen liberation movement, Chung therefore articulates herself from a position of double marginality that is defined at the levels of ideology and race. She declares that she was “not prepared to join the right wing”, nor could she change “the colour of [her] skin to please them” (p. 174). A very intricate character of marginality is unravelled in Chung’s experiences, specifically that the generally assumed homogeneity of the core is a veritable illusion. The core has its fringes that, depending on the criteria used, can stand out very distinctly from the innermost core. At certain moments, what Chung’s narrative does is to rupture the core along the fault-lines of ideology and especially race to a point where she is almost asking whether she could ever be Zimbabwean enough. The years 1974-1977 were the most difficult for her as the right wing of ZANU attacked her on the grounds of race and accused her of betraying a condescending demeanour when dealing with her black counterparts. Her ideological orientation and proximity to the young generation of freedom fighters meant that she was considered a constant danger by the right wing traditionalists/militarists who enjoyed an advantage in the balance of power in the liberation movement. These fundamental rifts account for the fragility of the nation at independence where it is clear that neither nationalism, nor circumstances of victimhood under colonialism, nor mytho-cultural factors had interpellated the Zimbabwean elements into subjects of the new nation.

Efforts to consolidate the nation project in the post-independence era were to suffer from a lack of solid and broad “hailing” acts that could achieve effective subjectivation of the entire populace. The ruling elite of the new nation did not evolve a clear ideological path in the new dispensation, rather maintaining a politics of convenience euphemistically covered under the policy of non-alignment while at the same time betraying a penchant towards the promotion of self-aggrandizing middle class ruling elite. Technically this meant the new nation faced another rift as both the superfluous lip-service to socialist ideals, as seen through rampant cases of corruption such as Willowgate, and the traditionalist ethos sustained in the struggle, are abandoned. In Chung’s perception, post-independence had only meant a “change in the class dominance in the ruling party, from a peasant dominated movement governed by the values of traditional religion to a middle class political party geared to promoting the interests of that class” (p. 261). This was not a middle class with any orientation in a self sustaining ideology, (Fanon, 1968) but rather steeped in opportunism and self aggrandizement. Typically the tribal and ethnic card became important for one to qualify into the inner circle of the nation, with open

hostility being shown to sectors of the population that were deemed threats to the narrowly defined nation project. Within the ruling party the situation in the post-independence era reproduced “the internecine conflicts of the 1970s in ZANU between the privileged and educated university elite and the less educated freedom fighters who had been recruited from the neglected peasants” (p.286). Once again Chung’s narrative attempts to negotiate the self into a strategic position of semi-alienation that would enable her both to partake of the contractual benefits availed through associations with those at the inner core of the new nation while at the same time professing ideological puritanism. The self is thus cast as an astute political judge who is in a position to dismiss both the periphery as unpatriotic and the inner core as ideologically bankrupt. The narrative in this way scaffolds the image of its subject and maintains her on a superior moral and ideological pedestal from whence she can minister on the direction the nation should have taken.

### **5.3.6 [S]heroes In vain: The Location of Women in Colonial and Postcolonial Zimbabwe in Chung’s *Reliving the Second Chimurenga*.**

One of the salient acts performed by Chung’s memoirs is to attempt to articulate the marginalized location, from a female perspective, of the subject from the centre stage of the liberation struggle where the critical narratives of nation are constructed and contested. This is achieved through references to the narrowed space and devalued status afforded to women in general in the envisaged new order despite the active and physical roles they might have played in the struggle. The nationalist narrative is portrayed as striving towards a consistent negation of women’s participation in the processes of nation construction while at the same time valorising men’s roles. Nagel (2005) theorizes the intimate historical and modern nexus between manhood and nationhood. Categorically Nagel identifies the domination of masculine interests and ideology in nationalist movements, sexualized militarism, the interplay of micro-masculine cultures and nationalist ideology and the designation of gendered spaces for men and women in national politics as the initial components that determine and influence the construction of nations in masculine terms. The import of these observations is in that “the culture of nationalism is constructed to emphasize and resonate with masculine cultural themes” (ibid:119). Zimbabwean nationalism is thus not only a gendered discourse but one that spells a perilous path for women both in and after the struggle.

Mama's probing questions on what roles women played in the anti-imperialist struggle and how this "affected their position in postcolonial states" (2001:258) is also useful in the effort to understand the marginalized circumstances of women in Zimbabwe. This is important because as much as Chung is an insider and privileged at one level, she is also an outsider from a gender perspective where male attitudes force her to consort with the generality of women in the new nation. Political autobiography here betrays its inherent ambiguity that allows it to be manipulated to express both the condition of marginality and dominancy. Chung's identity thus fluidly inhabits the porous region between power and powerlessness. In Zimbabwe and elsewhere in the developing world, women took part in the nationalist struggles as fighters and party activists, but this did not translate into recognition at the end of the war (Mama, 2001, Nagel, 2005). There is a disconnect between contribution in the struggle and co-option into the participatory processes of national construction. This has authenticated the view that Zimbabwe, alongside Algeria, are veritable cases where "men have reneged on their promise to share the fruits of independence" (Mama, *ibid*, 259) with their female counterparts. Radhakrishnan is more incisive in his deduction that the "ideological disposition of nationalism toward its people or its masses is fraught with the same duplicity that characterize its attitude to the women's question" (2001: 200). Nagel (2005) once again locates this janus-faced tendency of the nation historically by positing that the everyday micro-culture of masculinity, where apparently innocent masculine values are played out in the home and community, are reproduced on the national stage to articulate both the nationalistic and militaristic ethos. In the ZANU liberation movement Chung castigates the military leadership for taking liberties with women fighters and seeking to portray this as the venerable tradition that defined African identity. In taking these liberties the military men, led by General Tongogara, even "opposed both contraception and abortion" (p.125) and demanded sexual favours as a reward for perceived invaluable roles in the struggle.

The use or abuse of women during the struggle was already entrenching the fundamental valuations with which nationalism rated the man and women who participated in the liberation of the nation. Women were subjected to pressure by the men "to remain in supportive, symbolic, often suppressed and traditional roles" (Nagel, 2005:120). Men viewed their role in the construction of the nation as elevated and thus deserved reward, and women were the trophies. The inherent contradiction of nationalism is borne out by the fact that different groups within the nation subscribe to different contractual agreements and the terms of these contracts determine



how each group is located in the nation project. It is in this fact that Chung sees the intrinsic marginalization of women from the centre of the narrative of nationalism. If the contractual terms consisted of being “warm blankets” (p.126) for the fighting men in the struggle, then their future terms of relating to the central forces in the nation could not be far from the domestic realm where their roles would be supportive of the men. It is this trend that leads Chung to conclude that post independence Zimbabwe did not bring with it much critical transformational changes to women’s status in the nation. Such a transformation could only be possible if the new nation prepared itself for the challenge to “re-examine its heritage from the past and to create a new culture and values for the future” (p. 328). There is an inherent contradiction in this proposal since those who have appropriated the role of the makers of the nation, the men, have vested interests in tradition and the relationships fossilized in it. Nationalism because of its janus-faced nature thrives from redeployment of traditional values as well as pretensions to the modern. The memoirs register a serious concern over the adherence to traditional property ownership law “which disinherits women” (p. 288) in post independence Zimbabwe. This trend betrayed a resurgence of oppressive traditional custom in what had been constructed as a modern nation and all to the detriment of women who remained locked up in prescribed marginal spaces of the nation. Their roles in the struggle for the liberation of the nation are understated in the narrative of the nation, and calls for recognition in the post- independence era are contained within the largely patriarchal attitudes of the leadership of the new nation.

This section of the chapter argued that though Chung constructs her identity and that of the nation from a relative position of privilege as a middle class Chinese migrant in Rhodesia, she does so from a more alienated location than Lessing who belonged to the English stock. This enabled her to surpass the limitations of Lessing who is so embattled by the Empire and Rhodesian epistemes of identity as to barely suggest practical alternatives of nation. Lessing’s conception of alternatives largely remains on the idealistic. Chung suggests practical involvement in the construction of new selfhoods through active participation in the liberation struggle. From the vantage position of the liberation struggle, Chung, unlike Lessing, is able to destabilize assumed identity formations in nationalistic as well as gender politics. From a gender perspective, and as much as she enjoyed relative privilege as an educated woman who was also highly placed in the structures of ZANU, she is able to claim that she experienced the war in ways that were closer to what African women at the battlefield experienced. To the contrary,

Lessing's world is remote from the grinding poverty and oppression that African women lived through every day. However, there obvious limitations in that Chung explores these heavily nuanced identities from the partisan position of an insider in ZANU, which makes her more amenable, though with some critical alertness, to that party's formulations of nation. The next section will focus on Judith Todd's memoirs, *Through the Darkness*, in order to explore constructions of nation and self from the personal perspective of one who is variously placed; first at the epicentre of colonial politics as the Rhodesian Prime Minister's daughter, then as persona non grata to subsequent Rhodesian regimes, and secondly liberal supporter of the Zimbabwean nationalist cause, and finally as self professed victim of the same nationalist cause.

#### **5.4 Judith Todd- *Through the Darkness***

##### **5.4.1 Rhodesia's outcasts: Possibilities of New Selfhoods in Judith Todd's *Through the Darkness***

If Lessing was concerned more with white identities as constructed in the discourse of colonialism and empire, while Chung largely does so in the context of Zimbabwean nationalist politics, in contrast Judith Garfield Todd's (2007) *Through the Darkness- A Life in Zimbabwe* is a groping attempt to interpret the Zimbabwean experience from the personal perspective of the author. The memoirs attempt to reconstruct the life experiences of the narrator from the time of her birth to missionary parents at Dadaya Mission in Zvishavane. Important landmarks of the narrator's life, such as her political involvement both by virtue of her birth to a father who at some point is the Prime Minister of colonial Rhodesia as well as through activities in the Zimbabwe Project Trust are sketched. It is the activities in the Zimbabwe Project Trust, because they spun across the colonial and post independence era, that are used to define the multiple and complicated identities of Judith Todd.

*Through the Darkness- A Life in Zimbabwe* does offer itself, in generic terms, so much as an autobiography as it is a memoir. Chennells (2009) grapples with the lack of generic specificity and wonders whether Todd's memoirs can be read as autobiography. This generic complexity allows it to straddle between the porous boundaries of categorization in an intricate way that enables it to explore the possibility of new selfhoods in the marginally designated spaces of both colonial Rhodesia and independent Zimbabwe. The autobiographical element is achieved

through the rendition of life experiences of the self by the subject herself, experiences which intrinsically define an inner essence of the self. Yet Todd elects to temper the narrative record of her life by hinting that it is the culmination of “notes and copies of letters” (p.2) collected over the years and that the narrative is “neither a history nor an analysis of events” (ibid.). Chennells (ibid) further raises concern over the open ended nature of the records that Todd relies on for the construction of her life, a point which hints at the multiplicity of identities that can be drawn from them. Yet there is an inherent contradiction in Chennells’ implied insistence on “the authority of presence” carried in the title of his article. The implication is that physical presence when events unfold guarantees narrative truth. In effect Todd is thus given authoritative voice in the narration of critical events that shape both herself and the nations of Rhodesia and Zimbabwe in a way that seek to refuse to be subjected to alternative ways of interpretation. Political auto/biography in this way can be read as seeking to authorize itself as the only version of truth about the events the narrator would have witnessed. It betrays reductive tendencies that seek to silence alternative voices on the basis of absence from the scene. However, such a position can be contested on the grounds that truth or reality is never a given but is constructed and sifted through the mediums of vocabulary, ideology or political inclination.

By refusing to locate *Through the Darkness* in history or under ‘events analysis’, Todd intends to barricade herself from competing interpretations of the self and nation as constructed in her narrative. Such ingenuity situates the narrative ambivalently in the realm of memoir which McArthur (1992:650) describes as a “written record of people or events as experienced by the author; ...that gives particular attention to matters of contemporary interest not closely affecting the author’s inner life.” It can be surmised that the strategy to distance the narrative act from the emotive involvement of the subject narrator is meant to create an aura of disinterested and objective, and therefore incontestable, truth in the way events and experiences in the subject’s life are narrated. What Todd intends to achieve is a pre-emptive defence against perceptions of narrative bias towards the self project, a typical characteristic of the auto/biographical genre which claims incontestable truth values by virtue of its first person rendition of experience. Nevertheless, no amount of self-professing can ever take away the fictive element which intrinsically defines how we make meaning of experience both at a personal and collective level. More so, the negotiation for self identity and national belonging for those who are placed at the margins is inherently imbued with interest and promotion of the cause of the self. Promoting

certain desired images and perspectives of the self involves conscious selection, and at times unconscious sifting, of experiences and meanings associated with the subject, and hence the reconstruction is coloured by subjective interpretations.

Judith Todd's text strives to construct its subject narrator as inhabiting the fringes of Rhodesian colonial society. This narrative strategy is also meant to provide for her smooth passage to a liberal ideological position that would enable her to identify with the African nationalist cause. However, what undermines this strategy from the onset is that her liberal inclinations alone could not erase her privileged existence as the daughter of a former colonial Prime Minister and a member of a powerful racial minority in Rhodesia. Thus to a great extent, both in the context of Rhodesia and Zimbabwe, Todd's claim to marginality sounds a bit more contrived than genuine. In the case of Zimbabwe, the fact that she maintained contacts in high circles of the ruling party that she so reviled (p.306) is testimony of her privileged position after the nation gained its independence. Even when this claimed condition of marginality is variously and complexly implicated in gendered nuances that purport to represent the voice of the present-but-never-heard groups at the edges of the nation project, particularly women, Todd's circumstances were never comparable to those of the African women both under colonialism and after independence. As such, these marginal spaces from which the subject narrator purports to negotiate for self identity and national belonging need proper contextualization.

The narrative pretext to the identity of Judith Todd indexes her within the loose reference terms of race where she is part of the progeny of white settlers in Rhodesia. The allusion to the subject's birth circumstances, being the daughter of white settler missionary parents from New Zealand (p.1), is as terse as it effectively defines her by race. This brief but meaning-loaded natal record is immediately unbundled to reveal encoded identity assumptions that attend to one's birth into a particular race group. Significantly, to the Africans at Dadaya the arrival of the subject narrator in March 1943 is regretted as the "birth of another white" (p. 1), an act that firmly identifies her with the Rhodesian settler community that is privileged with power. This designation does not, on the initial instance, leave room for alternative modes of self identification that may depart from the political and ideological polarity that characterize the colonial situation. It also fails to acknowledge modern scholarly thinking that hereditary

characteristics do not explain cultural variations (Eriksen, 2005), or that at best that race ideology is a fallacy (Appiah, 1993).

*Through the Darkness* reveals that Africans in Rhodesia prefer to interpret the subject narrator as born into a specific race group whose conception of own identity depended on negating them. The gulf between the two race groups is hinted by the fact that as Garfield Todd, the subject's father, appraised the African community at Dadaya of the progress of the Second World War the Africans were actually cheering Hitler on and hoping that he "would get rid of you [white] colonists for us" (p. 1). All whites are identified as colonists by the Africans, a term of reference that see them as collectively privileged and refuses to recognize different categories within the white community such as the liberal missionaries. The experiences of the colonized in Rhodesia, as elsewhere in Africa, taught them that white liberalism directly fed into white racism that pushed them to the margins of colonial society. Thus no amount of liberal views and practices would convince the colonized that they shared the marginal space with individuals from the white race. Paradoxically the settler community at large viewed the liberal missionary community and their sympathies for the Africans as inconsonant with the desired white group identity and white nation project. It is this ambiguous space that Todd's political auto/biography tries to manipulate in order to claim a condition of marginality. What is constructed therefore is a contrived identity of a self that cries from a human wilderness in which both settler Rhodesia and the aspired for African independence are grotesquely distorted concepts that fail to accommodate society's humane values.

In the Rhodesian context, Judith Todd's claimed habitation in the spaces of marginality is given a historical precedent through the father, Garfield Todd, who, driven by his belief in the inherent injustice of a system that promoted the political domination of a few over the majority in Rhodesia, worked "towards a democracy that would embrace the entire population" (p. 1) instead of the numerically insignificant white group. The underpinnings of Garfield Todd's political philosophy is informed by something akin to J. Leca's submission that "to be legitimate, power must be based on inclusion and equality (be it only formal) among citizens" (Mbembe, 2001:39). The extent to which this thesis of inclusion and equality has to be balanced out with the reality of social stratification, whether based on race, ethnicity or economic status, constitutes the paradoxical riddle that characterized both white Rhodesia and the postcolony of Zimbabwe.

Political auto/biography here attempts to negotiate between the ambivalent spaces of privilege and powerlessness, with the intention of constructing an identity that is compatible with revolutionary progress for its subject narrator.

But for Garfield Todd it was specifically this political philosophy and sympathy for the Africans that was perceived as endangering the Rhodesian nation project. Critical to the Rhodesian nation project is a core of white settlers, mostly immigrants from Great Britain, who would champion the construction of a Europeanised nation in the model of Australia or New Zealand (see Godwin, Lessing, Chung). Intrinsic in the philosophy of the settler core group in the Rhodesian project is a racialised concept of being that outcasted the Africans from the national space, and in varying degrees, the other white groups whose patriotism to the group cause was held in question. But to all intentions and perceptions, all white groups no matter how variously located within the settler nation project, remained closer to the powerful core compared to the Africans. Even when Garfield Todd is removed from political office in 1958 he is viewed with suspicion only to the extent of being monitored through arrests and political restrictions by the new regime. But such political inconvenience cannot constitute marginality for him or his family, a condition that would imply total powerlessness. Judith Todd nevertheless exploits her father's liberal position that stood in opposition to imaginings of a desired Rhodesian nation to construct a self identity that is apparently gravitating away from Rhodesian modes of being. For her, occupancy of the Rhodesian 'marginal' space is given existential form through banishment into exile in 1972 after a stint in prison for perceived political activities interfering with the Pearce Commission (p.2). The significance of exile as an imposed condition of marginality is in its capacity to open channels for the exploration of new selfhoods and new modes of belonging, and thus through political auto/biography the Judith Todd charts new identity cleavages with the black nationalist cause and its formulations of nation and self identity.

Implicitly, the narrative in *Through the Darkness* fractures the concept of a Rhodesian nation that purports to house diverse race and ethnic groups while at the same time designating them as less significant and peripheral others. It reveals a preference for a racially less assuming grouping based on cultural and historical commonalities as the basis of nationhood. The grand concept of the Rhodesian nation based on the unifying effect of Western civilization is abnegated in favour of the reducible and heterogeneous groups that are viewed as largely sharing historical

memory, myths and culture. Judith Todd thus sees the possibility of new nationhood based on nationalistic sentiments that bring together the various African groups in Rhodesia. This she declares at the time Smith imposed the UDI, concluding that majority rule “would have to be fought for” (p.1). However, the envisioning of a Zimbabwean nation as opposed to Rhodesia is from the onset hinged on an unstable assumption that national cohesion will naturally be achieved permanently on the basis of shared historical memory and culture. Todd’s thesis from the beginning underplays the fact that an overemphasized consciousness of difference could always supercede patriotic sentiments and common belonging to the African race and degenerate into ethnic considerations that would undermine the national consciousness that in the first place would have inspired the liberation struggle (Fanon, 1968). Therein lays the shortcoming of Todd’s construction of the Zimbabwean nation. It refuses to accept that nations are born out of serious contradictions that may only appear to be resolved at the surface when deep under they continue to define the course of events in the nation.

The support for the liberation struggle through the Zimbabwe Project Trust (Z.P.T.) articulates Todd’s dream of what the alternative to the Rhodesian project must be, and after independence, the stark instabilities in such a formulation. This even goes against the grain of accusations that she and the ZPT were always intimately attached to the Zimbabwe African People’s Union (ZAPU), (p.59) (also Chung, 2007), a fact that would make her conception of the Zimbabwean nation problematic given the contestations from rival parties like ZANU. It can be surmised that from the beginning Todd’s imagination of Zimbabwe was not consistent with what people in the other political parties, say Chung, imagined. The inherent weakness in her construction is in that it is too heavily informed by an anti-Mugabe and ZANU, and decisively sympathetic to Nkomo and ZAPU to the point where it constitutes a one-sided political narrative. Political autobiography in this way lives up to its character, that is taking sides and promoting a desired agenda. Todd painstakingly, even against all odds, tries to make her narrative refuse to declare her open allegiance to the political party of her choice. The narrative strives to strike a code of neutrality, almost in vain, so as to enhance the political and moral stature of its narrator as she engages her perceived adversaries in the effort to proffer alternative modes of identity. This way she builds her thesis to the effect that Zimbabwe’s course to viable nationhood was disturbed by selfish interests by those who assumed power at independence. She reduces the complex problems of nation-building to a single equation with Mugabe, who is accused of creating the

“impression that he is Zimbabwe and anyone who voted against his party voted against Zimbabwe” (p.94) as the sole culprit. It is a thesis that borrows itself to Mayer’s (2000, 12) observation that it is the elites who often construct the nation, and that these have the “power to define the nation in ways that further their own interests”.

Mayer (2000) further argues that the same elites determine who should occupy the marginal and central spaces of the nation project. The veneer of a compact, homogenous project is fragile, and the various constituencies once accommodated under nationalism are defined by their contractual obligations to the centre. Each constituency or group come to realise that shared nationalist consciousness rises in the wake of grave national danger and ebbs when the common danger recedes. When that happens, what then holds the various interests in a loose assemblage is the social contracts to a perceived common good. Like in a business empire, when contractual obligations are perceived to be violated, preventive and even punitive measures are taken against the perceived culprit. Fanon (1968) contextualizes the inevitable disengagement of the various forces that once grouped under nationalism to achieve national liberation once the colonial oppressor was removed. National belonging graduates from a promising dream to a nightmarish experience where minorities are not only sidelined but often faced with ethnocidal elimination. All this is contextualized in what Nkomo, in an interview to the Sunday Mail of July 7 1985 called the “tragedy of tribal states” (p. 95). It is the possibility of ethnocidal elimination in the Matabeleland region in the early 1980s that implicates Judith Todd’s life to the point she constructs an identity of victimhood that is louder than that of the people at the centre of the debacle. In constructing the narrative of Gukurahundi Todd refuses to critically consider the Zimbabwean government’s viewpoints on the conflict, thus embedding herself in the politics of anti-establishment.

The embattled situation in which Judith Todd finds herself both in colonial Rhodesia and independent Zimbabwe is conflated to echo circumstances of the generality of women in the two nations. Political auto/biography here makes a claim for its subject, specifically that she belongs with the historically subordinated. This narrative of the female victim of gender politics however barely narrows the gap between Todd’s circumstances and those of the African women she wishes to fraternize with. But nevertheless she attempts to appropriate discourses that advance the agenda of the self as a character rising from victimhood to fight for noble causes. The



situation of women is used to bring out the ambivalent position they occupy and the symbolic role they play in the processes of national construction. At one level, women embody the nation, its virtue, character and its reproductiveness (Mayer, 2000: 98). The nation is always identified as a 'she' and just like the woman it is conceived of as the sacred abode of those values that are worthy defending, worthy dying for. This symbolic overlap between nation and woman on the immediate level propels the women to the centre of the nation project with men strategically positioned in defence of this grand edifice. But the fact that both women and nations need men to defend them means that there is an inherent shortcoming in their constitution that cannot allow for their free and unencumbered development without calculated curtailments from their guardians, the men. Despite their being, as Mayer (2000) posits, "symbols of purity, nurturers and transmitters of national values and reproducers of the nation's warriors and rulers", women are susceptible to seduction, physical molestation and contamination. The woman's position in the nation is thus characterized by both reverence and suspicion, and depending on the mood of the nation she is either extolled or reviled. Extolment and revilement are essentially both methods of control, of exacting conformity to male articulated values about the nation on the women. Through these methods of control, women inhabit precariously dangerous spaces in which they not only experience pressure to conform to men's conceptions of nation, but are in constant danger of being excluded, temporarily or permanently, from the nation project. In this way the nation itself is husbanded by a core group, usually male, whose ideals and interests are peddled as bearing the national character.

The Rhodesian regime viewed Judith Todd as the embodiment of a nation gone awry, and thus sought ways of containment that would make her conform with radical settler ideals of white nationhood. Her arrest in 1972 and subsequent imprisonment in Marandellas (now Marondera) (p.2) scuttles any pretensions to criminal procedure. Judith Todd is confined in the male prison, as if to suggest that by objecting to the direction that the male white rulers of Rhodesia had given to the nation she had trespassed into the male domain. As such, the male guardians of the nation exercise their privilege by withdrawing their protection of her, and instead exact ways of enforcing conformity. Incarceration in a male prison achieves the object of effectively pushing her to the margins, not only of the settler community, but of those who shared the same gender as her. The psychological effect is that of completely de-voicing the convicted subject from possible interaction with others, Africans or settlers, especially women who could sympathize

with her political stance. The Rhodesian authorities' objective is only subverted through narrative which in retrospect enables Judith to voice, for herself and on behalf of the muted others at the edges of the Rhodesian nation, an alternative way of conceiving the nation.

The release of Judith from incarceration is only achieved after international pressure on the Rhodesian authorities. Yet the view that she had become contaminated by liberal ideas, that she remained a serious risk that could infect the whole Rhodesian nation, remained central to those who had positioned themselves at the centre of the nation. The trope of disease is invoked to capture the feared danger to the mortal body of nation. If conformity could not be guaranteed, total exclusion of the diseased subject, the perceived danger to the nation as imagined by the settlers, was the next most viable option. Total exclusion, to the best it could be carried out, implied banishment from the physical spaces that were legally demarcated as the Rhodesian nation, and that return would specifically mean to jail. More critically important, exclusion meant that the name, and implicitly the ideas, of the proscribed subject could not be published in any media in Rhodesia. Judith Todd's narrative throws some light into the shadowy crevices of the Rhodesian nation in particular, and into nation projects in general. It shows that despite the nation's self representations as democratic and accommodating, at the core it is self-preserving and often viciously seeks to smother alternative views of conceiving the nation, and individuals or groups of individuals that threaten its own existence. Judith's liberal vision of a nation that could acknowledge the numerical realities of the demographic composition of Rhodesia undermined the very basis on which the Rhodesian nation was conceived upon. Her views take on after those of her father, Garfield Todd, but it is only her who is banished and not the father. In this way it becomes possible to argue that the right or privilege to contribute to processes of national construction is always implicated with gender meanings. The white woman in Rhodesia must satisfy the image of the faithful subject at the behest of the fathers of the nation, and any deviations are not countenanced and met with punishment and/or exclusion. The measures of exclusion are often harsher than those meted to male dissenters, presumably because males have an inherent stake in the Fatherland. Thus Garfield Todd suffers the inconvenience of incarcerations and restrictions, but never the aggravated exclusion from the fatherland through exile. The nation is only the Motherland when it is in crisis and needs to be defended, thus underlining its vulnerability, and the Fatherland when it has to be charted to greater heights, capturing its macho character. Nevertheless, exclusion appropriates for Judith an inner space

within the Rhodesian nation from whence her narrative subversively destabilizes constructed Rhodesian identities. The irony is in that the alternative nation project that she had envisaged in the form of a majority ruled Zimbabwe confirms the continued peripherization of the weaker and vulnerable groups in the nation.

#### **5.4.2 Todd and the new Zimbabwe narrative**

The birth of the new Zimbabwean nation is attended to by severe contradictions most of which had been embedded in the seams of the liberation movement itself. The internecine conflict between the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) and the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU), the two major political forces of the liberation movement, is barely contained beneath the surface at the Lancaster House conference. Even as the signatures were appended to the Lancaster House agreement, ZANU had decided to ditch the Patriotic Front arrangement to go into the elections as a single political force. Chung (2006:87), a ZANU political insider, categorically states that "ZANU was not prepared to share the leadership of Zimbabwe with the other three parties, namely the Front for the Liberation of Zimbabwe (FROLIZI), the African National Council (ANC) and ZAPU." With the announcement of ceasefire in 1979, Todd narrates the suspicions between the parties by noting that ZANU sent mujibhas and zvimbwidos to the designated Assembly Points instead of its combatants (p.10). These divisions spelt momentous consequences to the construction of the nation, and if anything, exposed the underlying fissures that would potentially threaten the nation with ethnic fragmentation. The alternative to the Rhodesian nation that Judith had envisioned, with the majority Africans forming the unified core of the new nation, had all the symptoms of a still birth in attendance.

The unity government formed at independence in 1980 was riddled with mistrust, and in its deep structure betrayed the ruling party's intentions of consolidating the apparent power advantage chalked at the war front, at the conference table and at the ballot. Such power advantage tended to define itself in terms of ethnic belonging, with ZANU having largely won the control of the Shona speaking regions while ZAPU largely controlled the western Ndebele speaking regions. Effectively this meant that the new nation was subject to a continued contestation, this time not between Africans and the settler community, but between the two dominant political parties whose political agendas had been ethnicized from the time of their split in 1963. The alleged discovery of the arms cache belonging to ZAPU in many ways can be read as a fortuitous

eruption of the political lava that would condense into, and define, the core of the new nation as opposed to its margins. Todd tries to dilute this narrative of political dissidence by countering that ZANLA guerrillas who had remained outside the Assembly Points had “easy access to arms cached across the country” (p.14), thus hinting at other motives in the handling of the discovery of ZIPRA arms cache. However, in the event that the arms had been cached for belligerent purposes, this then provides testimony to the contested nature, along the lines of political party and ethnic allegiance, of belonging to the inner spaces of the new nation. Judith Todd’s narrative in this way embroils itself in this complex process of nation construction, initially from the position of supporting those marooned by the war against the settler regime. In due course, the narrative’s major challenge is to prove that the subject narrator’s activities in support of those at the margins are not in conflict with what the national core regards as fundamental to the existence of the new nation state.

Nations, despite their apparent stability, are subject to turbulent tremors emanating from the activities of subject constituencies who continuously negotiate and manoeuvre for more strategic positions within them. Essentially thus, nations are always in the making, and in the case of Zimbabwe, independence was only a consolidatory effort to prop up the spiritually and culturally imagined nation that had survived Europe’s imperial onslaught (Chatterjee, 2005). Mbembe (2001) validly points out that the postcolony is not made of one public space, but of several, whose specific logics are nevertheless entangled with each other. The new nation thus is a stage on which different publics bargain for participation and belonging. Mbembe’s argument further posits that the postcolony is a “hollow pretense, a regime of unreality” (2001:108) that is chaotically pluralistic. Such an analysis when applied to the conception of the Zimbabwean nation explodes the semblance of stability that national reconciliation and majority rule was expected to bring about. Mbembe (ibid) insists that “it is in practice impossible to create a single, permanently stable system out of all the signs, images and markers current in the postcolony.” Judith Todd’s experiences, for better or worse, give testimony to this character of the nation through the Matabeleland debacle that was unleashed by the discovery of the arms cache on two ZIPRA properties.

### 5.4.3 The Gukurahundi narrative in *Through the Darkness*

The deployment of the Fifth Brigade, also known as the Gukurahundi, into Matabeleland and parts of the Midlands in the early 1980s sketched new margins to the political map of the new nation. Such new margins implied a shift in the way Judith Todd would identify herself in relation to the new centre of the nation. Rhodesia had excluded her both physically and discursively through exile and censorship of her existence in the press. She re-created herself by identifying with the black majority, even if only at the level of liberal philanthropy, that existed at the edges of the Rhodesian nation. African nationalism provided a new basis for a new national order that she hoped would accommodate everyone in a unified nation. However, the new nation tended to reveal to her the contradictions of nationalist consciousness which readily decomposes into sectarian interests the moment political liberation is achieved from the colonial authorities. Matabeleland and the Midlands provinces are designated hostile regions to the cause of the new nation and subjected to military operations in which civilians were decimated on the pretext of hunting down dissidents. It is in this way that the two regions, and by no coincidence largely Ndebele speaking, constitute a new marginality in independent Zimbabwe. The narrative is riddled with ingenuous ambivalence as its subject typically maintains the mantle of the periphery while at the same time claiming to be part of the original project of black majority rule. The inherent contradictions of such a scheme expose the complexity of the processes of identity construction both at the level of the self and the nation.

What emphasizes Judith Todd's consignment to the margins of the Zimbabwean nation is the fact that when she takes up the plight of the civilian population with the authorities at the centre of the new state she is immediately viewed as out of step. Her motives are viewed with suspicion and she is seen as a political sympathiser of the perceived enemy of the nation-state. The immediate allegations are that her "heart lay in a certain geographical part of the world" (p. 60), and this specifically referred to Matabeleland. The implications for self identity and national belonging are enormous, and in the ultimate reading meant that she was being excluded from that other geographical and political part of the world where the core of the Zimbabwean nation lay. Todd appears to miss the irony of how the Ndebele community itself ascribed certain identities to her. On visiting a certain Enos Ncube's rural homestead, she is introduced as Ma Khumalo, denoting a privileged belonging into the inner core of the Ndebele group. She is told that the

compliment befitted her because “you are not a Kalanga and you are not a Shona, You are Ndebele” (p.364), an explanation that firmly reveals how the Ndebele people perceived her. This is the same kind of perception that those in government have and use to label her and her ilk by extension, the weak entry point that could jeopardize the health of the new Zimbabwe nation in the politically unstable early 1980s.

Two critical issues that define the conception of a new Zimbabwean nation are brought to the fore through Todd’s experiences in the context of the Matabeleland debacle. The first is that despite the acclaimed reconciliation policy at independence, there was not much substance of this policy in the real forging of the new national bonds. The former settlers and the opposition PF-ZAPU party are assigned token spaces within the new political arrangement consistent with how the ruling ZANU-PF party perceived them from history. Simply stated, they had to be kept a safe distance from the central arena where the character and tenor of the new nation would be defined and dictated. Secondly, women, despite their mythicized centrality to the character of the nation, only access the central space through co-option and manipulation by men who are the real drivers of the nation project. As such they could be subjugated into conformity with male defined conceptions of nation or expended of totally if conformity could not be realised. In the case of Judith Todd, raising sensitive issues of the massacres of the people of Matabeleland and the Midlands with the Zimbabwe National Army commander is not only treated as political mischief from one of the white race, but from a woman. Her sexuality is thus made the first tool of control, of achieving a forced retreat from the traditionally male-dominated nation space. She is raped by one Brigadier Mutambara (p.51) as a way of sending a clear message that she had trespassed, that she belonged to only those spaces that men (here represented by the military) have designated for her. The female body is violated when it is deemed to be at variance with the imagined national character. It is conceptually separated from that which is to be defended, the nation, and targeted for punishment. Subjugation through rape comes with a violence that engraves a psychological and bodily effect of devaluation, of relegation, in the female victim. It invests the male molester with significations of control, of power, of occupancy of the central space of the nation. That the molester is a military man heightens the level of such signification. Mbembe (2001:158), explaining the representations of power and domination in the Cameroons noted that “with the help of the soldier’s uniform, the violence of the penis that “makes” a hole in a woman is indistinguishable from that of the gun that dangles and awaits its prey”. The

firearm “laid at the bedside” (p.51) by the brigadier next to the subject victim’s head captures the transmutable interplay between its lethal, eliminating effect and the image of the generative and subjugating power of the phallus. As a victim of this compounded subjugation, the subject narrator is left hanging precariously on the precipices of the nation project that threatens to deny her a voice to articulate her own self identity or opportunity to participate as a citizen.

#### **5.4.4 The Hollowness of the New Thing: Views of the Zimbabwean nation in Todd’s *Through the Darkness*.**

The nation always masks its fault lines under a facade of inclusivity, and its artificiality under invented ancientness (Hobsbawm, Ranger, 1983). It purports to cede ownership of the project to the people, the masses, when practically its fate is in the hands of the few who occupy its central space. Thus whereas the majority of Zimbabweans were overwhelmed by the realness of the moment and its unifying effect, the thing was fast taking after its predecessor by stratifying the populace and designating them to various spaces in relation to the core of the nation. Nkomo (2001) alludes to this process on the very day of independence when he alleges that the ruling ZANU PF had relegated him away from the limelight of the cameras and public view during the celebration gala despite his role as leader of one of the major liberation movement in the struggle for independence. Symbolically that sector of the populace who constituted his following in the liberation movement was also being pushed to the urges of the new nation project. It is this uncertainty about the viability of the new nation project that gives context to Judith Todd’s critical views of an aborted project. Alternatively put, it may be contented that there is variance in what Todd might have wished for the new nation and the way in which the liberation fighters conceived of the new Zimbabwe. In political terms, her narrative of the Zimbabwean nation offers itself unashamedly as the surrogate voice of the leader of ZAPU, ZANU’s bitter rival in the construction of the new nation.

Even as Todd returned to the country in 1980 she is already captive to a strong grip of doubt as to whether the new thing, the new nation, provided an alternative to that which it had displaced—the Rhodesian nation. To affirm her identity as Zimbabwean, a term which used to be “a forthright and sometimes provocative statement of support for future majority rule as opposed to existing white supremacy” (p.17), was beginning to sound hollow. The conduct of the elections which saw the major political parties contesting separately had began the process of undoing the

papering over the dreamt of compact Zimbabwean nation. As much as this political plurality is what underlies democracy, this also had the danger of opening up old vendettas which would divert attention from the urgent business of national construction. The means to achieving an inclusive nation in the aftermaths of the racially divisive Rhodesia had always been subject to debate and contestation. Judith Todd's reading of the nationalist struggle from the beginning borrowed itself to the less complex assumption that the Africans comprised a homogenous group whose every other perceived difference paled into insignificance in the wake of the national cause. This view prized the democratic process as capable of resolving questions of leadership in the post independence nation, hence the possibility of a solid nation under the vaguely inclusive majority rule of Africans.

The internal conflicts within the liberation movements, often bloody and vicious (Sithole, 1979, also Tekere, 2007 Muzorewa, Chung, 2006) are not given adequate attention in Todd's analysis as to allow an informed evaluation as to the mode they will assume in the post-independence era. There is a stubborn refusal to acknowledge the tendencies towards an oligarchic order that were already manifesting themselves within the liberation movements, which in due course come to typify the ruling ZANU PF party's vision of a new nation. These tendencies were embodied in ZANU's one-party state desire that essentially would place an oligarchic cadre of former liberation fighters, most likely from a specific coterie of the ruling party, at the centre of the nation. The dominancy of ZAPU in the Western parts and the Midlands of the country in the first elections threatened to frustrate the vision of a nation bound in the throes of a single party leadership as conceived by the ruling party. The ruling party's agenda of the nation defined ZAPU and the other minor parties as inimical to the desired singleness in the nation project, hence these had to be brought into the project forcibly or, if that could not be accomplished, they had to be excluded. Compromise was clearly a non-option as ZAPU's position on the matter was clearly articulated by Joshua Nkomo, who, on his demotion from the unity government by Robert Mugabe, announced that as much as the one party state dispensation could be the ideal order in the fragile young nation, it could not be "introduced without the unanimous agreement of Zimbabwe's entire population" (p. 35). Exclusion thus became a veritable strategy in the political engineering of a ruling party-desired Zimbabwe. Todd's reading of ZANU PF's understanding of the Midlands/Matabeleland problem approximates to what Erikson (in Spencer and Wollman, 2005:147) has called a particularist nationalist ideology which exudes



“mechanisms of exclusion and ethnic discrimination” more than the “mechanisms of inclusion and formal justice.” The nationalist narrative at such times will emphasize the friction between the dominating and the dominated group within the framework of the nation-state.

In her book, Todd seems to be arguing that the ZANU PF particularist strategy was initiated at first through a process of minoritizing certain ethnic and political groupings, and then through narrativizing their roles in the struggle in terms of insignificance. Enos Nkala, the ruling party’s minister of Home Affairs, crystallized this thinking by declaring that “Joshua Nkomo and his group [were] in government by the grace of ZANU PF” (p. 36). He also emphasized that their contribution to the struggle had been negligible and therefore were dispensable in the new order. Effectively, the notion of the Zimbabwean nation as wholesome, as devolving in equal measure to all those who are in it, - those who fought for it, and were ready to defend it, - is shattered. Inclusivity is maintained at the level of rhetoric, a necessary stratagem that gives the nation the desired image of coherence. This coherence must always be read as having its antithetical elements which are located outside the perimeter of that which can be included, and such elements are the subject of disparaging and negative focus in the state’s ideological and propaganda apparatus. In this logic, ZAPU is designated the oppositional element that threatens the coherence of the new Zimbabwean nation. The object of Judith Todd’s deconstructive narrative of the Zimbabwean nation is the equation where Robert Mugabe had come to exclusively symbolize Zimbabwe, with everyone who voted against his party being viewed as “having voted against Zimbabwe” (p.94).

Judith Todd’s narrative view of the Zimbabwean nation in *Through the Darkness* is intrinsically conditioned by a search of departures from the old order that was represented by the Rhodesian nation. The conception of Zimbabwe, in myth, history and contemporary struggle for her took the form of an inclusive and more humane alternative that aimed to restore the majority Africans to their land. Its hallmark as opposed to Rhodesia would be the removal of artificial barriers of race and ethnicity as the determinant factors to national belonging. The replication of these values in the new dispensation deprived the young nation of diverse views. The ‘hollowness’ of the new Zimbabwean nation is exposed through Nkomo’s purported observation in the aftermaths of the 1985 general elections. Nkomo is alleged to have described the electoral results as a tragedy that testified to how ZANU PF’s five year rule had “divided the country into tribal

and racial groupings, with the Coloureds and Indians finding it difficult to fit in anywhere” (p. 95). Beyond the categories of race and the ethnic, the ZANU PF-driven Zimbabwean nation project, obsessed with stripping itself to the naked core, disowned and disinherited the urban working masses who clamoured for space within the nation. In an act of appropriation of the nation space, Mugabe gave warning of his intention to displace the working masses in Operation Murambatsvina by denouncing the urban dwellers as “totemless” (p.430). In African cosmology, totems are a form of identity system that enable the existence of kinship and historically link particular groups to specific geographies. Urban dwellers in Zimbabwe are pushed to the periphery where they could not have any claim to the nation. The police Commissioner-General’s alleged description of the same group as “a crawling mass of maggots who were destroying the economy” (p. 430) effectively removes them not only from the nation space, but from the family of humanity. The family of humanity that could be accommodated in the nation project as envisaged by ZANU PF are the six million out of the thirteen million people, whom Didymus Mutasa described as “our own people who support the liberation struggle.”(p. 430). Because of these forms of limiting other people’s identities Judith Todd is alienated from the nation project that at one time had promised to be inclusive of diverse voices than colonially marooned Rhodesia. Together with the mass of the people, she is also effectively denationalized when her passport and citizenship of Zimbabwe is withdrawn, making her, alongside the masses who had over the years become critical of the ruling party’s policies, a permanent denizen of the marginal space.

The very ideology that inspires the political engineering of national entities, nationalism, is subject to internal instabilities and contradictions. A critical point to note is that all nations owe their existence to the fervent feeling of belonging to, and sharing, a common cultural history and myths that are perceived to be real and binding. This common fate is the basis for common struggle in building, defending and even projecting the nation to the future. Yet the appropriation of the nationalistic mantle by particular groups within one nation is a hegemonic exercise that involves physical subjugation of rival groups or extracting consent of deference, albeit under duress, to the politically or militarily powerful group. Judith Todd interrogates this development in the Zimbabwean nation. ZANU PF’s ascendancy to power in 1980 is buttressed by its alleged superior military and political gains during the liberation struggle. Basing on this claim it sought to entrench itself on the national space as the real nationalistic party while at the same time PF-

ZAPU and the other smaller parties were portrayed as harbouring agendas that were injurious to the nation project. Such a perspective from a ruling party is tantamount to the denigration of the role played by liberation movements such as PF-ZAPU in the construction of the nation of Zimbabwe. The narrative attempts to come to terms with the reality that PF-ZAPU figures like Joshua Nkomo, Lookout Masuku and Dumiso Dabengwa, who had donned the nationalistic mantle and been at the forefront of the liberation struggle, were now hunted down as the treacherous elements involved in the destruction of the new nation. Masuku and Dabengwa had been “valiant, triumphant warriors against the Smith regime” as they fought for an alternative order, but under the Mugabe regime they had become “helpless prisoners unable to lift a finger in defence of the thousands of their fellow Zimbabweans who were being smashed into the ground by ZANU-PF structures” (p.103).

Critical questions about the ownership of the nation project, the ambivalent meanings of belonging to its spaces for those who participate in its construction and those who are within its determined geography, and about the nation’s capacity to transcend its preceding modes beyond rhetoric take centre stage in Todd’s narrative. The new Zimbabwe depicted in the narrative is characterized by both consolidation of its critical mass that constitutes its core as well as dispersal of the perceived undesired elements. Nkomo is haunted into exile, while his aide-de-camp, Makhatini Guduza, fled to Dukwe refugee Camp in Botswana “to which so many fled over the years, first from Smith and then Mugabe” (p. 98). For certain groups whose ethnic belonging linked them to perceived undesirable political affiliation there is continued refraction from the centre of the new Zimbabwe, hence nothing changed from the experiences of the old dispensation of Rhodesia. Robert Thornton’s (2000) exegesis of the concept of the ethnic is enlightening to our understanding of Todd’s exploration of the Matabeleland crisis in the early years of Zimbabwean independence.

#### **5.4.5 The Construction and re-imagination of Ethnicity in Todd’s Through the Darkness**

To contextualize Thornton’s (2000) explanation of the ethnic we should go beyond the physical, cultural and social differences that normally feature in popular imagination as constituting the ethnic. It is also critical to recoup meaning from the etymological roots of the word *ethnes* in the Roman Empire. In the Roman order, the word *ethnes* referred to non- Roman peoples who had gradually become incorporated into the empire. In this sense, the ethnic is then conceivable in

terms of its relationship to the state. Alternatively, it can be submitted that ethnicities are emphasized by “power differences”, and whenever they are deemed to be in opposition to the state, and defined in the context of certain boundaries, they are often made the target of ethnocide, genocide or national cleansing. Todd presents her experiences in Zimbabwe and in Matabeleland in particular to provide testimony to what she sees as a deliberate policy of annihilation of the people of that region.

The same methods of exclusion used by the Smith regime such as disappearances, incarceration and murder are re-enacted in the new dispensation. This forms the crux of the paradox at the centre of the Zimbabwean nation where a significant part of its population, that is ethnic-specific, is subjected to exclusionary practices in the formative years of the young nation. What was wrong in the colonial regime is justifiable in the processes of consolidating the envisaged new Zimbabwean nation. It is in light of this that the narrative hazards the supposition that “maybe detention was wrong in those days simply because it was visited by whites, or by a colonial regime, on the representatives of the nationalist movement” but now could be justified on the grounds of “disloyalty to one’s peers in power” (p. 119). In essence therefore, beyond the grand framework of the nation as the holding force for those who imagine common origins, history, cultural and mythical values, there is always the intrinsic political imperative that sees the promotion of particular group interests at the expense or exclusion of others. This also means that beyond the democratic processes such as elections, and other forms of civic participation, the character and essence of the nation is defined, not by all in its boundaries, but by a few who wield political power in the nation. Those who wield power demand, in the name of the nation, unflinching loyalty from the subjects irrespective of their political disposition. On the basis of this ‘loyalty to the nation’, different groups are designated to different tiers of the nation stretching right to its periphery.

The arbitrariness and violence with which those at the centre of the nation allocates spaces for its others at the margins, whether in the colonial context or the post independence era, is critical for the conception of Judith Todd’s self identity. The narrative maintains a primary identity continuum in which the subject is constructed as the unheeded conscience against the excesses of state authority and the injustice of political oppression, whether by the minority over the majority or vice versa. In Rhodesia Judith Todd ambivalently attempts to extricate herself from settlers

and to identify with the African majority, while in Zimbabwe, despite protestations to the contrary, she seeks accommodation with the people at the margins, particularly those in the Midlands and Matabeleland. The whole profile of the self is built around the cause of the politically victimised, and the narrative can be read as an act of self-positioning within the ranks at the periphery. The periphery on the other hand embraces the subject as one of its own, an enduring voice that had exhorted them to resistance against white settler domination in Rhodesia. Thus when Judith Todd is introduced to the ZAPU war-wounded at Lido farm, she is readily accepted by the group since they had acquainted themselves with her 1972 book *The Right to Say No* at the time they were attacked by the enemy forces in Angola. Her political stance against the Smith regime and in support of the majority Africans is given as a definitive quality of the narrator's identity that defies primary patterns of identification such as race. The narrative allows its narrator(s) to escape the limitations of race identity in pursuit of justice and real liberation.

By taking a critical position to the Mugabe regime and comparing it to the Smith regime (p.170) the narrative steadfastly refuses the entrapment of its subject narrator within the narrow rhetoric of African nationalism which threatens the new nation with ethnic implosion. The subject narrator is uplifted to transcendental horizons where she is ensconced above both the Rhodesian and Zimbabwean nationalisms. Her activities, mostly in the area of sourcing aid funds for the liberation fighters and refugees through the Zimbabwe Project during the war, and rehabilitating ex-fighters after independence, mostly for ZAPU (Chung, 2007), an issue that antagonized her from the ZANU-led government, are thus presented as endeavours to achieve real and meaningful Zimbabwean nationhood and true liberation. The Mugabe regime is, just like Smith's before it, criticised for foreclosing the democratic space and betraying tendencies of ethnic persecution. It is in this context that the narrative plays a defensive role for its subject who is seen as consistent and resilient from the days of Rhodesia right up to Zimbabwe. Even at a time when she is viewed as a security risk by the Zimbabwean state, she is defended as someone who "fought and suffered for the liberation of Zimbabwe" (p.80) and continued to do so after independence. Her involvement with the ZAPU members incarcerated on allegations of treason after the arms caches discovery and the victims of the Gukurahundi atrocities in the Midlands and the Matabeleland regions becomes not only an indictment of the failure of the Zimbabwean nation, but a pointer to the work that needed to be done for the realisation of an inclusive nation. The subject appropriates pole position in this nation building exercise, and declares that she

accepted the responsibility of assisting the “anonymous, the unsafe, the hurt, the incarcerated” (p.184). This indeed buttresses her claim to belong within the ranks of the subaltern category that has been silenced and pushed to the edges of the new Zimbabwean society.

## **5.5 Conclusion**

Overall, this chapter has argued that white female auto/biographers narrate their identities from a double position of dominance and marginality. Their dominance arises from the fact that as whites they were at least privileged even when this privileging was not even or uniform. No one can argue convincingly that Todd was a subaltern like white women who were house wives, let alone like black women, or like the Chinese immigrant like Fay Chung, or even the working class immigrant like Lessing. Yet one cannot ignore the dynamics of gender within the white community that often relegated women to positions of marginality in the colonial context.

Lessing constructs her self-identity away from the authorizing institutions of settler Rhodesia, but her belonging to the British stock and white race in general avails her with alternatives that are closed to the indigenous African woman or the Asiatic migrant like Chung. Her conception of nation destabilises the Rhodesians’ recourse to the paradigms of the empire, but does not seriously go beyond this to envision a significant role of African nationalism in a new nation. Neither does she seriously acknowledge the possibility of a local settler nationalism that could thrive, to the detriment of African nationalism, under the shadows of fading imperialism. In terms of the positioning of the self, she remains ensconced in a zone of relative power where she can be seen as enjoying relative privilege compared to other groups within the Rhodesian nation. As such, her constructions of both self and nation do not significantly liberate her from the dominant discourses of the empire.

Chung, as a Chinese migrant, narrates both self and nation from the outskirts of the Rhodesian body politic. Because of her condition, she weaves herself alternative forms of identity that locate her within the nationalist movement where the possibility of new nationhood is advanced. She goes beyond Lessing’s constructions in that she practically as well as ideologically transcends the limited constructions of self and nation implied in the vocabulary of empire. In this way again her political memoirs allow for the creation of an identity that straddles the polarities of dominancy and subalternity. As a vanguard in the ruling party she enjoys relative

privilege and power while as a woman in the thick of a liberation struggle she is subjected to conditions of marginality that tradition normally imposes on women. Todd on the other hand carves her identity in the ambit of contradictions where, as the daughter of a colonial Prime Minister, she hails from a position of power. Her life path is embellished with choices that are not imaginable in the lives of the other two women. That she chose to “love the underdogs” (p.201) as a way of imagining alternative selfhoods and nation can nevertheless put her on the same footing with those she purported to support. As such, her efforts to re-invent her identity as victim, champion for liberation and empowerment activist remain locked within the trappings of privilege and power. The limitations of her constructions, beyond remaining within grid reference of nationalist politics, is that she projects the images of Mugabe and Nkomo, in negative and positive terms respectively, to the extent of submerging her own identity and voice.

In the construction of the nation, the three women’s narratives give their offerings in order to deconstruct masculinist narratives of the nation. Race as the basis for the construction of the nation is dismissed as a fallacy, while particularist nationalism is seen as fragmenting the nation. However, none of the three writers have devoted sufficient space to the exploration of the lives of women, of whom they are part, by virtue of biology. While for Chung and Todd the nationalist ideology is revealed as inadequate, because of the absence of viable ideology that scuppers efforts at national construction, the two female authors’ critique has been carried out largely using the political language typical of male elites. For example, there is an insistence in Lessing, Chung and Todd on delineating the struggle against social tyranny in a linear way doled out in phases described as oppression under colonialism, oppression during the struggle and oppression after independence. This teleology underestimates the struggles also occurring between poor men and among the gravid mass of poor women within the same periods. The choice by the three female authors to discuss more of the politically defined nationalist movements and their attendant discomforts they bring, tended to dis-enable the authors from embracing a truly female-centred approaching in defining the self and the nation such as those we find in, Dangarembga’s *Nervous Conditions* (1988), or Vera’s *The Stone Virgins* (2002). The politics of female authored autobiographies is hinged on the fact that protagonists found a voice for middleclass women that does not sufficiently echo with the day to day experiences of the ordinary women.

In other words, the answer to Spivak's (1988) question 'Can the subaltern Speak?' is responded to in a narrow conceptualization of female selfhood and nationhood. Lessing, Chung and Todd revealed that the subaltern can speak, but not with a cohesive voice, and that sometimes the subaltern middleclass women can speak through the male influenced discourses of mapping out the contours of self and nation. Despite these criticisms, it is important to argue that Lessing, Chung and Todd, nonetheless chart critical discursive territory which nevertheless though not exhaustive, bring out the political nuances that can be explored through autobiographical writing, while still demonstrating that there is no single way of constituting the self and the nation even in the so-called upper middle class women. The three women's voices differ and defer to masculine modes of authorizing identities of self and nation. To this extent, their contradictory insertion in self and national politics point to potential, though not vigorously complicated assumptions of cultural identities. Chapter Six of this thesis will explore life narratives that are situated outside the overtly political arena invite useful political readings of their constructions of self and nation. The focus will be the life narratives by black female authors, Tendayi Westerhof's *Unlucky in Love* and Lutanga Shaba's *Secrets of a Woman's Soul*



## **Chapter six- Diseased Identities: Black Zimbabwean Women and the Autobiographical HIV/AIDS Narrative**

### **6.1 Transcending Generic Ambivalences and Definitional Ambiguities.**

The preceding chapter analyzed three auto/biographical works/memoirs by three white Zimbabwean women. Its focus was to critique the ways in which minority white/Asian female writers' experiences in Zimbabwe/Rhodesia shaped or influenced constructions and perceptions of self and nation. The chapter revealed that the three white female authors use their works to image their own identities and the nation to which they belonged and felt excluded from in different ways. For example, Lessing shows that it is possible to conceive of self identity and nation outside the legitimating structures of settler tradition and state authority. The process of narrativizing the self is thus projected as an act of extricating the self from established and orthodox institutions of society that often suppress reflexive responses to individual experience. Lessing thus attempts a delineation of self and nation in settler Rhodesia that defies the imaginary logic of the imperial metropole that insisted on racial superiority and values of modernity. The strength of her narrative strategy is instanced in the appropriation of vantage spaces of marginality from where alternative images of self and nation are constructed.

This is to some extent similar to Chung who radically situates constructions of alternative selfhoods and nation not just at the margins of the Rhodesian nation, but outside it. Migrancy and her non-Caucasian identity places her outside Rhodesian epistemes of self and nation. Notwithstanding her privileged position in independence Zimbabwe, Chung's narrative goes beyond Lessing's in that it experiments with new modes of being as expressed in the Zimbabwean nationalist struggle, even critiquing the ideological premises upon which the new forms of being were to be constructed. It also locates and projects its subject from a gender perspective where it seeks to broaden the horizon for women's participation in the construction of their own identities both in the nation and at the level of the self. Judith Todd complicates both notions of self and nation by permanently designating herself the peripheral space both in the context of Rhodesia and Zimbabwe. Her memoirs also attempt to anchor the subject in the politics of gender in its formulations of identities, but are nevertheless hamstrung by its lack of breadth as it does not effectively accommodate the concerns of the ordinary and black African women. Fundamentally Todd's work builds on both Lessing and Chung by further highlighting

the fault-lines in the way identities are constructed and assigned in both Rhodesia and Zimbabwe. It particularly gives an incisive critique, even if it is informed by partisan interests, of the identity politics of the postcolony of Zimbabwe. The white writers dealt with in the previous chapter have shown themselves to be seized with identity constructions within the ambit of race and/or nationalist politics. We argued that the distinctly political element in their writings is that they confirm each other's constructions even as they also interrogated Rhodesian and nationalist constructions of nation. Further, Lessing, Chung and Todd by the standard measure of ordinary black Zimbabweans white writers with different experiences. Even when the three writers write from the perspectives of advantaged middle class women the differences they register in narrative the self and nation is that of degree and not of kind. We submitted that these differences though not wide, nonetheless reveal the effect of the political consequences of narrating oneself via the form of autobiography that necessarily advance certain political interests meanwhile suppressing other identities of the selves.

In contrast, in this current chapter, I shift from a preoccupation with white female writers and focus on two black female writers, Tendayi Westerhof and Lutanga Shaba. These two authors are unique because their autobiographies deal uniquely with private experiences of HIV and AIDS, a once-taboo subject in Zimbabwe that is associated with domestic, individual spaces and, individual identities more than the public political sphere we have seen dominated by nationalist political movements. The chapter demonstrates that what defines the 'political' aspects in Westerhof and Shaba's autobiographies is that there is not so much the pre-occupation with political forms of rebellion that give individual identities. I argue that their works deal with 'non-political' issues that have huge political consequences for the re-formation of personal and collective national identities. These writers seek to show that race and nationalist politics are not necessarily the only defining factors in the conception, construction and assignation of identities in both Rhodesia and Zimbabwe. Mule's conception of the political in women's artistic works emphasizes the elements of disguised or fictionalized women's life narrative from the margins that is depicted as a "seamless fusion of the self and the social" that amounts to "the radical and ideological politicization of African women's narratives" (ibid, 97). Women's autobiographies through HIV/AIDS narratives in Zimbabwe also "mobilizes the politics of identity... through the

paradigm of self referentiality in order to challenge the strictures placed on all women in their societies” (ibid, 94).

This current chapter explores how black female writers negotiate their identities out of victimhood to subjects of their own life stories. The thrust in this present endeavor is to expose the disparate subjectivities experienced by women and obtaining within the contexts of gender, race and nation. My analysis of the works of these two black female authors will be complemented as well as complicated by a selective but informed use of the critical and theoretical ideas of feminist critics such as Patricia McFadden, Ashleigh Harris, Susan Sontag and Deborah Madsen, among others.

Tendai Westerhof’s life narrative *Unlucky in Love*, and Lutanga Shaba’s *Secrets of a Woman’s Soul* are works that have been described as a “semi or disguised autobiography”(Ngoshi and Zhou, 2010). Westerhof’s narrative has also been qualified as based on “true story” (Westerhof, p.1). These descriptions are important in that ‘semi-autobiography’ suggests a fusion of fact and fiction, while to say these works are based on ‘true story’ means some important aspects of the writers have been fictionalized. But whether there are huge chunks of the writers’ lived experiences in their works or not, the process of narration implies that authors have selected some aspects of their lives and excluded others. In other ways each of the works is constructed, which implies artifice, exaggeration or understatement. Therefore the challenge is to prove in the first instance whether the narratives qualify to fall under the auto/biographical genre, while in the second whether they satisfy the descriptive of being political autobiography. The thrust of this chapter will rest on the argument that what has been described as semi-autobiography falls within the broad parameters of what is generally referred to as life writing. Life writing, by all definition, remains a loose assemblage of narratives of all manner that focus on the experiences of the self. It will be posited that the self can only be defined effectively in the context of others [as in other people] as well as its ‘other selves’ [as in other self identities not promoted or actually struggling to remain permanently unsuppressable] that may not always be surfaced but nonetheless are ever present, threatening, at every potential moment, to question the authenticity of the oneself that is given prominence through any act of enunciation whether written or oralized. Thus the intricate labyrinth of the subject narrators’ lives and the lives of those

significant others in their lives will be treated as testimony of the complexity of the auto/biographical narrative.

Thurman, (2006), contents that the term life writing is tautological in the sense that all writing is based on either tangible or imagined experiences. In essence this means that generic distinctions blur to a point where it becomes possible to include traditionally left out quasi life narratives in the study of mainstream auto/biography. However, Thurman (2006:110) alludes to the combative nature of life writing which he further defines as engaging “with the histories of particular people’ and thus has the capacity to “foreground and promote the dignity” of the individual(s) who are the subjects of such narratives. Coullie (cited in McGrane, 2004:145) also testifies to this ambivalent nature of life writing by noting that the term refers to “that range of representational practices in which the subject seeks to depict the lived experiences of her or his own life or another’s. The theoretical premises of this chapter thus draw from the notion that representational practices, especially through the mediated form of life writing, are never stable (Coetzee, 2006, Giddens, 1991, Berryman, 1999, Bruner, 2001, Brockmeier and Carbaugh, 2001 and Smith and Watson, 2001). The act of (re)presenting, be it the self or one’s others, is characteristically inspired by value-laden motives that tend to seek to essentialize the constructed identities.

The central motif in Westerhof and Lutanga’s narratives is HIV/AIDS and the broad social implications it has spelt for individual lives and the nation at large. Taken both as metonym and metaphor, the question of HIV/AIDS raises significant politico-ethical problems of ‘representability of life’. Hayden White (1987) argues that the value of narrative representation is its knowledge as well as ignorance to the fact that what it depicts is version of several potential narrative stories of the self. This implies or is related to whether or not attempts to locate the self and the nation are not ultimately ‘diseased’ or jaundiced in the sense that quests for identities have often been colored by perceptions and attitudes vis-à-vis one’s status in relation to HIV/AIDS. Madsen (1994) distinguishes between metonym and metaphors. She says metonym is a sign that aspires towards stability whereas metaphor is inherently unstable. In other words, and as Vambe (2003) observes, as metonym, HIV/AIDS is a lived reality and does not necessarily require symbolization; an infected person is not a symbol of anything. He or she

suffers as an individual when the body is ravaged by the disease. Vambe (2003:474) argues that the “disease is so real and concrete for readers (as well as sufferers) [that] turning it into an emblem of anything else is difficult.” However, when read as metaphor, AIDS can represent other meanings outside its lived reality; it can stand for the state of decay of the nation through the figure of the affected person.

An analysis of Westerhof’s *Unlucky in Love* and Shaba’s *Secrets of a Woman’s Soul* brings these contradictions of signification of self and nation through metonym and metaphors clearly. The problem of HIV/AIDS thus ceases to be just a biological (health) and moral issue, but assumes political connotations that warrant subjective narrative representations and/or interventions from across the gender divide. If political auto/biography in the preceding chapters was identified or characterized by open forms of rebellion from the grant narrative of ‘patriotic history’ (Ranger 2004), Westerhof and Shaba sidestep and revise this narrow definition of the political. Their concerns modes of survival for the self and nation in the context of HIV/AIDS and oppression by the patriarchal order. The texts invite a re-reading of how identities are constructed and assigned to individuals from both sides of the gender divide, race and nations in an environment where the scourge of HIV/AIDS redefines male/female representations. What ideally would be perceived as a personal matter, that is one’s health, explodes into the public domain where it ruptures orthodox views about individuality, gender, race and nation.

HIV/AIDS compounds the already vicious onslaught on African women by both colonialism and patriarchy and further relegates them to the nether regions of obscurity. Wisker’s (1999) reading of the fate of South African and Aboriginal women gives relevant context to both Westerhof and Shaba’s quasi-autobiographical narratives. She validly argues that “otherized triply because of gender, race and class, for black women silence and subordination is often seemingly an inescapable state” (ibid, 72). Yet she sees a breakthrough from this doom in the form of the life narrative in its various mutations. With reference to the South African and Aboriginal women Wisker posits that through semi-fictionalized autobiographical forms “women write out against such colonization and silencing” (ibid, 72). Wisker maintains that the semi-fictionalized autobiographical form is favoured by female writers for its capacity to challenge as well as sometimes being co-opted to be in tune with male authored narratives of self and nation.

However, the autobiographical form in its various shades is welcomed by contemporary women such as Westerhof and Shaba because it “enables not only the establishment of individual identity but an expression of the identity and experiences of a people, a community for whom the individual speaks” (ibid, p.74).

HIV/AIDS ushers in a discourse of contami/nation that contests any pretension that there is an easy way out in constructing images of the self and nation. Grand and celebrated constructions such as nation are read as fractured along multi-fault lines and therefore contaminated and unsafe. The AIDS pandemic is one such fault-line that renders the quest for stable and fulfilling identities within the nation, particularly for women, problematic. Women’s life narratives emerge to directly address the politics of HIV/AIDS as it affects not only how they are located in their personal relationships with the opposite sex, but from a race and class perspective, and in the nation. It is just as Coullie (cited in McGrane, 2004) justifies her focus on women’s life writing in South Africa, noting that such writing “challenges any notions of an essentialized, universal femininity upon which the subjugation of women relies”(p.145). If imperialism and patriarchy assigned peripheral identities to women, the advent of HIV/AIDS worsened their circumstances. As McFadden (1992) observes, HIV/AIDS has forced the close examination of the intimate spaces where the politics of sex are played out. She posits that now attention is on “how sexuality is constructed and played out in both the public and private areas of life, what the relationships are between health/wellness and disease/unwellness and their relevance in our social behavior”(ibid, 157). The unprecedented calamity of HIV/AIDS has also imposed significant trends in contemporary writing, one of which, according to Dodgson (1999:88) is “the increasing importance of women writers and the consequent focus on women’s situation in society.”

## **6.2 Global Perceptions of Africa, Women and HIV/AIDS**

African life narratives on HIV/AIDS need to be read and understood within the broad global constructions of Africa, blackness and the pandemic itself. The point of departure in such an exploration is the understanding of HIV/AIDS, just like Africa and blackness, as a phenomenon constructed, as much as it is physiological reality, through the language of science and medicine (Treichler, cited in Arnfred, 2004). It is only then that its political implications at the level of

individual relationships, race and nation can acquire meaning. Such an approach would also enable an informed analysis of how identities are imagined, constructed and projected in Africa and within the context of HIV/AIDS. The analysis will draw its hypothetical assumptions from the west's ideological imaginings of its others whose antithetical existence is critical for its own existence. Early discourses from the West on the disease were couched through science and medicine in a way that sought to link it to Africa and subsequently to the black woman. Vambe (2003:473) building on the work of McFadden, modifies this view further by arguing that the medical viewpoint with regards to HIV/AIDS emphasized "heterosexual relations as the dominant mode of transmission." In this way the woman, especially of Africa, remained a critical aspect in the politics of HIV/AIDS spread. Africa's existence in the Western perception was always cast in terms of negativity, a necessity for Europe's need to conceptualize itself as representing the positive forces of life. Africa was perceived as devoid of life-sustaining forces of enlightenment, of reason, and given to treachery, unbridled sexuality and disease. Europe invested in science, psychology and social anthropology so as to create and manage the images of the Orient that were so critical in the definition of itself as the model of civilization (Said, 1978). It is therefore important to highlight from the very onset the fact that Africa "has been represented in extremely catastrophic terms as the lost continent" (Paton, cited in Arnfred, 2004:97). It is in this representation of Africa by the West where we can trace the purported original link between the continent and HIV/AIDS. Jungar and Oinas (Arnfred, 2004:97) make reference to a Western "mythological understanding of HIV/AIDS as something specific to Africa" and argue that such "assumptions and questions are based on and reproduce colonial imaginations of African sexuality." The African female who embarks on writing a life narrative that has to engage issues of HIV/AIDS is thus confronted with myths and pseudo-scientific theories that seek to condemn her individual self, race and geography as the embodiments of threatening forces.

Paton (1997) exposes the extent to which the West invested in creating myths that linked HIV/AIDS to a particular race. He observes a veritable trend in the 1980s where Western science was fast consolidating around a particular construction of what was referred to as "African Aids" (p.397). Through this process the West had aimed to distance itself from the scourge, and moved on to show Africa as afflicted by the disease beyond redemption. This construction of "African

AIDS” was rationalized on the grounds of supposed differences between European and African sexuality, with the latter being much baser and closer to nature than the former. According to Paton even the spreading patterns of the pandemic had to be explained in a way that made the African the natural abode of the disease. The Genital Ulcers Theory of the late 1980s sought to rationalize the fast spread of the disease among the Africans by arguing that Africans are afflicted by genital ulcers which increased the transmission rate of the virus from women to men. More than just creating perceptions of HIV/AIDS as an African disease, such constructions in the ultimate instance targeted the African woman as the source and vector of the disease. As such, the representation of African women in HIV/AIDS narratives is a complex engagement and negotiation within the politics of hetero-sexual relationships as well as damning global perceptions about them in the context of the pandemic. Arnfred (2004) situates these complicated relationships between males and females in the context of AIDS in colonial enterprise and how it generated images of the metropole’s others. He cites Victorian and Evangelical (and White male by implication) notions of femininity and sexuality that underlined the division of the mind from the body, with the mind being the male and the body the female. The logic of this notion is further developed to construct the woman as body, and therefore the carrier of sexuality. The only redemption thus arises if the woman upholds her chastity and self control, thus assuming the image of the Madonna as opposed to Whore.

Colonial discourse projected sexuality as savage, and therefore in its most raw form it is associated with the African. In Western imagination therefore, African sexuality is something that is reducible to pathology, with the implications that African women negotiate their identities in heterosexual relationships from a compromised position. McFadden (1992:164) underscores this point by observing that in intimate sexual relationships involving men and women, be they through mutual consent or abuse as in rape, “male dominance invariably places the woman in a victimized position”. Gilman (1989:302) argues that “black women are targets for projection in a double capacity (as women and as black), thus becoming sexual beings par excellence.” Conflations of race and gender into the sexuality of the black woman’s identity are extended to give historical constructions that associate her with filthy and disease. In the first instance, the racialization of dirt and illness enabled the colonial order to designate the black woman the outermost marginal spaces (Burke cited in Ashleigh Harris 2008). Vaughan (1991:133), (also



McFadden, 1992) comments on this inherited colonial perception by observing that in the case of AIDS, “women were seen as the principal carriers of the disease.” Ashleigh Harris (ibid,41) further commends on the deliberate “extension of bodily dirt to a broader state of moral dirt” that is perpetuated in colonial syllabi and later on superimposed as the basis for the construction of identities of black women with HIV/AIDS in the Zimbabwean postcolony. In this way the sexualized female body, more so if it is African, can only be imagined in terms of corruption and disease. There are obvious implications of this perception on the intimate domains of sexual relationships, expression of sexualities, negotiation of identities between women and men and within wider communities. It is these implications that explain the perturbing connections between discourses of dirt and disease that Ashleigh Harris (ibid) makes from the ruling ZANU PF sponsored Operation Murambatswina (May- July 2005) whose ostensible objective was to clear urban spaces of illegal structures. Her conclusion is that “current discourses around HIV/AIDS in Zimbabwe are in danger of constructing HIV/AIDS sufferers as the epitome of the “moral dirt” so reviled in Murambatsvina” (p.49) intrinsically captures the critical thematic concerns of the HIV/AIDS autobiographical narratives in Zimbabwe. Tendai Westerhof’s *Unlucky in Love* delves into the intricate nature of identity politics in a contemporary society where issues of gender, race and HIV/AIDS threaten to significantly change the social fabric of whole societies.

### **6.3 Tendayi Westerhof- Unlucky in Love**

#### **6.3.1 Gender, Race and the Politics of HIV/AIDS**

Hare-Mustin and Marecek (1998:125) argue that “conventional meanings of gender focus on difference” and that these meanings “emphasize how women differ from men and use these differences to support the norm of male superiority.” This understanding of gender entrenches modes of practice that force women to occupy the less significant roles or spaces of society and even seek to naturalize such roles as the status quo. Once given the aura of convention, such an understanding seeks a distraction from the fact that gender refers to the roles into which individuals are socialized by society. As such it is a social construct, thus can be defined as the “socially mediated differences [that] can be explored apart from biological differences” (ibid,

126). The process of gender socialization itself is imbued with values and implications that ultimately manifest themselves in certain forms of identity expression.

Westerhof's *Unlucky in Love*'s attempt to engage the problem of HIV/AIDS in Zimbabwe begins from a gender perspective where women are compromised since they are already perceived culturally as the source of the problem. Perhaps this creates a much needed theoretical backdrop where concepts of feminism are employed to explore the mediation of identities by contemporary women in Zimbabwe. More aptly, as Naidoo (2010), citing Woodward and Mastin, intimates, the beleaguered location of woman in traditional African patriarchal society, especially in the context of the AIDS pandemic, invites them to experiment and modify feminist tenets into more accommodative variants of black womanhood. In the wake of HIV/AIDS, Naidoo asserts that the notion of black womanhood invests the AIDS narrative with the space to construct a "great black woman" who "is characterized by strength, determination, accomplishment and the ability to balance a personal life with professional obligations" (p. 61). It is the strength to confront the apparently insurmountable odds that are thrust on women like Rumbi, the ability to redefine one's identity in a society that is keen to religiously adhere to its normative identity prescriptions and voice it in unapologetic terms that is celebrated in Westerhof's fictionalized autobiography.

The HIV/AIDS problem in Zimbabwe at the turn of 2005 is said to have already reached catastrophic levels with one person in every four sexually active people being affected (p.2). Chari (2001) gives even a bleaker picture of the effects of the pandemic by submitting that analyses of media reports in the early millennium showed that between two to three thousand people died of AIDS related ailments every week. This revelation to begin with projects the nation as literally diseased. What makes it even irredeemably so is the chastisement that as much as the pandemic has become a reality, "we are masters at ignoring the truth" (p.2). What is under scrutiny here is the Zimbabwean collective conscience or psyche that has barricaded itself from the reality of the HIV/AIDS scourge. The narrative thus projects a diseased collective Zimbabwean identity that is locked in denial mode to the detriment of the individual citizen. Such a projection is also obviously problematic in the sense that it not only echoes the West's thesis of the Third World as lost to HIV/AIDS, (Jungar and Oinas, 2004) but also tends to ignore

the politics of resource availability and poverty in such countries. Willis (2002) has corroborated to this grim fact of the predicament of Africa and the rest of the Third World by citing poverty as a critical factor in the spread of HIV/AIDS infections especially among women and girls in particular.

The narrative in the disguised autobiography also tends to expose the nation through its pretentious attitude as the crucible of death where the most vulnerable group, the women and girls, are put at great risk to infection through negative socialization. The subject narrator Rumbi betrays her traditional socialization in which women are viewed as dirty and the source of disease. In the wake of the pandemic that has afflicted the Zimbabwean nation, Rumbi quips that she had “an inkling that it is the women’s fault somehow” (p.2). What perhaps she does not realize at this point in the narrative is that her hunch on the matter is deeply ingrained in cultural socialization, and that it is her society that constructed the woman as the lesser other who is the potential killer through her sexuality. More than the infected body, for women it is their socio-cultural consciousness, that aspect of their social being that informs their identity that is metaphorically diseased. And it should be noted that in patriarchal African society the socio-cultural awareness of women is largely determined by the men, and whatever vestiges of women’s own sense of being is confined to the darker regions of the collective consciousness. A critical aspect of women’s straitjacketing into ready-made identity roles in patriarchal society is the expectation that they fit into rigid definitions of good womanhood in their specific societies.

The women are expected to satisfy the cardinal virtues of good womanhood, viz piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity (Welter, 1996). By so subscribing to this definition of womanhood, women become a mere function of male conception of their identity, and by not questioning this they become willing objects of male definition or vectors in the own sexual and cultural demise. The male dominated society takes advantage of this situation to express womanhood in terms of negativity. Thus there is always a complicit admission that in the case of HIV/AIDS women are part of the problem of its origin and spread. The HIV/AIDS narrative creates a paradox of identities where both victim and culprit are diseased.

The narrative locates the construction of gender identities in the realm of Shona socio-cultural matrixes that construct women not only as appendages to men but also as the imperfect and grosser form of the human family. Rumbi agonizes over the fact that women in the Shona society are never allowed an independent conception of their identity. Their identity is always delineated in relative terms to some male figure in their lives. The most expressive aspect of this tendency is manifested in the fact that women lose their names at marriage and adopt their husbands'. A name is an expressive coding of one's identity, and abandoning one's original name results in the deformation of the original conception of who one is, in terms of identity. Adopting the husband's name substitutes a critical element of the woman's sense of self with something that is relative and elusive to grasp. It is in this sense that Rumbi's quest for a new identity as a married woman, as Horst's wife, can be interpreted as infected at two levels. At the very first instance, she vigorously pursues the quest to drop her own identity and become "Mrs." somebody, as if to imply that just being who she is was inadequate. Such a mindset derives from a socialization that emphasized the unwholesomeness of a woman in the absence of the stabilizing presence of a man in her life. Thus Rumbi admits that the "the quest of being a married woman was so important to me ... that I immediately put in motion the various bureaucratic activities that would formalize my becoming Mrs." (p.19). In seeking fulfillment of her being in relation to patriarchy's expectations, the subject narrator is acknowledging an anomalous and diseased conceptualization of her own identity.

On the second instance, the conceptualization and construction of Rumbi's self identity is not only driven by the need to have just a man in her life, but a white man. Her "Cinderella dream" was that she was escaping the original identity as "Rumbidzai Chawora, a vegetable girl from Ndarama Mine settlement"(p.16) to land herself "a wealthy, handsome, white husband"(p.16). The psychopathic death wish for the self can only be understood in pathological terms where the perceived inadequate self, hence diseased, seeks redemption in whiteness. This pattern fits neatly in Fanon's (1952) general analysis of the colonized where a psychological onslaught has engraved the mentality that *to be* is to become white at whatever cost. For the black woman, her circumstances under a patriarchal order have conditioned her that *to be* in the first place is to become a "good woman" as defined by men. To have one's identity defined in relative terms to a white man thus becomes the ultimate realization. From Fanon's exegesis of the colonized's

identity crisis, it can be inferred that the conception and construction of women's identity is contingent upon their blackness as well as gender. Rumbi's arrival at full being comes into perspective with the prospect of marriage to a white husband. She is no less a victim of the cultural and psychological barrage that has projected whiteness as representing purity, security, wealth and power.

The illusionary force of such a representation of whiteness presents a mirage that disables the subject narrator from interrogating the forms of being so promised, nor contesting the embedded meanings carried in the metaphor of whiteness. Rather, the flight from an original self, from blackness to use Fanon's idiom, is rationalized by retrieving matter from the subject narrator's subconscious repertoire. Rumbi recounts a very vivid dream she had at the age of eight in which she stood before the altar in white wedding gowns and with a white man by her side (p.9). Years later in her adulthood, when looking at Horst's photograph, she recognized that he was the man in her childhood dreams. The consummation of the subconscious experience in the form of a dream into real prospect in the form of Rumbi's relationship to Horst invites some foray into Jungian explanation of the psychological and spiritual nature of dreams. For instance, can the dream be treated as just mere attempt to justify the subject's obscene psychological craving for whiteness, or is it an expression of a suppressed subconscious reality whose fatalistic nature cannot be avoided by the subject? Jung (1974) distinguishes between what he calls the prospective and compensatory functions of dreams. He posits that the compensatory aspect is when the unconscious "adds to the conscious situation all those elements from the previous day which remained subliminal because of repression or because they were too feeble to reach consciousness" (ibid, 43). In this case the dream is a manifestation of repressed experience. Since Rumbi had not experienced marriage or intimate relationship at the time of her dream, it thus could not be the result of the compensatory intuition. On the contrary her dream could be read as wielding the prospective function which according to Jung (ibid) is "anticipation in the unconsciousness of future conscious achievements, something like a preliminary exercise or sketch, or a plan roughed out in advance." This is to say from childhood, and given the colonial background that conceived of experience in binary terms with whiteness as positive and blackness as negative, Rumbi grew up predisposed towards whiteness. Her dream therefore is not prophetic in any way, but is in Jungian terms "an anticipatory combination of probabilities

which may coincide with the actual behaviour of things” (ibid). Rumbi seems keen on capitalizing on the coincidence between anticipation and event by giving it an aura of fatality. This explains why the matter of the dream is deposited with “the local pastor” (p.9) as if to underline its spiritual significance to the later life and identity of the subject.

In the context of Zimbabwe and the HIV/AIDS pandemic, Westerhof’s narrative suggests that the construction of women’s identities is deeply embedded in the cultural attitudes of the societies in which they live. Ashleigh Harris (2008) builds on Sontag’s thesis (1991) of a cultural apprehension that tended to construct African female bodies as syphilitic and capable of spreading the disease by non-venereal means in public places. Harris sees this as the basis upon which society begins to moralize about HIV/AIDS with the result that the infected are then condemned. Historically, Shona and Ndebele cultures in Zimbabwe tend to betray a vested interest in controlling female sexuality since it is viewed as susceptible to unacceptable excesses. Female sexuality is also seen as the potential source of contagion and thus a threat to the wellbeing of society. The narrative shows that such attitudes are not limited to the Shona and Ndebele cultures as the tentacles of patriarchal oppression are manifested in other cultures that Rumbi encounters. Her experience in Saudi Arabia reveals the way the patriarchy and/or religion has compartmentalized society in terms of gender and race, with men arrogating to themselves the responsibility of defining what women should be and what spaces they should occupy. She realized that women were not allowed in public spaces and no ablution facilities were provided for them in such spaces. As much as the Saudi Arabian case borders on the extreme, it is critical in showing how women are defined bodily and spatially.

Closure of spaces for women is undergirded by a patriarchal and/or religious belief that they are a potential cause of disharmony to normal order. Female sexuality, which refers to attitudes, beliefs and practices of sex by women, is seen as instinctive and subject to licentiousness to the point where it can disturb social order. It can also bring bodily disorder through the vector effect where sexually transmitted diseases are passed on to sexual partners. Women are viewed as threats to civilization, and as such the Saudi Arabian society, like other world societies, tend to believe that “the very emblem of civilization is female chastity, and conversely, uncontrolled “free” female sexuality is the root of evil, sin and disease” (Arnfred, 2004:67). Men have an

interested stake in constructing women in such images, as this elevates the man to moral and political superiority. When Horst is diagnosed with HIV in Dubai, his immediate reaction is that it is the female body that contaminated him. Thus he rants at Rumbi with acerbic accusations saying, “It’s all your fault you bitch. They tested me for HIV and I am positive. I must have got it from you” (p.8). This is the naming or constructing of woman as loose and dangerous. The effect of such descriptions is to exclude women and render their voices silent. The choice of diction as in the term “bitch” augments notions of lack of moral control, looseness and contamination. What Horst sees and understands as the cause of his predicament is what Arnfred (ibid) describes as the “unbridled black female sexuality, excessive, threatening and contagious, carrying a deadly disease”. It does not arise to Horst that he could be the one contaminating his partner, and in any case the long term insinuation is that either way he must have got it from some woman. This perception of women as carriers of disease is even buttressed at the level of society where Rumbi observes that “no one seemed to believe that Horst had AIDS but everyone blamed me” (p.95). McFadden (1992:159) puts Rumbi’s dilemma into perspective in the broader context of sexually transmitted diseases when she observes that “in Africa, STDs still carry the double stigma- of being sexually related as well as being believed to be a “woman’s disease.”

The narrative in this way operates at a paradoxically complex level where, over and above the implied diseased identity of women, the society at large is also infected as evidenced by its symptomatic fear and pretension of its men who deny the reality of the disease in them. By striving to carve up sterilized identities that can only be contaminated by the woman, men bring to the surface the gender politics involved in constructing, assigning and projecting identities of the self’s other. At best, the process of identity construction is always implicated in acts of maneuvering the self into positions of advantage. This involves grotesque acts of transgression, aggression and buttressing of desired identity images to a point where society or part of it is seen as perpetuating morbid perceptions of its other various components. Westerhof’s narrative thus transcends the parochial view of women in the Shona culture as the bitches who spread the disease to expose the whole society as diseased. In this way Westerhof’s narrative is as ambiguous as it is complex. At the first level she seems to comply with cultural perceptions that make the woman the embodiment of disease while at another she consciously challenges those very same cultural assumptions. It is the later stance that fortifies her to go public, an act that

calls for strong resolve and determination to live positively with her condition. This is not withstanding the fact that her going public can be read in various ways that can yield different meanings. The overall statement that comes out is that the Zimbabwean society is sick to the core as revealed in the observation that “our people are... always happiest over someone else’s misfortune” (p.90). This statement is underlined as a collective behavior of Zimbabweans, a collective identity. Identities therefore are never free of blemishes, whether of a physical or metaphorical nature. The HIV/AIDS pandemic in this sense has not only afflicted the individual, but also the body of the nation that needs to come to terms with its socio-cultural and economic effects in the same way the individual quests for therapy. In the ultimate the narrative suggests that therapy to the nation can only be realized through acceptance of the HIV/AIDS scourge not only at the official level, but at the level of prominent figures going public about their HIV status. Put differently, whether Shona or European patriarchy constructs women as sources of evil and as diseased, Westerhof effectively challenges such a discourse as based on cultural ill-conception.

The politics of HIV/AIDS assume even more complex dimensions in the narrative where beyond gender there are perceptions that seek to explain the pandemic in terms of race. Innuendoes that link the HIV/AIDS virus to the African begin to emerge the moment Rumbi’s husband, Horst, is asked to undergo medical examination, including for HIV infection, as a condition for the job on offer in Saudi Arabia. Horst, who is a white man, from the very onset betrays a logic that convinces him that the medical examination is done on him specifically because of his intimate association with Rumbi, a black African woman. In other words, had it not been for this association, the Saudis would not even suspect him of being contaminated. Thus as he refused to undergo the tests Horst protests that “they (the Saudis) think all Africans are infected” (p.7). What is most intriguing is that in protesting against the Saudis’ attitude towards the Africans, Horst is oblivious of the fact that he is part of “they”, that at the subconscious level he also believes that as a European he cannot be the source of the contagion. In his ranting against Rumbi he regrets having listened to his friends who advised that he “should marry a Zimbabwean” (p.27). In effect what this means is that deep down in his psyche Horst assigns HIV/AIDS a national label, a signification that made it a Zimbabwean disease. It is at this stage that it dawns on Rumbi that Horst was insinuating that “if he had HIV then he must have got it



from [her] because [she] was an African” (p.7). Thus beyond the embarrassing treatment at the hands of the Saudis, Horst’s bitterness is targeted at the woman whose gender and race he believes is the source of the disease. For him such an identity label completes the equation where HIV/AIDS is not only assigned a female identity and associated with a black race. Both Horst and the Saudis are caught up in a mindset that appropriates higher moral ground to themselves whilst demoting women and Africans, to the darker abyss of disease and licentious immorality. To this end, they are also constructing their own identity narratives predicated on the negative other. Such narratives are also contaminated in the sense that they refuse to acknowledge the scientific rationale that show that the HIV/AIDS virus knows no biological identity or race. In this sense they can be read as sponsors of the pseudo-narratives of the 1970s and 1980s which propagated the myths of “African AIDS” and the “Genital Ulcers Theories” (Jungar and Oinas, 2004).

Such pseudo-narratives are given symbolic meaning in Rumbi’s narrative through Horst’s subconscious separation of the Third World (Africa) from The West. To him, the problem of his HIV infection does not simply rest with the pathological condition of Rumbi, but invokes images of a Conradian dark Africa where beyond adventure one has to avoid it like a curse. Thus as soon as the results revealing his status are given, he thinks in terms of safe and dangerous geographies. Europe represents security and enlightenment, while Africa stands for insecurity and darkness. Hence Horst’s immediate reaction is to flee to Switzerland, a supposedly safe haven in terms of the HIV/AIDS scourge. The act of fleeing to Switzerland is premised on the metaphor of distancing oneself from contamination, of divorcing oneself from the ugly, or dirt (Ashleigh Harris, 2008). Rumbi is part of the ugly, so much so that before the legal processes of terminating his marriage relationship to her, Horst has to symbolically and physically divorce himself from Africa and the ugly spectre of HIV/AIDS. The ugly spectre of HIV/AIDS is given physical form through references to ascribed moral deviations of African women. These ascriptions have historically constructed the African woman as promiscuous and unclean, making it easy for Horst to apportion blame on Rumbi “and [her] boyfriends” (p.9). And to give a semblance of scientific rationale, Horst capitalizes on the fact that Rumbi tested HIV positive to buttress his construction of the African/woman as the source of the disease. As Rumbi realized

after the result of the test was issued, Horst had always “needed [her] to have a positive result so that he could blame his infection on [her]” (p.13).

### **6.3.2 Personality cultism as pathology**

So far, I have argued that Westerhof constructs her image as that of victim. This image is constructed on the basis of the fear of the unknown about the lives of people with AIDS as much as it is worsened by the dispassionate attitude of male-authored perceptions that influence both women and men to view anybody infected with AIDS as dirty, loose dangerous and deserving to be isolated. But in *Unlucky in Love* Westerhof authorizes another image associated with celebrity culture. This entails the glorification of one’s personality and its perceived unique accomplishments. Personality development and projection is an intrinsic aspect of identity formation. It is a conscious process where a desired image is cultivated from available cultural and social resources. The propagation of a personality can result from powerful conscious or emotive forces arising from either positive social and cultural influence or from negative and traumatic experience. In the case of Westerhof’s narrative it is arguable that the identity of Rumbi is consolidated around the various misfortunes that she lived through from childhood right into adulthood. The ultimate in this string of shaping events in her life is the discovery in marriage that she had contracted the HIV virus. The reference to AIDS as “the great revealer” because the experience of being HIV positive so often brings out the best in people” (p.1) can be read as a milestone towards the emergence of a willful personality in Rumbi. She assumes a new identity whose co-ordinates are rooted in a pathological condition. The HIV status and abuse at the hands of Horst breathes into her a new confidence and belief in herself that estimates to a personality cult. In narrating her subjectivity both as woman and an HIV virus carrier, one is taken through a path where negative experience is converted into (even celebrated as) the definitive outlines of one’s new identity. Identity in this sense is drawn from negative or pathological conditions. The representation of that pathological condition and the trials attendant to it in narrative form is therefore a claim to be read and be heard. Underneath it is a subtly veiled obsession with celebrity status that amounts to personality cultism. On one hand, a celebrity cult image appeals to commercialization of victims of AIDS as desiring not only sympathy but genuine understanding of their predicament. On the other, without standing up as to reveal the pressures inherently in the lives of celebrities Westerhof would have succumbed to silence like many women. The projection of a personality cultism that is rooted in pathological

misfortune is thus a means to an end and an end itself. This form of self writing that reveal paradoxical sides or identities of the subject enacted in the same space partly defines what is 'political' in autobiographical self constructions.

Thurman (2006:111) attributes the emergence of the cult of personality in the 20<sup>th</sup> century to “our obsession with celebrity”, and this is constantly hinted in Rumbi’s ubiquitous reference to herself as a public personality. What bestows the identity or image of a public personality on her is subject to critical scrutiny. In the first instance, Rumbi’s turbulent childhood in the rural areas and mining compounds is a far cry from the glamour and familiarity that is associated with the stature of public personality. In the second instance, her modeling career does not put her on the national stage, let alone on any better platform than where she fills herself with a false consciousness that she had arrived into the upper middle class where she could hobnob with the well to-do of the Hararean society. The insecurity that characterize her existence in between escapades with rich men she calls husbands, even falling into dire straits of poverty, speaks nothing less than a determined pretension to public notability. One is then forced to ask the question, what then constitutes her public personality status? Is it her marriage to a white man, Horst, or is it the pathological condition that she has due to the HIV virus? If the answer is in the affirmative for both cases, then the process through which identities are constructed in Westerhof’s narrative is as fickle as it is contaminated with the elusive pursuit for public recognition and celebrity status. Thurman’s submission is more than apt in exposing the diseased process of identity construction in such narratives as Westerhof’s. To borrow from his argument, Rumbi’s pursuit for a public personality status can be said to be based on “the false promise of familiarity, or even intimacy” or alternatively, on the “assumption that celebrities can be accessed and known as “private” individuals through countless interviews, photo-shoots, press releases and public appearances” (Thurman: *ibid*). If this hypothetical position were to be upheld, then warped consciousness, as manifested in the Fanonian Blackman’s death wish to consummate in whiteness, and disease as in HIV/AIDS, can be read as possible currency towards the attainment of a desired public personality status. This paradoxically introduces a complexity in narrative where the negative formulation of identity nevertheless achieves the positive effect of opening discussion on the condition of those, especially women, affected with HIV/AIDS.

Identities, even when it is granted that they are diseased, are by nature unstable and do not give themselves to be read in monological terms. The process of narrating one's life story, thus constructing one's identity, is in itself an act of constructive therapy. Meanings retrieved from memory through the process of writing carry with them the benefit of corrective reflection on undesired elements in one's lived experience. Furthermore, as Wisker (1999:75) observes, the autobiographical form in its various shades "enables the reclamation of voice, empowerment, and a choice over forms of representation by writers themselves in the face of misrepresentation."

Westerhof's *Unlucky in Love*, is a narrative re-engagement with the way women with HIV/AIDS have been represented in male dominated discourses. According to Ngoshi and Zhou (2010:48), the life narrative "presents itself as a form of psychotherapy" which cleanses and heals the inner person." Read in this way, Rumbi's coming out in the open about her HIV/AIDS status assumes a redemptive element where the ultimate objective is to reconcile herself to her fate as well as serve the Zimbabwean society from its blind pretence in the face of the pandemic. Ngoshi and Zhou (ibid) argue that the fictionalized life narrative affords to redeem the subject in two ways. In the first instance it does not pass judgment on the subject, while in the second it allows free exploration of the inner space by removing the kind of restraint that societal custom imposes on the individual. It is in this light that Rumbi declares that "I was going public about my status to open up discussion about the disease and to educate people about the prevention of new infection" (p. 94). This intrinsic quality of the autobiographical form that bestows on it a complexity which allows it to be read in several ways part of its arsenal of defining what is political in its meaning-making potential. Thus, another way of reading Rumbi's life story is to say rather than going out public on her HIV status to gain mileage from the disease and her association with Horst, Rumbi's story becomes a diagnostic presentation of the infection that has both physically and metaphorically afflicted not only herself, but the nation as a whole.

Both the identity of the self and nation in this way assume a complex character where they are capable of presenting themselves in afflicted states at one level, and progressive terms at another. Donning the garb of noble cause, Rumbi is able to retort that "if more public figures spoke out about their status...it would have a major impact in reducing the stigma" (p.101) on the

HIV/AIDS infected. Through self positioning as a redemptive force, though diseased in several ways, the self is able to appropriate moral ground from whence it begins to expose its others, as represented in Horst, as deficient in physical, spiritual and moral terms. The subject engages in self cleansing by downplaying its moral blemishes, hence she declares that I can “count the number of sexual partners I’ve had on the fingers of one hand” (p. 2). The tone of the declaration is deliberately meant to understate the possibility of her having contracted the HIV/AIDS virus from the alluded to encounters (Naidoo, 2010). It is meant to defy the scientific evidence that it is possible to contract the virus in just one encounter, and also the fact that her partners might have been involved in multiple relationships unbeknown to her. Paradoxically, having more than one partner becomes the all-critical behavior for which Horst is condemned as the culprit who contaminated her with the disease.

The identity of the subject narrator is thus constructed through two redemptive strategies; the first being coming out clean on her HIV/AIDS status, and the second one being the exposition of Horst as involved in multiple sexual relationships that placed her in a position of potential victimhood. Horst is portrayed as “endangering the lives of other people” (p.88), and beyond this individual Rumbi’s narrative strives towards a gendered conception of HIV/AIDS where men are not victims but the main vector through which the virus is transmitted. In this sense the life story of Rumbi can be read as a counter discourse to the commonly held traditions in African and Western societies that women are the abode of diseases related to sexual activity.

Beyond opening up the Zimbabwean psyche on the HIV/AIDS pandemic to scrutiny, the narrative specifically focuses on male attitudes towards the spread of the virus in general and women in particular. The general attitude is typified by a denial mode that borders on criminalizing those with the HIV/AIDS infection. The process of criminalization has obvious implications to transgressions of normative and social morality having been committed. The infection itself then becomes the physical evidence that invites social ostracization of the victim. Horst’s experience in Saudi Arabia suffices to bring out the ideological-political nature of the debate on who should blame for the HIV/AIDS virus between men and women. The doctor who handles him, shouting to those in the gym that “this man has AIDS- he is infected-keep away from him” (p.8), typically defines Horst as a social aberration who should be outcasted by

society. The Saudis' reaction is also typically a male attitude (though in this case largely predicated on religion) that banishes those suspected of un-cleanliness (women included) away from public spaces. Such an attitude can be explained in terms of an inherent fear for contamination and is justified in terms of the public good. Horst himself later on betrays this mentality when he instructs Rumbi to terminate the pregnancy that she had conceived as a result of rape by himself. The definition of rape as instanced in the case of this couple is contentious as Naidoo (2010) clearly shows that Rumbi's accusation of Horst rests on the fact that the sexual act was consented to and the only problem was Horst's refusal to use a condom. Horst later on wants Rumbi to commit an abortion because his social perception of their condition convinces him that they are "like criminals who carry the AIDS virus and that baby will also have AIDS" (p. 79).

The metaphor of disease here operates on subtle levels. First, the society that is driven by patriarchal values is sick at the very core to the extent where it prejudices the weak and vulnerable amidst it. Second, the rape of the female suggests the violent ways in which the woman is denied the right and choice to self protection through condom use or other forms of contraception. The society even condones those who prey on the physically diseased as evidenced by Horst who, as he "raped" Rumbi, brags that "you are my wife and I will show you who is the boss now... dirty bitch with AIDS" (p.79). Rape, with all the accompanying violence, is used as punishment on the victim who is portrayed as the source of the original sin that then is transmitted to the unborn child. Horst thus does not think of himself as in any way physically contaminated until his relationship with Rumbi, and this is the general and diseased mindset in men that the narrative is exploring.

In Westerhof's *Unlucky in Love* we see constructions of self as victim. We also see the use of celebrity image harnessed to enable Westerhof to create a platform to find a voice to challenge society's stereotypes of people with HIV/AIDS as loose and dangerous. It is also in this same vein that the narrative in the quasi-autobiography suggests that the nation is contaminated through its attitudes and pretences towards the HIV/AIDS problem. Whereas Westerhof emphasized the effects of stigma on a person, Shaba uses the trope of AIDS to comment on the victimized status women. She goes further to use AIDS as metaphorical commentary on the

diseased nature of contemporary Zimbabwean society. These trends are very much evident in Lutanga Shaba's *Secrets of a Woman's Soul* where women are denied political and economic resources by colonial and patriarchal structures, and consequently their sexuality, and thus are reduced to vulnerable subjects at the margins of society.

## **6.4 Lutanga Shaba- Secrets of a Woman's Soul**

### **6.4.1 In the Throes of a Collective Syphilis: The Image of Zimbabwe in Lutanga Shaba's *Secrets of a Woman's Soul***

Lutanga Shaba's narrative, *Secrets of a Woman's Soul*, is a heart-rending story of mother and daughter who are as much victims of those people who are involved in their intimate lives as of society in a general sense. It tells the story of Lingalireni, who is Lutanga disguised, and her mother, disguised as Beata, and their tormented existence in a society that does not believe that women can and are capable of surviving and knowing themselves outside the narrow confines determined by male interests. *Secrets of a Woman's Soul* is a narrative that presents women's existence as complexly labyrinthine as to give a common narrative of suffering whose historical root is oppression by patriarchal values. Linga's life is woven intricately into her mother's, and by extension into that of women in general, in a way that makes it a communal women's autobiography. Ngoshi and Zhou (2010:47) aptly describe this narrative as a "disguised autobiography [that] identifies the mother and daughter as one woman's soul." The expression "one woman's soul" can assume the meaning of Woman the universal. What then is established through this description is a unity of experience that subsumes not only mother and daughter, but the women of the Third World in general. Thus Ngoshi and Zhou (ibid) are able to develop their thesis to argue that in Shaba's narrative there is a "concept of oneness [that] opens up the discourse of women's pain and marginalisation which seems to have similar echoes across age, ethnicity and class structures." The story of women's oppression and abuse that has been kept in subterranean caverns is exhumed and given voice, albeit in fictionalized autobiography.

At the immediate and individual level focus is on Linga's upbringing under a strong-willed and free-spirited mother, Beata, and an abusive, though at times loving, father, Daudi. The narrative also unravels the tragic experiences of mother and daughter after the death of Daudi when both

are exposed to economic insecurity, abused and contaminated with a sexually transmitted disease, and subsequently HIV/AIDS virus, by the same man. Such a horrendous experience is the raw material from whence Shaba constructs not only the multiple identities of women struggling to make meaning of their existence in an HIV/AIDS- rife environment, but a disturbingly diseased collective identity of the Zimbabwean society. The narrative makes overtures into a historical background whose defining context is colonialism, and weaves into the legacy of this historical epoch in the postcolony. Relations between the sexes are interpreted in the context of disruptions of the pre-colonial order which ushered not only political subjugation of the indigenous groups, but also ruptured existing power relations between men and women in Africa and elsewhere. It also dictated new imperatives of dependency on capital goods and services as well as migration in pursuit of these new needs.

The first line of disruption of Lingalireni's family is spelt through migrancy where the movement between Malawi and Zimbabwe (formerly Rhodesia) is testimony of their insecurity. In the first instance it is the Africans as the colonized group who are victims of the roller-coasting colonial system, which also fissures the internal cohesion within the African society resulting in African women being the most disempowered. Sofola (1998), referring to the impact of European and Arab imperialism in Africa, observes that both male and female Africans were victims of the male-centered and male-dominated European and Arab cultures. However, she further contends that African women suffered greater damage than men since "wherever the new alien power dislodged African men from their previous positions of power, those African men would in turn grab whatever was left of power by dislodging their female counterparts from their own positions of power" (1998:52). Through this colonial matrix and its lasting effect in the postcolonial dispensation, the subjection of women to various indignities and socio-political effacement in Zimbabwean society is put into context. Their vulnerability in society in general, and to HIV/AIDS and STIs is a matrix of the distorted relations in the African society particularly owing to the impact of colonialism. Sofola pursues her argument noting that "the demotion of African womanhood has produced contemporary African women who are to a large extent disoriented, weakened, and rendered ineffective and irrelevant" (ibid.). Thus the identity of the contemporary African woman is both metaphorically and physically diseased from the very point of contact with the West right into the independence era. The nuanced nature of this diseased



state, especially as it also affects male identities, is evidence of the volatile nature of identity constructions.

The power of Shaba's narrative lies in its ability to go beyond the diseased body and its pathological condition to focus on the metaphorical unwellness of the whole society that exposes, contaminates, blames and ostracises victims of its moral bankruptcy. Harris (2008) uses an apt metaphor through which bodily dirt (read diseased body) is extended to subsume notions of moral dirt which point to the degeneration of the whole body politic. By transcending the victim identities of individuals, the narrative strives to fathom the more complex issues involved in HIV/AIDS traumas and intervention discourses. It shifts the terrain from HIV/AIDS infection and pathology to societal attitudes and prejudices as the more critical tools used to construct the identities of those who are contaminated with the disease. It is in this sense that the Zimbabwean society can be said to be in the throes of a collective syphilis that is fast gnawing at the core values of its humanity.

Shaba premises her construction of the collective Zimbabwean identity on a set of questions that probe society's role in the spread of the virus as well as in the "silent" deaths of victims whose recourse to medical treatment is forestalled by self-righteous attitudes by those who profess to be clean of the disease or virus. Linga projects the slow and painful demise of her mother, Beata, who silently nurses a sexually transmitted disease, subsequently leading to HIV/AIDS complications, for a period of fifteen years. She had contracted the disease from a city councillor who had covered his underhand scheme of extorting sexual favours from both mother and daughter by posing as a benefactor. Linga also falls prey to this man, and she highlights the fact that the councillor was married. At the first instance, society is hopelessly out of depth as to how it can assist its vulnerable individuals. When Linga is pressurized through blackmail to consent to sexual intercourse with the councillor, with the condition that it was the only way she could pursue her ambition for Advanced Level studies and for her mother to keep her job, she turns to the health workers for advice. The innocence in her enables her to candidly open up to the nursing sisters about her predicament. But these vaunted professionals who are the custodians of society's physical wellness, and to some extent moral probity, prove to have no better sense than to give Linga contraceptive pills (Naidoo, 2010). The minimum expectation, if proffering alternative forms of fees sponsorship was impossible, was for them to give Linga something that

would have protected her physically from contagion. Condom sheaths would have protected Linga from the Sexually Transmitted Infection that probably spelt doom to her future. The sympathy from these healthy workers border on moral opprobrium directed at young Linga and is also complicit in condoning, if not absolving, the councillor of any moral wrongdoing. The narrative here subtly refracts society's uncritical attention on vulnerable victims such as Linga back to society's collective conscience.

In the second instance it is the moral standing of the men, that element of society that has appropriated cultural and political lordship over women through patriarchal ideology that is put under scrutiny. The way the councillor conducted himself during his imposition on Linga betrayed his awareness of his own infection from the sexually transmitted disease. But the young woman's sexual health is not valued as long as the man gets his sexual gratification. The woman is not only a receiver of sex, a condition that she can hardly escape given her economic and cultural dependence on men, but also of contagion. The double tragedy is that the woman is historically denied the means through which to articulate her experiences because society has made them inaudible or completely silent. Spender (1990) asserts that there is "a historical aspect to the silence of women which casts some light on their present position." She argues that the most significant of this historical aspect is the fact that women have always been excluded from "the production of cultural forms" (ibid), and language is one of those cultural forms. Taken metaphorically, this explains Linga's painstaking effort to forget her first encounter with the councillor, and even worse, her mother, Beata's silence about her sexually transmitted infection. Society and men in particular impose and benefit from women's cultural inaudibility, even when it is a slow and sure consignment of women to the graveyard of human culture. Society in this sense is in the grip of a moral as well as psychopathic seizure that demands as much remedy as those that are forced into victimhood. The councillor is not only diseased physically, but morally and psychopathically as his liaisons with the two women borders on incest.

Both mother and daughter are victims whose economic vulnerability makes it impossible to resist the machinations of the councillor. Jungar and Oinas (2004) make a succinct point when they underline vulnerability as a key factor in seeking to understand the situation of African women in the context of HIV/AIDS infection. They argue that while all people are biologically susceptible to infection by HIV/AIDS, "certain social and economic factors place some

individuals and groups in situations of increased vulnerability” (2004:99). In a more basic sense, vulnerability entails exclusion from the political economy, from entitlement and from empowerment projects. At a secondary level, it manifests itself in forms of insecurity from sexual abuse and violence, poverty and socio-cultural prejudice. Beata’s husband, Daudi, had maintained a suffocating lead over her potentials as to ensure that she never meaningfully got involved in life-sustaining activities, or got entitlement to anything that could give her security in the event that her husband passed on. Thus the death of Daudi immediately threw her into severe penury with no means whatsoever to provide for her children. Daudi is part of a patriarchy that thrives on maintaining its powerbase by creating and even naturalizing circumstances of poverty and servitude for women. In this society, women are thus constructed as the weak and poor others who are dependent on men. The councillor thus comes on to the stage to perpetuate a patriarchal legacy or tradition that refuses to recognize that women can have an individual identity. According to McFadden (1992) patriarchy places more premium on socializing women into a concept of sexuality that puts them at the service of men as lover, wife and mother. It is in this sense that the narrative is questioning the politics that informs patriarchal ideology with a view of exposing the fault-lines along which the Zimbabwean society is more dangerously infected than the victims of the HIV/AIDS virus.

Women like Beata and Linga are called upon to make sacrifices in which they have to defer control of their sexuality in the hope for a secure future that would come through employment and education. The structure of this society is such that men like Daudi and the councillor wield the power to avail or withhold opportunities to such lifelines as education. Such exclusion ensures that women remain under the patronage of men and also that female sexuality is maintained within the province of men’s control. It is the men, using their social, economic and political advantage, who decide how women are to have sex, where and with whom. Meanwhile the women become dependents of the patriarchal ideology to the extent that their very welfare and being is determined by the men. Thus Beata’s dressmaking skills are thwarted by her husband, Daudi, to curtail her independence, and as an ultimate statement to this effect she is banished to rural Malawi where she could not pursue her individual potential. This also meant that on the death of Daudi Beata and her children were left exposed to the vagaries of a male dominated order.

It is this insecurity that makes her a victim of the councillor and a society that does not seek to understand the factors that landed her in the abusive liaison. Society socializes the women to withdraw from self expression, to accept victimhood and to drown in self pity. Sexually transmitted diseases, HIV/AIDS included, are made the shameful burden of women, for who to be infected means to be the dirty source and immoral. Once infected, they are made social and moral pariahs whom society fears as potential contagion to the whole society. Social stigma thus makes it difficult for Beata to seek medical treatment that could have guaranteed her a longer life.

McFadden (1992:160) incisively observes that the generally unfriendly attitudes of many health personnel “have created a situation where the majority of women accept that they are carriers of the virus, and/or fear that if they go to clinics and hospitals to report symptoms of STD, they will be embarrassed or humiliated by service personnel.” McFadden’s observation partially answers Linga’s critical question on “where did such depths of shame come from, that dictate that it is better to die quiet and lonely than to have people know your condition?” (p.92). Her own experience with a young doctor who attended to her when she is diagnosed with a sexually transmitted disease fundamentally exposes the medical personnel as having a flawed attitude towards those with sexually transmitted diseases, HIV/AIDS included, especially if they are women. Linga is made to feel that the STI had consigned her beyond what is acceptable in human morality. It is the “grimace and look” (p.70) that showed on the young doctor’s face that told a complex story of how those infected with HIV/AIDS or other sex related diseases are viewed by this society. The clinic ceases to be where one would go to get remedy, but to be reminded of their moral depravity. The doctor, as much as he is a professional, fails to transcend society’s general prejudice and hypocrisy against those infected. The pharmacists also give morbid attention to those who visit their shops to access antiretroviral medication. Linga is subjected to furtive glances and whispers as she tried to get the drugs for her mother. As such, medical personnel are caught up in the same hypocritical jinx and therefore cannot heal the attitudinal malady that characterizes society with regards to HIV/AIDS. It is the negative or unsupportive attitude of society, the medical fraternity included, that needs healing if those who are bodily infected are to be redeemed. When dealing with the HIV/AIDS positive, society

invokes images of the cursed, the evil, the amoral, and therefore lost to the disease. It is this negative attitude from society that Linga exposes as an obnoxious sickness that is worse than the infection in the bodies of Beata and Linga.

What kills Beata in the final analysis is the condemnation of her HIV/AIDS status by the community around her. She could not dare take good care of herself, including taking an early retirement from work, for fear of insensitive pronouncements that would come from society. Getting laid off due to ill-health would attract nasty euphemisms like being “on the slow train”, or “having a slow puncture” or being on “expedited mail service” (p.9). Euphemisms, beyond being understatements, constitute muted references to HIV/AIDS as taboo subject, as an aberration whose victims cannot be considered and treated as fully human. The infected is thus reconstructed in terms of difference and condemnation as well as constituting an abomination to society. What society chooses to highlight is the diseased condition of the infected person and in the process banishes the spiritual, psychological and emotional dimensions of the individual so affected. Such a limitation on the part of society can only point to its own unwellness which tragically translates into premature deaths of HIV/AIDS victims like Beata.

Society’s negative attitude towards those who are HIV/AIDS infected creates a paradoxical situation where instead of them coming out to seek remedy they withdraw into self destructive cocoons for fear of being stigmatized. The tragic consequence of this attitude is that society itself, by harbouring its “silent infected”, allows its infected components to contaminate the whole. As such, the Zimbabwean society cannot boast a clean bill of health as long as a part of it is diseased and is not positively attended to. At least at the level of collective conscience and morality such a society will have its putrid blemishes to deal with. It is based on this logic that Linga poses her equally critical diagnostic question probing the supposed wellness of her society. She wonders “what kind of society bred women who normalise being unwell behind exhortations that “it is hygienic for a woman to bath twice in a day” when the real reason is because they will be masking the smell of sickness?” (p. 92).

What is under interrogation here is the state of wellness of a society that prescribes a cosmetic solution to a deep-seated illness. Shaba’s narrative seems to be intent on exposing society’s suicidal clinging to hopelessly moribund notions of order and dominancy within its structures. As such, the metaphor of wellness or lack of it is conflated in a way that enables it to inhabit

both body and nation. The infection of the body is both metonymic and metaphorical in that it echoes the malfunction of the nation's body politic (Sontag 1991, Vambe 2003, Ashleigh Harris 2008). Focus thus shifts from the suffering Beata to the condition of the nation at large. The sick woman can be exonerated from blame as by concealing her sickness she is simply conforming to the dictates of a pretentious society that treats STIs and HIV/AIDS as odd aberrations that do not reflect the state of the society. The woman is a product of this society and her biological condition can be read as a metonym of the state of the society. The imagery of "masking" captures the character of a society that does not want to come to terms with the real challenges confronting its individuals. In such a scenario the individual is only a victim and society is the culprit. Linga identifies with women like Beata who are forced to endure the "ravages of ignorance and stigmatization by a self-righteous morally bankrupt society, whose measure of goodness was based on the misfortunes of their friends and neighbours" (p.75).

For society goodness or wellness lose their intrinsic and aesthetic value the moment they are conceived of in banal and relative terms of who is HIV/AIDS infected and who is not. The result of such negative distinction is manifested through the veiling of HIV/AIDS status by individuals, and also through a lack of confidence in the institutional structures that are supposed to mitigate the spread and effect of the pandemic. This strain of sickness is seen in society's fabric through Mai Likuma who disparages modern medicine and doctors to Beata, even extolling the secretive traditional remedies, but all to the detriment of Beata's condition. Nicknamed "the serpent," (p. 98) Mai Likuma symbolically represents the disruption of society at its nodal points where, ideally, revitalization through support and counselling of each other must be taking place. She, and like-minded people in the community, relish extracting information on the condition of Beata so as to maliciously spread to all and sundry. Beata's human dignity is trampled as if though being HIV positive supercedes one's humanity. A society that is insensitive to the suffering of its individuals is also sick and immoral to that extent. Mhiripiri (2008) draws attention to official insensitivity to the welfare and dignity of the people with reference to how Operation Murambatsvina effectively trashed the urban vulnerable in the name of cleansing the city space and restoring order. Among other reactions to local and international criticism, Mhiripiri cites what he calls the "classic discourse of official denial and rebuttals" (p.149) which come to define government's response to major problems affecting the citizenry. Linga aptly refers to "the closed cupboard of a society" (p.75) which captures the HIV/AIDS denialism in

her society as well as the physical neglect of “mangled infants needing major surgery to piece together their mutilated little organs” (p.75). At this juncture Linga captures the complete unwellness of society by invoking images of total dysfunction. In this closed cupboard of society is to be found “dead-eyed little girls”, “bruised lips”, and “organs festering with sores and dripping pus” (p. 75) that are forcibly thrust into wives and sweethearts. On the moral front, the complete breakdown is hinted through reference to fathers who beget babies with their daughters, the neglect of old and frail women to their means, and housemaids, factory workers and secretaries who are forced into sexual relationships on the threat of losing their jobs. If society is this diseased, the narrative is suggesting that the first line of therapy should be directed at changing its attitudes so that it can become morally whole again.

Linga’s life narrative can be best understood within the context of her mother’s suffering at the hands of society. Her own misfortunes are intricately woven into the mother’s life to the extent where it is almost impossible to separate her own fate from that of Beata. The “pain, the loss, the guilt, the anger” (p.5) that results in her breakdown in Cape Town is so much a consequence of her unfair treatment at the breakdown of her marriage as it is of the cold, and cruel attitude extended to her mother by society. Both women are victims who succumb to the weight of an imposed identity that dictates that they accept their new definition as outcasts. Contaminated from the same source with the HIV virus, both mother and daughter are pitted against a society that views the disease as something worse than just a physiological pestilence. For the victims, society makes the HIV/AIDS condition an inevitable essence of their identity. It is made to occupy their emotional and spiritual being in a way that brings self pity and loss of hope. Society’s attitude undermines the very humanity and confidence of the HIV/AIDS infected by insisting that they carried the blame for being infected. In this way women are in particular blackmailed into forgoing their life-long investments in marriage relationships on the pretext that they are the source of the disease. Thus in addition to the stigma, the HIV/AIDS tag on women brings with it social and economic insecurity. Linga is devastated by the crumbling of the “high fence of material security against social and economic calamity” (p.2) she had put in place once she is diagnosed HIV positive. She is left vulnerable materially and she attributes this to “an indifferent onslaught of the coldness and callousness of a value system that said she had been at fault and deserved what came her way” (p.2).

Value systems, be they cultural, ideological or moral, are what constitute the identity of a nation. If below the veneer of well-being that nations always project there is decay that feeds off women, then the entire body politic we call nation is affected. A nation that is unfeeling and inattentive to, or rather gripped in pretence as to the social magnitude of the HIV/AIDS scourge, is itself diseased right at the core. The character of the nation is often carried in the attitudes of its individuals. Linga's husband chooses not to see the human need and suffering in Linga's mother in her struggle against HIV/AIDS, neither could he console his wife on the mother's passing on. What he sees in the bed-ridden mother-in-law, and her urgent need for continuous supply of anti-retroviral drugs, is a burden that is draining resources from the "morally upright" who are free from the disease. By abdicating the supportive responsibility to the suffering, Simba reflects the critical strain that is also eating at the heart of the nation. The Zimbabwean quasi-autobiographical HIV/AIDS narrative is subversive in its construction of both self and national identity. It torpedoed the apparent stable identity of nation even as its professed subject are the women who are physically disoriented through HIV/AIDS infection. In the same way Beata is "shrunk to a skeletal shadow of her former self" (p.9), the image of the nation is blighted by its negative, inhumane and pretentious attitude towards the HIV/AIDS victims.

The capacity of Shaba's characters to diagnose themselves as source and end, cause and consequent, and victim and vector is what complexly sets Linga's definition of what is political apart from the male-authored autobiographies that project the source and the cause of their political misfortune from coming only from outside the self. The acceptance of one as victim and potential vector in the spread of AIDS enables Shaba's characters to rise above self limitations and confront their own weakness. It is this aspect that is lacking in black male, white male and female autobiographies whose subjects saw and externalized the sources of their vicissitudes in a manner that blamed others, except themselves. This deeper politics is in a way the beginning of liberation from negative perceptions of the self from the self, and hate/hurt from others with vested interests to benefit from women's misfortune. This self reflexivity in Linga's autobiography shows that her characters can create other new contexts to authorize alternative identities not always dictated by others whether these are powerful men or women.



#### 6.4.2 Gender Violence as Contagion

The HIV/AIDS quasi-autobiographical narrative attempts to explain the mediation of identities by focusing on the uneven power relations in heterosexual relationships in society. In the Zimbabwean society depicted, men and women do not engage in social as well as sexual relationships as equals. On the social arena women are maintained in the less challenging domains of life, and are expected to defer to their men on critical matters of survival both in politics and the economy (see Dangarembga, 1988, Mahachi-Harper, 2004). Where sexual relationships between man and women are concerned, McFadden (1992:183) shows how these are structured in ways that promote the male ego. She argues that “heterosexual sex is essential in the realisation of maleness, in the social mobility of the male from boy to man, to father, to owner, to head of household, to decision maker, to MAN”. She goes on to stress that when understood in this sense, sex is a controlling tool that is used to keep women in line. It is a form of violence in which women are always the victims of a depraved male psyche that is questing for complete control of the other. As if the sex act itself does not offer enough violence, physical violence is often used to ensure total submission of the woman to male authority. Because violence results from an irrational urge to resolve a deep-seated insecurity by the male, it cannot be limited to the domestic and to the woman, but tends to manifest itself in the other spheres of society. Linga points out that in the urban locations the apparently “tidy external environment hid a violence that was shocking in its everydayness” (p.17). What is stressed in this statement is the endemic nature of the violence that rocks Linga’s society from under the thin veneer of order and peace. This can be read as a symptom of the bigger contagion that is affecting the whole nation. References to the murdered robbery victim, the girlfriend burnt with hot oil, and the body of a baby found cold and lifeless in a bin, are all tell-tales of a sick society which nevertheless can project varying and nuanced images of itself at different times and spaces. It is the stable projections of a nation’s identity that the narrative is subverting by exposing its diseased bowels where violence is spewed out every hour of the day.

Shaba’s narrative poses a fundamental question on what kind of identity, for both the self and nation, is mediated through acts of violence. The narrative also boldly dissects the anatomy of violence to show how in its wantonness it takes hostage of the individual perpetrator or a whole society that uses it to rationalise skewed power relations. Violence becomes a mode of

expressing those other inner nuances of personal and group identity that border on a sense of insecurity and a desperate quest for control especially among the men. Women are subjected to violence so as to make them submit to men's authority and also enforce a certain fear and vulnerability that would make them dependent on men. Linga's mother is subjected to severe beatings by Daudi who threatens to throw her out of the home. The home belongs to the man, and authority over who should enjoy the security of the home and when rests with the man of the house. This is a tool that is used by patriarchy to disinherit, disempower, and push women into positions of marginality. A woman who is cowered, cloistered, powerless and silent is constructed. This is the desired image, from the point of view of patriarchy, of a good woman. Male-on-female violence targets the very spirit of the victim in a way that seeks to blunt it into a lifeless lethargy.

It is such an identity that the quasi-autobiographical narrative challenges and fractures through restoring voice and agency to the woman-victim. Beata, as much as she is victim of male violence and HIV/AIDS, is raised to a rich repository of strategies for the independence of women in an otherwise oppressive society. Her knowledge of traditional herbs is a necessary tool for the liberation of female sexuality. A woman could regain control over her sexuality by not relying on men when she needed to conceive or terminate a pregnancy. Thus it is from a position of power and independence that the narrative declares that "with herbs and other means a woman was always in full control of her fertility and it was not a matter of discussion with the man" (p.39). Recourse to African traditional knowledge in itself is an interrogation of the assumptions of the modern that has seen the reduction of spaces for vulnerable groups such as women. It is also a way of questioning the depraved constructions of male power and patriarchy that rely on violence as the critical defining aspect of individual and national identity. Shaba's narrative here can be read as questing for alternative modes of existence for women in this society, calling for departures from the cloistered existence that has been imposed on women by men. Beyond it being a therapeutic exercise, the voicing of painful experience, and the reference to alternatives, is an act of postcolonial deconstruction of patriarchal modes of constructing its others.

Beyond exposing the fractured foundations upon which male authority and power is founded on in the Zimbabwean society, the narrative operates in subversive ways to stand the male ego on its

head. Male ego is portrayed as amenable to a kind of psychoneurotic disorder that seeks self confirmation in victimising the defenceless. This is the import of Beata's didactic moral to Linga where she stresses that "only weak men and cowards assault the weak" (p. 43). The net effect of this indictment is to recast the apparently stable male authority, and by extension male identity, in this society as nothing more than a contrived subterfuge to cover men's own vulnerability. Beata argues that "strong men have no need to demonstrate their strength" and that "it is the weak ones who hit, and for them beating a woman is like dipping into the honey pot of male power" (p. 43). The base of male power is effectively disparaged, and the men who brutalize their women are equally scandalized. By referring to violent treatment of women as the "honey pot of male power" Beata is alluding to a sickly disposition that sees men deriving pleasure from the pain and suffering of women. It is this perversion in the male psyche that exposes women not only to institutional insecurity, but to diseases such as HIV/AIDS. Young women are the most vulnerable as evidenced by the cases of Linga's childhood friends. Norma is impregnated at age fifteen and succumbs to an HIV/AIDS related disease after her second child, while Chipso is labelled "damaged goods" (p.16) and died at a tender age. Linga on the other hand harbours childhood memories of a chest on top of her, an incident that smacks of sexual abuse at a very tender age. These young women are in one way or the other victims of male imposed violence and their contamination with the HIV/AIDS disease cannot be separated from the violent encounters with the men. Linga may not only account for her loss of virginity to this fuzzy encounter in her memory, but can also reckon the possible infection from the same encounter.

## **6.5 Conclusion**

In conclusion, this chapter has argued that a discourse of contami/Nation is at the centre of understanding the construction of identities by Zimbabwean women writers who explore the HIV/AIDS experience in contemporary society. It has exposed the flux of identity perspectives both at the level of the individual and society/nation in *Westerhof's Unlucky in Love* where conception of individual identity can be as problematic or diseased as that of nation. In *Westerhof's Unlucky in Love* self identity is imaged in the context of victimhood. The author rehabilitates herself by adopting a celebrity status image that nevertheless offers itself to contradictory interpretations. It is an image that promises to give salvation to the muted and suffering women of Africa while at the same time it smacks of an ill-informed consciousness that

pursues personal glory out of a pathological condition. However, what Westerhof achieves beyond the limited pursuit of a personality cult is to lay bare the unsupportive attitudes of society to people infected with AIDS. In her novel, AIDS was depicted in metonymic terms; what was emphasized is the harm that the disease visits on the body of the carrier and the stigma that this would attract. Shaba complicates the image and shows how through the unhealthy body of the individual the sicknesses that define the nation are manifested. In *Secrets of a Woman's Soul*, Shaba uses AIDS as metaphor. The effect is that it allows her book to offer a critique of state and how it has failed to fulfil various aspirations in whose name the leaders rule. The political dimension of the two women's fictionalized autobiographies is not depended on openly condemning the ruling class in Zimbabwe. Neither do the authors favour visible feminist explanations to their problem. The disguised life narratives are deeply political in that they have used individualized narratives to comment on the misfortunes of individuals in the era of AIDS. At the same time, the metaphorical dimension of their depictions of self are allegories of diseased nationalist politics that are threatened with implosion at various levels.

As Jameson (1991) argues, the nature of an individual narrative projected as a national allegory is that it reflects fractures and internal contradictions inherent in any process of narrating the self and the nation. The two black female authors' fictionalized life-stories thus play the role of narrative antidote that transforms the subjects from perpetual victimhood where they are defined by their infectedness to positions where the psychological, spiritual and physical imperatives of humaneness are recognized. The nation/society is also criticised through exposure of its pretentious identity which it has to surpass in order to acknowledge the social cost to humanity of downplaying the impact of the HIV/AIDS scourge. Lutanga Shaba's *Secrets of a Woman's Soul* reveals the debased conscience of the nation that has come to represent its critical image in relation to the construction of women's identities. The nation and the self are enthralled in an identity limbo in which both cry for redemption. It is specifically this narrative thrust that gives Lutanga Shaba's text a stronger critical exploration of both national and self identity than Tendayi Westerhof's. It seeks to say in bold terms both body and nation are diseased. Overall, this chapter thus argued that as much as identities are transient and transitory, the contemporary Zimbabwean woman has been stuck up with negative identity references that she attempts to address through auto/biographical narrative. Hence Westerhof and Shaba's disguised narratives are an attempt at psychotherapy aimed to heal both self and society/nation in varying ways.

However, the capacity of Tendai in Westerhof and Linga in Shaba's narratives to diagnose themselves as source and end, cause and consequent, and victim and vector is what complexly sets the two black women's narrative definition of what is political apart from those in male-authored auto/biographies that project the source and the cause of their political misfortune as always coming only from outside their selves. The acceptance of one as victim and potential vector in the spread of AIDS enables Westerhof and Shaba's characters to rise above self limitations and confront their own weakness. It is this aspect that is lacking in black male, white male and female autobiographies whose subjects saw and externalized the sources of their vicissitudes in a manner that blamed others, except themselves. This deeper divergent politics of representing the self in the nation is in a way the beginning of liberation from negative perceptions of the self from the self, and hate/hurt from others with vested interests to benefit from women's misfortune. This self reflexivity in Westerhof and Shaba's auto/biographies show that their characters can create other new contexts to authorize alternative identities not always dictated by others whether these others are powerful men or women.

## **CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION: ZIMBABWE AND THE PARADOXICAL MODES OF SELF WRITING**

This study set out to explore how Zimbabwean political auto/biographies conceive and construct identities of the self and nation. Its starting point was to concede to the inherent contradictions that define both the identity categories of the self and nation. These are categories that cannot be contained from singular perspectives, and thus their definition, characterization and construction is always subject to contestation. The narratives analysed in this study are therefore engaged in serious contestation to generate desired meanings and images of both self and nation.

Even where the life narratives are predicated in similar ‘political’ circumstances, the way they conceive and construct identities is remarkably different. Each of the autobiographies discussed in this study embraced the value of marginality in which the self initially is depicted as a victim. This was a strategy that all authors whose works were analysed in this study adopted so as to clear space to imagine that same self as heroic and a new source of historical agency. The study revealed that the voices of white male authors could not effectively move out of the orbit of reactionary politics because their narrative remained disabled by the subject position they occupied within a larger discursive economy whose ideologies protected white privilege and was basically anti – African nationalism that brought political independence to a majority of Africans. Black male authors considered in this study also used the image of the self as victim of colonialism and of the new black leadership. Later in their differentiated narratives the authors revised this image and embraced a more combative and assertive individual identity that they used to question the veracity of each other’s narrative. The manner in which the authorial critical voice was used in male black authors recalls Guha and Spivak’s (1988) observation in which they say that during, and after colonialism, African political leaders viewed “any member of the insurgent community who [chose] to continue in such subalternity as hostile to the inverse process initiated by the struggle and hence as being on the enemy’s side” (Spivak & Guha 1988: 14). This explains why Nyagumbo critiqued Muzorewa, who critiqued Nkomo who was also critiqued by Tekere.

Female white authors followed in the footsteps of male writers in that the butt of their criticism was mostly colonialism and post colonial black leaders. It was argued that the understanding of the ‘political’ as referring to an actor in the armed liberation struggle that the authors emphasized

is inevitable; as actors, authors felt they had a different story to tell, differently. However, a deeper knowledge of the self was prevented from emerging through the overt political autobiography because of its perverse focus on acts of military and physical rebellion. Much as these are important, Cooper reminds us that acts of narrating the self and nation are most political when they reveal a relation of dependency and antagonism with the social forces that they contest. This contestation can appear or be manifested through “complex strategies of coping, of seizing niches within changing economies, of multi-sided engagement with forces inside and outside the community” (Cooper 2003: 33). What is implied is that it is only a faked narrative displaying the power of the false (Mbembe 2002) that depicts the authors as always fighting either colonialism or the black leadership. Individual weaknesses are not highlighted or rather are deliberately downplayed. The insistence on the political public sphere underestimates those struggles occurring in private and domestic spheres but which nevertheless have political implications. The study argued that it is in the works of the two black female authors one could approximate articulation of a complex redefinition of the ‘political in autobiographical form when Westerhof and Shaba moved to embrace the politics of HIV and AIDS and begin to re-imagine the self and the nation from this politically ‘unconventional’ point of view. This act of adopting an expansive creative canvas that does not or deliberately undermines the idea of commenting directly on open forms of political nationalisms introduced a refreshing way of politically re-inventing the self and the nation. The two black authors mostly preferred indirect commentary on nationalism and its pitfalls. The force of this new poetics is that it deals with forces, and processes that influence personalities to make choices in contexts not always overdetermined by the overarching narrative discourses of the grand project of nationalist discourse. The two authors fashioned new images that are not entirely relying on a stock of nationalistic symbols and images, and this enabled their autobiographies to re-situate them and their narratives into another plane that refuses to collapse the struggles in Zimbabwe as either of the nature of land distribution struggles only, or simply of a nature of controlling state ideological apparatus only. While control of the former is necessary at times to use to deal with the issue of HIV AIDS, starting to grapple with the lived experience of disease can originate new ideas with which to build or renovate national institutions.

In short, chapter One of this study provided the context in which political auto/biography in Zimbabwe has become a serious contender in the deployment of meanings that are used to

understand identities both at the level of self and nation. The Chapter identified aggressive attempts to define self and nation made by the Zimbabwean state (Hammar et al, 2003) as well as by civic groups and individuals after the period 1980 as critical in spawning vigorous contestations for naming and marking spaces in the nation through life narratives. The life narrative thus became an integral tool of the literary corpus that interpreted the cultural and political conception and construction of Zimbabwean identities. The study preferred to read auto/biography as situated in literary study (Gusdorf 2001) and argued that what constituted the genre was its capacity to yarn fact and fiction into a cultural representation that captures individual and group realities (Vambe 2008a). The point of departure in the reading of life writing in Zimbabwe in this study is the etymological derivation of the Greek form that means 'self life writing' (Smith and Watson, 2001, Berryman 1999). The porous nature of generic boundaries especially where auto/biography is concerned was highlighted as an intrinsic characteristic that makes for the existence of various narratives under the name of auto/biography. The study was thus able to focus on memoirs, fictionalised or disguised auto/biography and those that can be described as conventional life narratives.

The political meanings of auto/biography were identified as situated in the overt involvement in political/liberation movements (Boyers 1978, Weintraub, 1978), in the contradictions imposed by genre (Chennells, 2009), in the inherent politics of narrativity (White, 1987, Onega and Landa, 1996) or in the politically unconscious narrative that nevertheless reveals serious contradictions of society (Jameson, 1981, Mule 2006). However it was noted that these definitions can in no way exhaust the potential political meanings that can be carried in auto/biographical writing. As such, there is further room for investigation into the contribution life narratives can make to our understanding of processes of identity conception and construction. The complex nature of the self as an identity category that is unstable, transient and that only gains meaning in the context of narration and its immediate environment (Giddens, 1991) was explored as a pretext to the reading of how the category is constructed in Zimbabwean political auto/biography.

The chapter also outlined the theoretical framework and methodology that the study would use to analyse Zimbabwean political auto/biography. While postcolonial theory was privileged for its deconstructive thrust on totalizing narratives, an eclectic theoretical approach was entertained in



an effort to give a holistic interpretation of the meanings, conceptions and constructions of identities in Zimbabwean political auto/biography. The qualitative method of interpreting the life narratives was preferred for its capacity to accommodate plural and individualized life circumstances, (Flick, 2002) qualities that are intrinsic in auto/biographical narratives.

Chapter Two of this study provided an extended literature review to further contextualize the area under study. From a Western scholarship point of view, it traced the evolution of auto/biography to the ruptures visited upon society by the advent of modernity. Before modernity, there is a general consensus that identities, especially in pre-medieval Europe, were contained in ethnic/lineage, gender and social status that made it difficult to conceive of the individual (Weintraub, 1978, Giddens, 1991). Thus the imagining of the individual identity is a product of modernity. The Chapter also noted the dearth of a sustained and comprehensive theory of auto/biography, a fact that arises from its despised status in history where it was deemed as unreliable and of little use in the construction of reality (Berryman, 1999, Brunner, 2001). According to this Western scholarship the value of auto/biography in relation to other disciplines such as historical study and the social sciences was very much diminished. The only systematic theorization of the genre is traced to the proposition that every cosmology begins in self knowledge by the Greek Heraclitus (Olney, 1972). This proposition made the individual the centre from which any knowing or conceptualization of the world must begin, hence called for the understanding of that individual. Therein lay the seed of auto/biographical writing and interest in studying the life narrative.

The Chapter also noted that African conception of auto/biography stressed the genre's potential to discipline the inchoate and fragmented aspects of the individual's life into some specific form (Coetzee, 2006). Thus the life narrative is critical in arranging the various selves and consummate them into a desired self identity. In this way identity is realised through narrative. Further to this African views of the life narrative emphasize its instrumentality in scaffolding agency, that is to say through narrative construction the individual is spurred on towards certain goals in life. The subject of the life narrative practically works towards the desired image in the process of narrating his or her self. On a transcendental scale, African conception of auto/biography underlines its capacity to transform the individual life story into the public domain. Thus the narrative of the individual is valued only to the extent that it reflects and echo

the values of the community in which one lives. The individuated self is never completely divorced from the larger community.

Critical scholarship on auto/biography in Zimbabwe makes some interesting departures from Western positions. Given the colonial experience, the Chapter observed that fiction and its literary criticism predominate the Zimbabwean literary and cultural scene, with life narratives getting very scant attention in the first half of the twentieth century. This scholarship also argues that unlike in the West where modernity is seen as the impetus behind the burgeoning of life narratives, in the case of Zimbabwe, and the colonized world in general, it is the postmodern that triggers reflections of the self and nation (Vambe, 2009). The life narrative in this situation thus arises out of the need to contest official narratives of the imperial order as well as to open up new spaces for the creation of cultural memory (Muchemwa, 2005).

In this Chapter it was also submitted that there is a general consensus particularly in Western scholarship that “nations are a relatively recent phenomenon” (Spencer and Wollman, 2002:59) and that “national identities may not be automatically present, that they have to be both constructed and reproduced” (ibid, p.60). This follows arguments by Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983) that nations are not rooted in antiquity and that they are constructs and national artefacts, and Anderson’s (1983) submission that they are imagined communities. Mayer’s (2000) contribution to the effect that the nation is a gendered project was also noted as necessarily complicating any efforts to understand the concept of nation.

Chapter Three of this study analysed Ian Smith’s *Bitter Harvest- The Great Betrayal and the Dreadful Aftermath* and Peter Godwin’s *Mukiwa- A White Boy in Africa*. It argued that though there are differences in the way the two life narratives conceive and construct Rhodesian identities, they are both primarily informed by an imperial logic that has led Chennells (2005) to call them colonialist literature and Primorac (2006) the Rhodesian chronotope. It was argued that these auto/biographies are defined by their committed essentialization of colonial identities which is manifested through binary categorizations of civilized versus uncivilized, black versus white, or human versus the subhuman. The assigning of negative categories to Rhodesia’s perceived others, the Africans, or those who are not of British stock, allow these narratives to engage in acts of discursive displacement that push the othered groups to the margins.

Smith's *Bitter Harvest* delineates the identity categories of the self and Rhodesian nation in deterministic terms that are meant to spell a closure to other ways of reading these identities. Beyond the discourse of the empire's mission to civilize, the auto/biography conceives of its subject's identity as obtaining within the unique circumstances of genealogical pedigree, family honour, individual genius as well as political astuteness. These absolute terms are used to elevate the subject from those people around him and to endow him with qualities that made him a natural leader. The narrative strives to naturalize the supposedly superior attributes of Smith so as to foreclose any contestations from perceived adversaries in the construction of Rhodesian-ness. The Chapter thus argued that Smith's narrative constructs the concept of Rhodesia around the values of the British Empire in which only the courageous and morally strong among those of English progeny were eligible to represent the Queen abroad. The ideology of Rhodesiana thus excluded not only the Africans who are the clearly marked others, but also those of Afrikaner and Portuguese decent.

On the other hand, Godwin's *Mukiwa* also largely relies on the cultural and ideological vocabulary of the Empire. It designates the Whiteman in Rhodesia, especially those of British stock, a special place in the nation of Rhodesia. Other groups in the Rhodesian nation are variously assigned peripheral spaces, which in the young narrator's consciousness, are understood in terms of Europe and particularly Britain's privileged status in terms of civilization. Nevertheless, the Chapter noted that the narrator's consciousness is subjected to the vicissitudes of history in way that enable him to re-interrogate the concept of Rhodesiana as received from his community. In this way Godwin's fictionalized auto/biography concedes to the unsettling contradictions inherent in the genre. It submits to the fact that identities cannot remain constant from beginning to end as they respond to changing pressures of space and time (Hall 2000). In this way Godwin's narrative does not only depart from Smith's deterministic constructions of self and nation, but also provides a critique of essentialized white identities. Participation in the Rhodesian War exposes the subject narrator in *Mukiwa* to possibilities of alternative nationhoods that are implied in African nationalism. However, the auto/biography maintains a crippling ambivalence that disables the narrator from making a practical appreciation of the historical meaning of African nationalism, hence he sticks to the Rhodesian side through killing for the Rhodesian cause in the war. In the subsequent chapter, this study focused on life narratives that explore constructions of self and nation from an African nationalist perspective.

There are salient commonalities in the way auto/biographies by African nationalists construct their self identities and the nation. In Chapter Four, focusing on Maurice Nyagumbo's *With the People* (1980), Abel Muzorewa's *Rise Up and Walk* (1978), Joshua Nkomo's *The Story of My Life* (1984) and Edgar Tekere's *A Lifetime of Struggle* (2007), it was argued that the first strategy in these narratives is to establish an inextricable bond between the self and the nation. In this way these narratives purport to say it is impossible to imagine the nation in the absence of the subject narrators. Thus the political-ness of these auto/biographies is in the first place subsumed in their being implicated in organized politics of the liberation struggle. However, in their various ways they also exude other political meanings alongside the dominant nationalist struggle. For instance Nkomo and Nyagumbo's texts begin by exploring the social implications to their existence of both the traditional and modern order, thus engaging them in a different kind of politics. The political life narratives also share a trend where they, in their various ways, situate the conception of their subjects' identities in the context of an oppressive order in the form of colonialism. Thus conditions of victimhood and persecution from both colonial and the post-independence regimes are critical determinants in how self identities and images of nation are constructed in these narratives. The narratives also make ancestry or notable family history a key reference in the construction of their self identity and a launch pad into the affairs of the nation.

Nyagumbo's *With the People* refrains from immersing its subject into the full implications of colonial politics in youth by preferring to allow him to explore the social scene. By so doing the auto/biography begins by constructing an image of the narrator who is late in appreciating the full impact of racial politics of both Rhodesia and South Africa. When he finally feels the weight of colonial oppression, the narrator anchors his constructions of self and nation in the shared victimhood of Africans living under colonial rule. The chapter argued that Nyagumbo's narrative conceives of the nationalist movement that gave birth to Zimbabwe in sole terms of victimhood and the cultural revival of African values. As an individual he models his own identity on a great ancestry that is famed for creating a great chieftaincy after a tumultuous phase in history. As such the Chapter noted a limitation where no other ways of conceiving the Zimbabwean nation is allowed. Muzorewa's *Rise Up and Walk* attempts to proffer an alternative vision for the construction of the nation. Situating the self in Christian family background, the narrative scaffolds the subject towards an existence that is informed by Christian dogma at the level of the individual as well as nation. The Christian denomination is conflated to wield meanings of

Christianity and nationalism that coagulate into an alternative vision of nation. Through the “Total Gospel Total Man” philosophy that calls for holistic interpretation of the scriptures that includes the social and political existence of the subjects Muzorewa has a vision of the “Total Nation.” However, it was argued in this chapter that this grand narrative is deflated by representations of Muzorewa in other narratives as the man in charge of a ruthless militia that haunted civilians in the rural areas (Todd, 2007, Nkomo, 1984). The total nation is riddled with contradictions the moment Muzorewa is perceived as presiding over a government that massacres unarmed refugees in neighbouring countries. The associations with the Smith regime in the Internal Settlement in which he is characterized as a quisling expose the shortcomings of his vision.

The alternative of a radical nationalism in the construction of the Zimbabwean nation was explored through the narratives of Joshua Nkomo and Edgar Tekere. Nkomo’s *The Story of my Life*, beyond prefixing his initial imagination of the self in the traditional context, steeps his self identity and nation in liberation politics. The alternative of the Zimbabwean nation as distinct from Rhodesia is envisaged as possible only through a determined struggle against the colonial oppressors. Nkomo thus carves his own self identity as the embodiment of that struggle, Father Zimbabwe, and any other contestants to this image are dismissed as self-serving opportunists. When this portrayal is fiercely contested at various times in the struggle, for instance at the split of ZAPU in 1962 and during the Matabeleland and Midlands disturbances in the early 1980s, the auto/biography proffers the image of the martyred self. In this way Nkomo goes beyond Nyagumbo’s presentation of victimhood as his persecution after independence is interpreted as a mortal dent to the body politic of the new nation. The study argued that Nkomo’s narrative captures a serious limitation in the way the nation is imagined. The reductive process of equating nation to an individual limits the scope of dynamic currents that inhere in nationalism as an ideology capable of formulating and organizing alternative nationhoods. Nkomo’s constructions of both self and nation are also pegged against the narratives of his adversaries, particularly Robert Mugabe, to the point where his own visions are subordinated to those of the perceived opponent (Vambe, 2009).

On the other hand, the study argued that Tekere’s narrative employs the politics of disparagement as a way of elevating his own self image. The self is put at the centre of every

significant act in the liberation struggle to the extent where there is an element of over-claiming. Such self glorification can work to undermine the self as it is often countermanded by other life narratives or historical texts. On the question of the nation, *A Lifetime of Struggle* seeks to entrench its subject by linking his origins to royalty, thus claiming significant stakes in its construction. The subject narrator is also endowed with spiritual links that make him conversant with the desires and ethereal communications of the spirits of the land. In this way the narrative creates a superior spiritual, even moral ground for its subject. Nevertheless, the narrative is so much embroiled in the act of settling scores to the point where it does not make clear articulations of its own vision for the nation of Zimbabwe.

Chapter Five focused on the life narratives of three female writers. Doris Lessing's *Under my Skin* (1995), Fay Chung's *Reliving the Second Chimurenga* (2007) and Judith Todd's *Through the Darkness* (2007) construct identities of self and nation from ambivalent positions of both privilege and marginality. The Chapter argued that these female writers are variously privileged as members of the white or Asian race. As much as their relative privilege is not even, their situations in the matrix of the colonial state as well as in post-independence Zimbabwe for Chung and Todd cannot be compared to that of the Africans. Even amongst themselves as members of different races who occupied different time spaces they did not enjoy the same privileges. Thus their conceptions of identity differed depending on the historical exigencies under which they experienced their lives. But as women they were all subject to male constructions of gender that relegated them to the shadowy zones of marginality.

The Chapter argued that Lessing constructs her identity away from the legitimating structures of settler Rhodesia. She even creates a distinct sense of being through destabilizing the Rhodesian paradigms of empire and civilization. However, she somewhat remains ensconced inside the Rhodesian paradigms, as much as she migrates to England, by virtue of racial belonging that avails her with options that are not generally available to Africans or the Asian minority. Where Lessing constructs her self images away from Rhodesian institutional ideologies, she nevertheless fails to go beyond these to moot alternatives embedded in other nationalisms such as those implied in African nationalism. This limitation means that Lessing never seriously acknowledged the possibility of African nationalism as capable of providing an alternative paradigm of national construction. This is what makes Chung's life narrative more perceptive in

its constructions of self and national identity. Though, like Lessing, Chung conceives of her identity from the outskirts of the Rhodesian body politic, she goes further in that she does not only construct her desired selves and nation away from Rhodesian discourses, but inside the African nationalist movement. In this way she transcends the limited constructions of self and nation that are implied in the vocabulary of the empire. Though her education and belonging to the Chinese minority group would not equate her to the circumstances of the generality of African people, her gender meant that she had to contest a condition of marginality imposed on women in general.

On the other hand, Todd's self images are produced from contradictions spelt out by clear circumstances of privilege and the availability of alternative choices. As a daughter of a colonial Prime Minister, Todd hails from the matrix of power that firmly defines her as part of the Rhodesian institution. This also removes her from the circumstances of both Lessing and Chung. Todd had more choices from which to select desired identity images, thus she could afford to, at various points in her narrative, re-invent herself as victim, champion of Liberation struggle as well as empowerment activist for the former liberation combatants. Her liaisons with people in the high circles of government also reveal her privileged position, which makes it difficult for her to make pretensions toward a condition of marginality in any other sense except gender. Todd's conception of self and nation is also seriously inhibited by the fact that she maintains herself within the reference gridlock of Nkomo to the point where she does not articulate any independent vision of her own. The same criticism that accuses Nkomo of making his adversaries prominent through overstating their misdemeanours can be applied to Todd.

Chapter Six of this study, analysing Tendayi Westerhof's *Unlucky in Love* and Lutanga Shaba's *The Secrets of a Woman's Soul*, moves away from constructions of identities that are situated within the politically overt. The narratives of these two women focus on the subtle politics that affect the hungry, the poor, the abused, the powerless and the sick. In this way they foreground the politics of identity as they obtain in zones that are normally interpreted as politically unconscious (Jameson, 1991). The political-ness of the two narratives is not in deploying visible feminist explanations to account for the misfortunes of women in Zimbabwe, nor in open condemnation of the Zimbabwean ruling elite, but in using the individualized narrative to

simultaneously capture the misfortunes of both self and nation. They use the discourse of contami/Nation to reveal the confluences between the diseased body and Nation.

Westerhof largely constructs her self identities in terms of victimhood. Women in general are viewed as victims of phallus-totting men who are keen on maintaining oppressive patriarchal control over them. Beyond the state of victimhood, the chapter argued that Westerhof rehabilitates her bruised 'selves' by adopting a celebrity status image. This adopted image can be read as a useful survival strategy for the muted and suffering women in Zimbabwe and Africa as a whole. It is also an indictment of the diseased attitudes of a society that does not have meaningful structures for supporting its HIV/AIDS infected. But it also carries with it the attendant contradiction of deriving personal glory out of a pathological condition. In overall terms, Westerhof's fictionalized life narrative presents the HIV/AIDS problem in metonymic terms. It is in a way limited to the harm that the disease cause to the body and the stigma that this attracts. Shaba transcends this rather simple conceptualization of the HIV/AIDS pandemic in the Zimbabwean context. She complicates its representation to reveal both its metonymic and metaphorical dimensions where the pathological condition of the body is a manifestation of the diseased state of the nation's body politic. Thus Shaba's narrative provides a powerful critique of the state and the debased conscience of society. Attention is drawn to the private and individual in a way that interrogates the collective society's attitude to the HIV/AIDS suffering.

Zimbabwean political auto/biography therefore has an intrinsic capacity to handle complex issues of self and national identities. The meanings and constructions generated by narratives under this category reveal that our understanding of cultural identities in Zimbabwe is never complete if these are excluded from study. The political auto/biography explores the interstitial spaces that established disciplines such as history and fiction have neglected or failed to explain. The capacity to harness both fiction and fact is what qualifies auto/biography as a critical tool to analyse the subtle nuances of cultural identity that are often missed in history and fiction. It is on the basis of this finding that this study will recommend the inclusion for study of life narratives in school and university curricula. The life narrative is an entry point into the understanding of any group culture.

Recommendations



*From the study, it is recommended that future research should;*

- Focus on autobiographies in the oral form
- Critically highlight the theory of narrativity in relationship to the autobiographical form
- Compare selected Zimbabwean autobiographies with others from other parts of Africa or those composed in the enforced conditions of diaspora

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MA in Public Health,  
MA, MA(SS), DLitt et Phil and DPhil in Sociology,  
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