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‘LAUGHTER IN DARKNESS’: HUMOUR IN SELECTED CONTEMPORARY ZIMBABWEAN SHORT STORIES

Confidence Joseph

A research paper submitted to the Faculty of Humanities and the Social Sciences, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Arts.

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2018

DECLARATION

I declare that this research report is my own unaided work. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of a Masters of Arts in African Literature at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted for any other degree or examination in any other university.

Name: Signature:

Date: day of 2018

DEDICATION

I dedicate this study to my daughter, Tatyana Angela Joseph

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank God for the gift of life.

To my supervisor Prof Dan Ojwang- Thank you for your insightful comments, patience and most of all, for the words of encouragement when the 'going got tough'.

To my big sister 'MaNcube'- Thank you for your emotional and financial support. I love you.

To my little sister 'MaWidzo'- Thank you for taking care of 'our' child while I chased this dream. I would not have done it without you.

To my friends (the inner circle) - Thank you for keeping this dream alive.

For that extra chair in your office and the never-ending supply of tissues!!- Thank you so much Dear Mrs Govind!

ABSTRACT

Amidst the ongoing socio-economic and political crisis in Zimbabwe, it has long been dangerous to publicly criticize or condemn the situation in ways that put the government in a bad light. However, humorous stories have provided a platform through which such issues may be engaged outside the censoring regime. In this research report I use humour theory and James Scott's concepts of 'hidden transcripts' and 'everyday forms of resistance' to unpack how writers engage with the political and socio-economic crisis in Zimbabwe through the genre of the short story. The research paper shows that humour has been deployed as both a conscious strategy of subversion and an emancipatory tool at the same time. In the course of this endeavour, the research report also sheds light on how humour is coded as a coping mechanism in stressful or overwhelming situations allowing some respite amidst life challenges. The primary texts examined in the paper are *An Elegy for Easterly* (2009) by Petina Gappah and *Laughing Now: Short Stories from Zimbabwe* (2007) edited by Irene Staunton. The study comes to the conclusion that in as much as protest literature does not necessarily send people out in the streets in protest, the use of humour in these stories allows for certain modes of thinking and being which resist official narratives and other manifestations of power.

Contents

DECLARATION i

DEDICATION ii

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS iii

ABSTRACT iv

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION 1

CHAPTER TWO: THE GROTESQUE AND THE RIDICULOUS IN *AN ELEGY FOR EASTERLY* 23

CHAPTER THREE: 'Laughing with the side of the mouth': Incongruity and Irony in *Laughing Now: Short Stories from Zimbabwe* 50

CHAPTER FOUR: CONCLUSION 70

REFERENCES 75

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Irene Staunton (2007, n.p) describes laughter as a "release, a positive energy, an affirmation of a principle or ideal, a perception of the ludicrous or absurd; it provides us with some sense of community as we laugh with people at something comic or alien, or reduce someone or something to a size where it can no longer threaten us". In the same vein, Adele Marian Holoch (2012, p. 18) argues that for "an individual who has been impacted by a physically or emotionally painful experience, a humorous response to that experience provides an alternative to a more energy intensive, distressed response thus becoming a defensive or coping mechanism". The research report borrows into these readings of laughter to show how Zimbabweans have come to deal with their social, economic and political problems, which have been on-going for the last two decades. Quite a substantial amount of work has been done on the survival strategies employed by Zimbabweans in what has been termed by Chitando et al. (2015, p. 2) as "the proverbial lost decades" (e.g. Chiumbu and Musemwa, 2012; Musoni, 2010; Jones, 2010; Worby, 2010). The research report aims to contribute to this growing literature and to provide fresh insights into the study of the mediation of the Zimbabwe crisis through literary works, the short story in particular.

In the Foreword to *The Art of Survival: Depictions of Zimbabwe and the Zimbabwean in Crisis* Maurice Vambe (2015, p. viii) argues that the arts have played an influential role in assisting Zimbabweans to make sense of their situation. He goes on to state that "through music, day to day interactions, religion, drama, poetry, short stories and jokes Zimbabweans have sought to mitigate their pain". Nelson Mlambo (2011) also acknowledges the role played by the arts when he states that even though the Zimbabwean crisis stymied many forms of economic, social and political production, the cultural sphere flourished, especially the literary space. He argues that the crisis provided occasion for remembering of narrating and recording lives in tempestuous and trying times. Mbulelo Mzamane (1991) argues that when people live under conditions of severe repression, with no attention paid by the rulers to their political voice, culture often becomes an important medium for expressing the desire to transcend the oppressive situation. The research report examines how through the genre of the short story, writers engage with the political and

socio-economic crisis of Zimbabwe. The primary texts under consideration are *Laughing Now: Short Stories from Zimbabwe* (2008) edited by Irene Staunton and *An Elegy for Easterly* (2009) by Petina Gappah.

The contributors to the anthology *Laughing Now: Short Stories from Zimbabwe* are Zimbabwean writers, both seasoned ones and new-comers onto the literary scene. Some of these writers are based in Zimbabwe, while some are living abroad having joined the mass migration which has been a result of the 'Zimbabwean Crisis'. Through the thematic concerns and characterisation in their short stories, these writers join what Irikidzai Manase (2014, p. 5) describes as the "body of Zimbabwean English fiction that is commonly identified as the third-generation narratives and 'new voices' which comment on the post-independence Zimbabwean trajectories". The strategies these writers employ to touch on sensitive issues such as the damaged economy, the quality of governance, homosexuality amongst other themes becomes quite important, especially in a country like Zimbabwe where the concept of 'freedom of speech', due to the many censorship laws, remains a dream yet to be attained. Martin Meredith (2009) gives an example of how Mugabe's government was intolerant of not only gay people, but also the literature on or about them. In his article, he talks of how the former President of Zimbabwe, Robert Mugabe asked the association of Gays and Lesbians of Zimbabwe (GALZ) to withdraw from the Book Fair held in Harare in August 1995. According to Meredith, Mugabe's spokesperson declared that, ''Zimbabwean society and government do not accept the public display of homosexual literature and material. The trustees of the book fair should not therefore force the values of gays and lesbians on to the Zimbabwean culture'' (Chakaodza, 1995, n.p). These remarks are one example of how the government aims to control both the public and private lives of its citizens, thus an artist wishing to expose some of these ills has to be creative indeed.

The title of Petina Gappah's short story collection, *An Elegy for Easterly*, is itself telling of what is in store for the reader. According to the Cambridge Advanced Dictionary, an elegy is a sad poem or song, especially remembering someone who has died or something in the past (2003, p. 395). In her review of *An Elegy for Easterly*, Susan Williams (2009, n.p) states that the title story

is “literally an elegy for the Easterly shanty town razed by Robert Mugabe’s thugs but the book is also an elegy in a broader sense for the optimism and hope for 1980”. This ‘elegy’ can also be for the millions of Zimbabweans who find themselves trying to eke out a living in foreign lands, where they are frequently treated like second class citizens. There is an underlying sense of despair and loss in most of the stories in the collection as the characters try to survive against all odds. Gappah’s use of humour in her stories can also be read as a way of dealing with the pain and confusion associated with the Zimbabwean crisis. In one interview, she states that ‘‘we [Zimbabweans] mix tragedy with comedy. Even at funerals it is traditional to appoint someone to imitate the departed, to make the mourners laugh. Even in our saddest moments, there is a lot of laughter’’ (Hopegood, 2015, n.p). This ability of Zimbabwean writers to capture these moments of despair and despondency and yet manage to portray them humorously is the focus of the research report.

Statement of the Problem

In response to what Oliver Nyambi (2013, p. ii) argues to be “the attempts [by the government] to regulate the expressive sphere and censor alternative historiographies of the crisis”, the writers under consideration employ humour in their stories to evade censorship. Their stories become what Nyambi (2013, p. ii) terms the sites for “articulation of dissenting views which offer alternative perspectives, assessing, questioning and challenging the state’s grand narrative of the crisis”. The research report explores how humour in the short stories has been deployed as a conscious strategy of subversion and also as a coping mechanism. The research report also shows how humour functions as an adept instrument that expresses resistance to and or subversion of a dominant social order. It will also become evident from the research how humour keeps control of “challenging or stressful situations and allows people to work with life situations that are shot through with ambiguity, paradox or incongruity” (Hagemann, 2005 p. 3).

The study works under the assumption that there is the official narrative of the government which it attempts to ratify as the truth, and then there is a counter narrative or the other story which is couched in humour/laughter as a form of subversion. It is these counter narratives that this study is interested in. The circumstances and the ways the writers under consideration have

used humour in their stories to get their narratives smuggled into serious conversations is a major concern of this study as are the contradictions one encounters in these stories.

It is important to touch briefly on the short story as a genre and how it fits in this proposed research. Ada Azodo (1999) argues that just like the novel which was used by African intelligentsia in the early 1950s and 1960s to herald African values outside and inside Africa, the short story has also been used by the modern writer to comment on the postcolonial condition. It becomes the ideal medium to make a quick statement on contemporary situations as Isabelle Allende (1996, p. 28) also states that "the short story wakes up consciousness, brings people together, interprets, explains, denounces, keeps record and provokes change". This is clearly brought out in the stories under consideration as they engage with the Zimbabwean crisis. Head et al.'s (1992) take on the short story also helps justify the genre for this research report. They argue that the story ''has its origins in oral anecdote'' (Head et al., 1992, p. 22). This helps create an illusion of reality- an authorial effort to present a story as true. It is important to note that even though the short stories might have been inspired by real life events, they are works of fiction as the events can be reframed, reshaped or even distorted by the writers, depending on their motive.

Gappah's collection helps by giving us the view of someone writing away from home, who is not affected so much by the censorship laws the way other writers based in the country might be. Staunton's collection's relevance lies in the fact that it gives us works from writers both young and old, inside and outside of the country. This selection of authors helps answer the question pertaining to how Zimbabweans are affected by the crisis in their different contexts and how they deal with it as shown by the fictional characters in the stories. Five stories have been chosen from each collection and the selection is largely based on the thematic concerns and the mode of humour employed by the writer.

Aim of the Study

By undertaking this research, I am interested in finding the place of humour, how it becomes deliberately placed in its different modes in Zimbabwean fiction, specifically in the short stories. I am interested in how writers join in the conversations regarding the Zimbabwean socio-

economic and political situation happening online via a medium that is more prone to censorship like fiction. Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1972) argues that literature does not develop in a vacuum. He states that "it is given impetus, shape and direction and even an area of concern by social, political and economic forces in a particular society" (Ngugi, 1972, p. xv). In the same vein, the research report shows how some of the incidents portrayed in the short stories were inspired by real life events. I am also interested in why the writers under consideration deploy humour while writing about conditions that are generally taken to be depressing. I aim to show how Gappah in *An Elegy for Easterly* uses ridicule and, the grotesque to engage with some pertinent issues and concerns in contemporary Zimbabwe like the seemingly perpetual reign of the former president. The other issues are the displacement of the poor as they were left homeless after the government operation code-named *Murambatsvina* and the plight of those who find themselves outside of the country's borders in search of 'greener pastures'. I am also interested in the use of irony and the incongruent by the writers in *Laughing Now: Short Stories from Zimbabwe* as they touch on some taboo subjects in Zimbabwe like homosexuality and other concerns like material consumption, and the violence against women and children. In this instance, the study will show how laughter may be provoked by inconsistencies between expectations and reality. I am also interested in establishing the limits and the possibilities of laughter as a strategy of subversion in Zimbabwe. The main objectives of the proposed study are to establish how laughter is "a device which is self-consciously employed and strategically positioned in textual constructions" (Reichl and Stein, 2005, p. 2). I also attempt to show how laughter can be read as a struggle for agency and as a resigned comment on the status quo. The different modes of humour under consideration are the ridicule, irony, the grotesque and incongruent to critique the political and socio-economic condition of Zimbabwe.

Justification

A lot of work has been done on humour as a coping strategy for Zimbabweans and scholars like Wendy Willems (2011) have looked at it from the angle of cartoons, while Jennifer Musangi (2012) has specifically looked at jokes. Not much has been done on the short story as compared to the novel, stage plays and even poetry thus I hope by focusing on the short story genre, I can

contribute to the scholarly work that has focused not only on the short story, but on humour and its uses in the various art forms in Zimbabwe.

I have chosen to focus on the short stories *Laughing Now: Short Stories from Zimbabwe* and *An Elegy for Easterly* for several reasons. Firstly, from the anthology of the short stories one gets the different versions of what Zimbabwe has come to mean to different people. NoViolet Bulawayo captures these different versions in her debut novel, *We Need New Names* (2013) when the narrator Darling states that,

> There are three homes inside Mother's and Aunt Fostalina's heads: home before independence, before I was born, when black people and white people were fighting over the country. Home after independence, when black people won the country. And then the home of things falling apart, which made Aunt Fostalina leave and come here. Home one, home two, and home three. There are four homes inside Mother of Bone's head; home before white people came to steal the country, and the king ruled, home when the white people came to steal the country and then there was war; home when black people got our stolen country back after independence; and then the home of now. Home one, home two, home three, home four. When somebody talks about home, you have to listen carefully so you know exactly which one the person is referring to. (Bulawayo, 2013, p. 193)

For me the above quote helps capture the different versions of Zimbabwe that are presented in the stories under consideration. Since the social, cultural and economic challenges facing Zimbabwe affect the population differently, it is important to look at stories from different perspectives. By focusing on the different characters and settings in *Laughing Now: Short Stories from Zimbabwe* and *An Elegy for Easterly* from the Ministers, the retired pensioners, the prostitutes, the maids and not forgetting 'the have beens', the diasporians who are now back home, the short stories allow for many voices which can be taken to represent the millions of Zimbabweans spread all over the world. This research report even goes further and explores the effectiveness of humour as a tool of subversion in postcolonial states.

It is important to investigate the place of humour in Zimbabwean short stories as one can argue that 'laughter' is still one of the coping mechanisms or tools the 'ruled' still have at their disposal, as shown by the many jokes and memes that keep making rounds on social media, especially about the economic and political situation in Zimbabwe. It is also important to note that laughter is not only directed at the ruling class, but can also be read as self-reflexive. The study also attempts to ascertain whether humour can truly be taken to be the 'weapon of the poor' or it is as Achille Mbembe (1992) claims- a way for the rulers and the ruled to co-exist in the same space. The study's significance also lies in the fact that it sheds light on how certain repressive conditions create room for creativity as shown by how some writers in the collections manage to rise above the censorship laws and are then able to engage with some of the concerns of ordinary Zimbabweans.

Literature Review

This section engages with some of the work that has been done on the use of humour in literature and also on counter hegemony and counter-narratives. The section does not limit itself to work done on short stories, but it is also going to look at the use of humour in theatre, newspaper columns, comic strips and cartoons before it finally touches on the primary texts under consideration.

A lot of work has been done on humour, especially its connection with the body of post-colonial literature. Holoch (2012, p. 2) defines postcolonial literature as a "body of literature concerned with contesting colonialism and its legacies". In discussing the term 'postcolonial', Anne McClintok (1992, p. 88) argues that the term is "organised around a binary axis of time rather than power in its premature celebration of the pastness of colonialisms, and it runs the risk of obscuring the continuities and discontinuities of colonial and imperial power". The works under consideration for this research report concur with the above argument as they show how the evils that were once associated with colonialism are still haunting independent states like Zimbabwe. James Ogude (2000, p. 88) talks of the "plight of the ordinary Ethiopian populace who suffer at the hands of the state, which masquerades as the sole agent of social transformation and development although it is hardly different from the ancient regime from which it usurped

power". One can argue that Hama Tuma's concern in *The Case of the Socialist Witchdoctor and Other Stories* (1993) is similar to that of the Zimbabwean writers under consideration.

Some postcolonial writers resort to a mode as evasive as humour, in that it allows them to dodge censorship in their explorations of political insurgence. According to Holoch (2012), in allowing them to strategically downplay and even negate the seriousness of their non-conformist political views, humour provides a most effective means of forestalling the censoring without which, postcolonial writers know that their demonstrative siding with malcontent and rebellious elements of their societies might be considered offensive or even dangerous. The major concern of humour then becomes how it has been incorporated within this literature as a way of not only subverting the authority of colonial discourse, but also as a way of critiquing the postcolonial society. Adding on to Holoch's argument on humour, is Christina Oesterheld (2011, p. 64) who states that the different forms of humour provide "comic relief, ease tension, serve as an outlet for anger, aggression, pain and despair". It also facilitates a sense of community through laughter among those who deploy it and those who enjoy it as audience members. Humour also alludes to alternative ways of articulating the world beyond a single, serious discourse, and in doing so, it opens new spaces for historically marginalized individuals to be heard. It is important to note that humour is not always meant to be funny, as it can also have a satirical intent. All these arguments on the role of humour in literature are quite relevant to my research as I argue that through their works, writers form a community with their readership as they seek alternative means of expression.

Amongst the many scholars who have touched on the use of humour as a subversive tool, I am interested in the work done by Musila (2010) as she tries to find the place of humour in Kenyan fiction and theatre. Musangi (2012) touched on e-humour and her essay also bears heavily on my research as does Willems's (2011) article on cartoons. These scholars seem to agree on humour being an indirect device through which "truths are hidden and communicated to the audience with a sense of stinging honesty" (Wasike, 2000, p. 7). As they try to reflect reality in their works, most writers have had to find new ways of expression and one of those has been exploiting laughter in their works. The artists that Musila touches on in her article 'Redykyulass'

(2010) all rely on satire to invoke laughter, thus making difficult subjects somewhat easy to deal with. Willems (2011), examines the role of humour in the case of the rulers and the ruled in the postcolony using the famous comic strip *Chikwama* which was published in the Zimbabwean privately owned newspaper *The Daily News* in the early 2000s. *Chikwama* is a comic strip cartoon about an ordinary Zimbabwean struggling with all the economic and political changes around him. In his interactions with his friends, Chikwama shows the self-reflexive role of laughter and how those subject to power use it as an expression of power and agency. In her article, Willems shows how postcolonial laughter does not always target those in power but may also be directed at the ruled in an attempt to make them aware of their own complacency in the current state of affairs. This argument is very important for my own study as I attempt to show how some stories under consideration show the self-reflexive aspect of laughter.

Before she touches on the use of humour, Musila (2010, p. 281) first engages with the conditions which make it necessary for artists to resort to means of expression like satire. She argues that "Africa in general has some cultural values which lay a certain premium on age as a repository of wisdom and leadership, especially among men". Lene Bull Christaensen cited in (Musila, 2010, p. 281-282) concurringly states that there are continuities between African traditional paternalism articulated through the father as the head of the household and patterns of authority in the post-independent African nation state. The president represents himself as the Father of the Nation in a classical paternalistic style but also, as the head of the family in an Africanist traditionalist sense, and as the husband of the nation who is entitled to clamp down on any one who attempts to 'steal' or 'rape' his wife or his children— the people.

As I hope to show in the research report, the representation of African leaders as 'Fathers of the Nation' is mostly done to subdue the people and to also entrench these 'Fathers of the Nation' in positions of power. It is difficult for a child to question their father's decisions in some African cultures like the Shona culture in Zimbabwe. At worst, it is considered an abomination. Just like Jomo Kenyatta who had styled himself as the elderly patriarch presiding over the nation and could clamp down on anyone who dared oppose him (Musila 2010), so is the case in Zimbabwe where many artists have been in trouble with the law for having criticized the 'Father of the

Nation'. In an article *Artists persecuted for raising voices* published in the *Daily News* in 2012, the writer mentions several Zimbabwean artists who have found themselves on the wrong side of the law because of their work. The article mentions Stephen Chifunyise, a famous playwright and director who had several of his actors detained for participating in the play *Rituals*. The play looked at the complex process of healing and reconciliation in communities following the long period of violence in Zimbabwe. Cont Mhlanga's play *The Good President* was also banned in 2007 for its supposedly 'political undertones'. Musicians like Thomas Mapfumo, Leornard Zhakata and Raymond Majongwe have had some of their songs blacklisted. Owen Masuku, another artist who was arrested for undermining the authority of the former President Mugabe, captures the plight of artists when he states that "there is no way we can function as artists if we cannot be free to express ourselves. The most important thing as an artist is that we need to be relevant in the societies we live in" (Daily News September 2012).

Article 33 (a) of the 2005 Zimbabwe Criminal Law states that

> Any person who publicly, unlawfully and intentionally makes any statement about or concerning the President or an acting president with the knowledge or realizing that there is a real risk or possibility that the statement is false and that it may engender feelings of hostility towards; or cause hatred, contempt or ridicule of; the President or the acting president, whether in person or in respect of the President's office shall be guilty of undermining the authority of or insulting the president and liable to a fine not exceeding level six or imprisonment for a period not exceeding one year or both.

This shows why artists in their bid to expose the follies of the government have to be extremely careful as the state would not hesitate to arrest them. Thus we see writers employing satire and humour in their works. George Paton et al. (1988, p. xxi) further justify the use of humour by stating that "the otherwise publicly unthinkable and outrageous act or belief can often be referred to or touched on and expressed more appropriately and acceptably in humorous form than in other literary or journalistic forms".

Musila (2010) argues that the use of state apparatuses including detention without trial is another form of upholding the idea of the 'nation-family', where the citizens who are the children of the nation are required to respect and pledge their loyalty to the father of the nation. Because of these state apparatuses artists in Kenya have had to seek alternative ways of escaping censorship while engaging with politics. One of the members of the group 'Redykyulass' states that "when the President's name could only be mentioned in hushed tones we boldly decided to take the ruling elite head-on using the most unlikely of weapons- humour" (Musila, 2010, p. 284). The writers under consideration in the research report are trying to do for Zimbabwe what the group 'Redykyulass' did for Kenya. According to Musila (2010), the group contributed towards the gradual loosening of the repressive grip of the Moi regime on the country's public sphere and political culture by unmasking power, reducing the hierarchical gap between state power and ordinary citizens, and through self-reflexive laughter.

Musangi (2012) draws parallels between the Nazi government and Zimbabwe's government, especially its intolerance for jokes targeting the government or head of state. In her article she states that joking about Hitler was punishable by death. This shows that the use of humour as subversion has a history that seems to have grown alongside that of political and social oppression across the world. Benton (1988) also argues that the most popular form of subversive humour is the political joke which occurs in modern dictatorships of all sorts. He goes on to state that humour has a "subversive effect on dominant structures of ideas and is representative of what is called the triumph of informality over the formal" (Benton, 1988, p. 33). In Musangi's essay, the triumph of the informal over the formal is shown by how people in Zimbabwe took to emails to express their discontent with the government. Since the formal structures of communication could not accommodate them, they had to find alternative ways of being heard.

The way the figures of power are represented as the fathers of the nations and their seeming 'omnipresence', it becomes hard for writers to stay true to their art as is the case in Zimbabwe. Musangi (2012, p. 162), analyses the various ways through which internet humour has been used as a commentary "on the ubiquitous struggle of Zimbabweans through a reconfiguration of the president". In her article, she shows that humour is indeed, a powerful transmitter of popular

mood in societies where this mood can find no officially sanctioned outlet. The website www.bob.za which announces itself as Robert Mugabe's personal website is dedicated to the generation and archiving of humour arising from both the political and economic climate of Zimbabwe. The site is of course a mock arena where Mugabe's character is brought into question. It castigates the former President through the virtual distortion of his pictures. These digitally reproduced images which are sometimes accompanied by captions aim to ridicule the figure of the former President. In some of the images, his head is attached to the figure of a woman. His body is disempowered through a sort of emasculation that leaves him unfit to be the father of the nation. While the internet was developed primarily as a means of serious communication, it seems to have become popular mostly for its entertaining nature. The images of the president on www.bob.za are a good example of humorous creations meant to unmask the power of the president. As she explores people's reactions to the website before it was finally pulled down due to censorship laws, Musangi shows how powerful humour can be, especially with the growing number of internet users made possible by the abundance of smart phones.

Before moving on to the primary resources, I briefly look at literature on counter hegemony and counter narratives as I try to show how the short stories under consideration in this research report can be considered as such.

According to Sanelma Iisalo (2012, p. 6), counter discourse refers to "various acts of resistance against hegemonic representations, ideology and values which tend to discriminate and oppress those individuals whose position in society is regarded as marginal in relation to the dominant center". She goes on to posit that a counter discourse is not "merely engaged in contradicting the dominant narrative but it tries to represent reality differently and to counter the strategies of the dominant which regulate the understanding of social reality" (Iisalo, 2012, p. 24). These readings of counter discourse and how it operates in narratives resonate with Chimamanda Ngozie Adichie's seminal talk on the danger of a single story. In her famous talk *The Danger of a Single Story* posted on TED Talks website, Adichie warns the world about the dominance of a single story and the consequent marginalization or erasure of all other stories. She touches on personal anecdotes to show how unreliable a single version of anything, be it a story or event is, as it is

likely to favor whoever is telling the story at that particular moment. Since this privileged version of the story is retold over and over again, sometimes through generations, it slowly becomes the authoritative story at the expense of all other versions of the same story.

It is important at this juncture to mention the power plays that happen in the course of how certain narratives get privileged over others. In his article "The Lion has Learnt how to Speak?" The novel *A Fine Madness* and Third Chimurenga Counter-Discourse in Contemporary Zimbabwe' Nyambi (2013) comments on the first part of his title which is derived from the proverb 'until the lion learns to speak, tales of hunting will always glorify the hunter' and states how it functions to highlight the relationship between power and representation. From the proverb we get how those who cannot speak like the lion will always have their stories silenced or erased in favour of those in power. Both Adichie and Nyambi help explain the need for multiple versions of any narrative for any situation to be fully understood.

Reuben Makayiko Chirambo (2007) shows how Jack Mapanje's counter hegemonic discourse exploits the resources and techniques of an oral poet, the *imbongi*, to challenge the political discourse about Kamuzu Banda, the former president of Malawi. Through the use of irony and rhetorical questioning Mapanje interrogates Banda's dictatorship. Mapanje's poetry becomes counter-discourse in that it challenges and undermines Banda's legitimacy as Malawi's president for life. This defiance became problematic as the Malawi Congress Party (MCP) had relied heavily on a hegemonic discourse that both popularised and legitimised it. By openly challenging Banda's rule, the poems constitute a counter hegemonic discourse thus becoming subversive. This resulted in the collection being banned from schools and in Mapanje's arrest.

Chirambo (2007) argues that during the reign of Banda in Malawi, the dominant discourse which Mapanje challenged was shaped by what is called *kamuzuism*, an ideology that produced a powerful myth of Banda as the 'fount of all wisdom' and a leader who 'always knew what was best for the nation'. During his reign, he was called *Mpulutsi*–Messiah or Saviour, *Ngwazi*-conquerer, *Wamuyaya*-a president for life, *Nkhoswe* No.1- a protector, guardian and protector of all people. The dominant ideas of the national political discourse that popularised and legitimized

Banda's dictatorship made sure that he was presented as a gift from God to the people of Malawi and could not be questioned on anything.

The above claims on *kamuzuism* are challenged and disputed in Mapanje's poetry collection, *Of Chameleons and Gods* (1981). He challenges everything Banda's rule stood for including his many titles and his claim of immortality. Using his poetry, he paints the regime as responsible for the crushed dreams and hopes of the nation. Some of the poems that attack Banda and his authoritarian rule include 'The Song of Chickens' where the chickens ask their master why he bothered to protect them from the hawks only to prey on them himself. This can be read as a question to Banda, who claims to have fought the colonialists to liberate the Malawian people whom he now abused.

Another example of counter-hegemony in literature is the analysis of subversive techniques employed by the Khoi in their tales as they struggled to survive under the colonial rule of the Boers. According to Hermann Wittenberg (2014), these tales function in a subversive manner in their mockery of the 'king of beasts' as they castigate the political elites for eating easily at the expense of others. The figure of the jackal in these oral tales can be taken to represent the ordinary person who many a times has to rely on his wit in order to outsmart and escape the jaws of the political elite as represented by the lion-the king of the jungle. The lion is the "symbolically defeated and discredited enemy at whose misfortune one laughs" (Wittenberg, 2014, p. 80) for in laughing at whatever is threatening us, the object of our derision is reduced into a level where it can no longer bother us.

Wittenberg (2014) goes on to argue that with the entry of colonial forces in the Northern Cape frontier, the Khoi used their jackal trickster narratives as a strategy of discursive resistance. These tales are direct forms of storytelling in whose animal proxies one can easily recognize human characteristics. The lion with its tendency to prey on other animals especially the weaker ones can be taken to represent those in power who use their positions to violate social norms. In response to colonial invasion of the 1860s, the jackal trickster fable was adjusted to deal with the new realities of their situation. They achieved this through a simple substitution of the white

settler for the lion who was associated with rapacious and dangerous predateriness. The jackal represents the ordinary Khoi man trying to outsmart the system.

Just like Mapanje's poetry which attacked Banda's rule under the guise of satire, the Khoi through the folktales were able to deploy subversive humour in dealing with the powerful forces. The Khoi were able to take the figure of the jackal trickster and make him the imaginative vehicle for symbolic re-ordering of colonial power relations in which they and not the white settler could emerge triumphant.

By touching briefly on examples of counter-narratives in Africa, their meaning and how useful they are in providing the 'other story', I have tried to pave way for the reading of the short stories from Zimbabwe as counter- hegemony in as far as they allow the expression of the alternative views of the crisis which are in contradiction with the official narrative.

Primary Sources

So far, I have tried to touch on the background as to why some Zimbabwean artists have had to find alternative means of expression in their counter-hegemonic narratives. Political jokes can have grave consequences especially when the person telling them chooses the wrong time or place to tell them thus writers and critics need to be very creative in their art so as to escape victimisation from the state. Sisonke Msimang (2016) states:

> At its best, satire is a heady mix of comedy and tragedy. It is irreverent and silly and yet it can also offer powerful insights into the worst fears and most closely held taboos of a society. Good satire frees those who laugh along and it makes fools of those it targets. Because it uses humour, satire can survive in plain view for a long time before those who hold power recognize it. (Msimang, 2016, p. 6).

As stated earlier the short stories being considered for this study are an example of artists finding an alternative way to express their reality and are taken from the two anthologies, one by Gappah and the other edited by Irene Staunton. I firstly look at Gappah's An *Elegy for Easterly*.

Gappah was born in 1971 when Zimbabwe was still white-owned Rhodesia. She started writing at the age of 11 and her first published story was in the St Dominic's Secondary School magazine when she was 14. Though she initially wanted to be a journalist and a writer, Gappah studied law at the University of Zimbabwe. She attained her Masters in Law at Cambridge and went on to do her doctorate at the University of Graz in Austria. She then settled in Geneva where she is practicing International Trade Law. Her first collection of short stories which is under consideration for this research report, *An Elegy for Easterly* was shortlisted for the Frank O'Connor International Short Story Award and won the Guardian First Book Award in 2009. The book has been translated into several languages like Chinese, Dutch and French. Claire Armitstead (2015) describes the book as a collection of stories about every layer of Zimbabwean culture, from the educated and the elite to the quirky, the completely mad and children running in the streets. Writers do not simply write to mirror the societies they are part of, but sometimes writing can be their way of dealing with feelings of helplessness. In an interview with Armistead, Gappah says that she "wrote the stories of *Elegy* out of the rage and hopelessness that come when you are watching a country collapsing from the outside, and there is nothing you can do about it" (Armistead, 2015, n.p).

In some of her stories, Gappah employs grotesque humour to bring out her thematic concerns which range from the abuse of women, corrupt politicians and the failing economy of the country. Grotesque humour is loosely defined as something comic, based on a character or event that is painful to watch and funny at the same time. The grotesque can also touch on the bizarre, abnormal and the unnatural like in the title story of the collection, *An Elegy for Easterly* where Josephat's wife helps Martha Mupengo deliver her child and cuts the umbilical cord using her teeth. The grotesque also relies heavily on exaggeration, characters or events are exaggerated in such a way they seem unreal and according to Bakhtin, the grotesque does not exaggerate the negative elements to negate them but to show they could be turned around (Gremlin, 2016, n.p). 'The Mupandawana Dancing Champion' uses the abused body and death of M'dhara Vitalis to show the gruesome effects the economic situation was having on the ordinary citizens of Zimbabwe. M'dhara Vitalis literally dances himself to death at the *Why Leave Guesthouse and*

Bar and although this scene invokes laughter one cannot help but be disturbed by the events that lead up to his death.

In some of the stories, the figures of authority are stripped off their powers and are reduced to mere beings. This unmasking of power makes it easy for satirists to do their jobs like in the first story of the collection 'At the Sound of the Last Post', where one of the characters, who can be read to represent former President Mugabe is seen as nothing but the old man that he is. The story mainly brings out the hypocrisy of those in power as they are seen burying an empty casket just to keep up appearances. The man had already been buried at his ancestral home and the ceremony which is the setting for the story is just nothing but a show for the public.

In expressing this sense of despair over the affairs of the country and the conditions faced by those abroad, Gappah uses satire and irony and these devices, by invoking laughter, allow her to go where most would not dare. Her location might have also worked to her advantage. Being based in Geneva means the censorship laws of Zimbabwe do not affect her as they do the writers based in Zimbabwe. Tom Fleming (2009, n.p) states that "Gappah's book thrives on secrets, secrets that everyone knows but which may not be spoken". Concurringly, Tendai Marima (2009) states that Gappah "courageously tables issues that often produce deathly silences when raised among strangers for fear of persecution as one never knows to whom they are expressing their political opinion" (Marima, 2009, n.p). As stated earlier these secrets might be about the activities of the government which could not be expressed freely. In some of her stories, she reveals the hypocrisy of the Zimbabwean society and shows how it is the women who suffer the most.

Due to her concern for the plight of women, one can link Gappah's writing to some female writers in Zimbabwe like Noviolet Bulawayo and Valerie Tagwira. Just like Tagwira and Bulawayo, Gappah's subjects in the stories are mostly the poor and the marginalised and how they negotiate certain spaces to try and beat the odds. We find in Gappah's Easterly Farm, as in Bulawayo's work, the government operation code- named 'Murambatsvina' as the backdrop of the story. Darling and her friends live in the shanty part of town 'Paradise' where they have lived ever since the government destroyed their homes as part of 'clearing out trash' operation. The

shanty town is made up of tiny shacks which are unfit for human habitation. This shanty town takes one to the shacks in Mbare which were also destroyed during 'Murambatsvina' and how people like Sheila in Tagwira's *Uncertainty of Hope* were left homeless thereafter. The three authors (Gappah, Tagwira and Bulawayo) also address the theme of home and belonging. They discuss the issue of leaving one's homeland in search of greener pastures and the impact this has on one's life.

Marima (2009) also draws our attention to the parallels and comparisons drawn between Brian Chikwava's novel *Harare North* and Gappah's short stories. He states that Gappah challenges the nationalistic rule from the external perspective of non-Zanu supporters. Chikwava on the other hand provides an internal, fictive account of the brainwashed mindset of Mugabe's youth militia. Basing on Marima's assertion on Gappah's work, there is need then to explore how she gets away with exposing 'secrets' which tend to endanger one's life.

The other collection of short stories under consideration for the research report is *Laughing Now: Short Stories from Zimbabwe* and was edited by Staunton. Staunton began her career in publishing in London in the 1970s. She moved back to Zimbabwe after independence and worked for the government in its new Curriculum Development Unit. In 1987, she co-established Baobab Books which she left in 1999 to co-found Weaver Press. Staunton has also researched and compiled a number of oral histories including *Mothers of the Revolution*. She is also the editor of *Women Writing Zimbabwe,* the first anthology of women's writing in Zimbabwe. According to Chenni Xu (2011) Staunton's work is at once literary, creative, and passionately committed to concretely improving women's lives by giving them a voice that they would not otherwise have. Staunton states that, "for me, literature is an incredibly important way of telling the truth. In fact, I believe it is more important than history in terms of being able to help us understand the complexities and nuances of any period, any situation" (Xu, 2011, n.p).

Anna Chitando et al. (2015) discussing *Laughing Now: Short Stories from Zimbabwe* in "Surviving in a Land of Death" argue that the humour that surrounds the suicides in Staunton's collection is a rude pointer to a society that is in search of any strategy to alleviate the abject suffering and general poverty that it is experiencing. In the article, death is explored as a paradox

in the area of humour where instead of being a sombre event, death becomes a source of laughter. They argue that Zimbabwean writers have borrowed this concept in their depiction of the crisis from the Shona culture which expects the *sahwira* to provide the mourners with some entertainment, despite the sombre event. The Shona term *sahwira* can mean one's best friend. In his review, Jara (2008, n.p) states that the stories are a "time capsule in which a fragment of the country's history is stored but thankfully made less painful by the humour of the authors". The authors in the anthology "employ humour and satire to critically appraise life while constructively scoffing at the follies and frailties besetting people" (Ferra, 2008, n.p).

In the story 'Minister Without Portfolio', we see how humour enacts a rebellion against authority. There is a sense of superiority we feel over the character of the Minister as he is being ridiculed over his love of women and alcohol. Just like in 'The Sound of the Last Post' the figure of authority is again stripped of all powers and is seen just like an ordinary being. This reading of these stories borrows largely from Bakhtin's concept of the carnivalesque, where society is turned upside down with the beggar becoming king and the king becoming the beggar. In 'The Chances and Challenges of Chiadzwa', one laughs at the desperation of the locals to get their hands on the diamonds which have been discovered in their area. This story brings into light the gap between reality and the expectations of the people thus bringing out the incongruity in the story. In this instance laughter is being provoked by the inconsistencies between expectations and reality.

Although a lot of work has been done on Gappah's collection of short stories, not much critical work has been done on *Laughing Now:Short Stories from Zimbabwe* thus the need to critically engage with it in this research.

Theoretical Framework

The research report is guided by two approaches to humour theory, superiority theory, and incongruity theory. Superiority theory suggests that humour is generated when the subject has a sudden realisation of supremacy with respect to another person or situation. It is easy to laugh at something or certain behaviours we feel are beneath us and one finds that in some of the stories

under consideration, the characters' vices and follies are portrayed in excess such that we see ourselves as better human beings and we laugh to ridicule and to also establish our superiority. The incongruity theory suggests that humour follows the substitution of an expected event or remark in the place of what is expected. Holm (2011) argues that incongruity theory helps in identifying the gap between what society is and what is expected thus as people laugh, laughter is performing a social function as those who are being laughed at will realise what they need to do or aspire to be, to be accepted in society. This theory will come in handy especially in reading stories that are critiquing the socio-economic condition of Zimbabwe. Some of these stories show the gap between the aspirations of the people that came with independence with the actual lived experiences. In a way, this reading of the stories will help establish people's concerns by helping us identify instances where reality is in stark contrast with the ideals the rulers try to sell to the people This juxtaposing of the unexpected and the expected helps bring in the element of laughter as another form of mourning which is a key element in the reading of the stories. If mourning is read as a reaction towards loss, then some of the stories in the collection depict laughter as a way of mourning as laughing is the only thing the characters can do in response to the chaotic world they find themselves in. In describing the dire situation in Zimbabwe, writers use stories that evoke laughter and in so doing laughter and mourning are placed side by side thus depicting the incongruent.

The study will also lean heavily on Scott's seminal work *Weapons of the Weak* (1985) where he states that much of the politics of subordinate groups falls into the category of everyday forms of resistance which include acts such as foot dragging, dissimulations, false compliance, feigned ignorance, desertion and slander. Scott's work was based on fourteen months of anthropological fieldwork carried out in the late 1970s in the small village of Sedaka in Malaysia where he studied the politics of land tenure and ownership, how the peasants relate to their rich landlords who take advantage of them at every turn. He argues that just because the peasants did not resort to open revolts did not mean compliance on their part but that little attention has been paid to the ordinary, everyday forms of resistance which they resort to and their symbolic and ideological underpinnings. These techniques are what ordinary citizens resort to in instances where open defiance is impossible or entails mortal danger. Due to the high policing of the expressive

sphere, Scott's work does come in handy as the methods that he touches on rarely call attention to the perpetrators thus becoming useful in situations where there is no freedom of expression.

Methodology

The research will mainly use literary analysis which stresses the importance of examining the different elements of a piece of literature as a process to help one better understand the work of literature as a whole. In analysing the short stories, not only will I look at the context which can affect one's reading and interpretation of a text but my analysis will also look at the stylistics employed by the writers (imagery, symbolism, tone, characterisation, diction) and tie all these to the overall meaning of the text.

In reading for humour in these stories, I look out for the grotesque, the ridiculous, the incongruent and the ironic in situations, dialogue and characters. I am also interested in reading these stories as satire largely because of their stance which can be read as that of social critics.

Chapter Breakdown

In the first chapter of the research, I start off with a brief introduction where I touch on the use of humour in society, and I go on to introduce the two texts under consideration for the research report. This section is followed by the statement of the problem. I also state the aims and the justification of the study. Relevant literature is also reviewed. This section is divided into two parts, secondary sources and primary texts respectively. The literature review section is followed by the theoretical framework where I discuss the theories guiding the research report. This section is followed by the methodology then finally a chapter breakdown.

The second chapter concentrates on Gappah's *An Elegy for Easterly*. In the first section, I try and unpack her thematic concerns in the short stories and then I attempt to identify incidences of humour specifically the use of ridicule and the grotesque in the selected stories and finally look at how effective this mode has been in advancing her thematic concerns especially her critique of government officials and also her preoccupation with the diaspora. The stories that I look at in

this chapter are, ‘At the Sound of the Last Post’, ‘An Elegy for Easterly’, ‘Mupandawana Dancing Champion’, ‘Something Nice from London’ and ‘My Cousin-Sister Rambanai’.

The third chapter of the study focuses on Staunton’s *Laughing Now: Short Stories from Zimbabwe*. The chapter’s main preoccupation is to show how irony and incongruity have been deployed to critique the socio-economic conditions of the characters in the following short stories, ‘Minister without Portfolio’ by Julius Chingono, ‘The Chances and Challenges of Chiadzwa’ by Edward Chinhanhu, ‘Last Laugh’, by Shimmer Chinodya and finally ‘A land of Starving Millionaires’ by Erasmus Chinyani. Chapter Four is my concluding chapter. The first part of the chapter is a mere reflection of the ideas and discussions touched on in chapter 2 and 3 and then I go on and discuss the limitations and possibilities presented by laughter as a means of expression as shown by the texts under consideration. This chapter also helps assess whether the objectives of the study have been met and the challenges encountered as this research was being undertaken.

CHAPTER TWO: THE GROTESQUE AND THE RIDICULOUS IN *AN ELEGY FOR EASTERLY*

Introduction

The aim in this chapter is to show how Gappah, through the use of humour in her short stories *An Elegy for Easterly (*2009) undermines and parodies the hackneyed language of officialdom in its postcolonial Zimbabwean setting. By doing a close analysis of the stories, I aim to situate this research in the larger body of scholarship which looks at official narratives and how they are subverted through art. I begin by providing a brief background on Gappah and her writing. This brief background will help illuminate how she departs from 'patriotic history', which Terence Ranger (2004) argues is a "framework of historical remembering that enabled ZANU PF to cling to power by systematically deploying the politics of difference, of marginalization and forgetting, silencing wherever possible the memories and dissonant voices of those who recalled different histories" (Ranger cited in Ndou, 2012, p. 8). I proceed to discuss the 'elegy' as a kind of writing at whose core is a sense of mourning but in this case charged with humour: how in some instances, laughing becomes a way of mourning. I also show how this titling of the book helps advance the main concern of the collection which is to give voice to alternative narratives – the stories of ordinary citizens which are often silenced by mainstream media. I use the term mainstream media to refer to the national newspapers, TV and radio stations which were being controlled by Mugabe's government.

Before focusing on the stories, I briefly unpack the rhetoric of nationalism in Zimbabwe, especially the post-independence nationalist politics of the country. The major question I attempt to answer in this section is how the Zimbabwean state seeks to entrench its power through the use of language and the manipulation of history, memory and symbols. By analyzing the short stories, I seek to show how Gappah subverts the national narrative by turning the symbols of nationalism such as the flag, the national shrines and the war of liberation into objects of ridicule.

In her review of *An Elegy for Easterly*, Marima (2009) argues that Gappah challenges the nationalistic rule from the external perspective of non-ZANU PF supporters. The anti- ZANU PF

position which Gappah adopts results in her being labelled a traitor, a rebel according to Mugabe's 'with us or against us' discourse. Those who dared oppose the latter were invariably labelled as treacherous puppets of the West. Furthermore, Gappah herself admits that her stories result from her tiredness with ZANU PF acting like it owned Zimbabwe. Commenting on one of the short stories in the collection, 'At the Sound of the Last Post', Gappah states that, "I wrote this story actually because I have become increasingly upset about the way the government of Robert Mugabe has sort of appropriated this struggle (liberation struggle) as their struggle". She goes on to state that "it's now become a political game, where you only become a hero if you happened to be in agreement with the president at the time that you died" (Renne, 2009, n.p). These assertions are a clear indication that Gappah's fiction seeks to challenge what has been taken to be the national narrative of the country. One can also argue that the commemorative rituals ZANU PF has used for political legitimacy and historical remembering are based on the selective designation of national heroes who get recognized and buried at the national shrine. This selection of national heroes based on political affiliation has the effect of turning the roll call of Zimbabwean heroes into a ZANU PF hall of fame. The above statement paves way to a brief discussion on nationalist politics in Zimbabwe and the meaning of patriotic history which Gappah seeks to negate. Enocent Msindo (2011) captures this dilemma in the quote below:

> Although most Africans of the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s believed in the principle of restoring political power to the black Africans, the fact that there was also very little if any debates during the liberation struggle about the nature and forms of governance and political accountability in the post-colonial context, when the new leaders took over, they felt they were generally at liberty to do as they pleased. Taking advantage of the euphoria of independence, the leaders entrenched their authority over the state's ideological resources and political structures and also ritualized their leadership, making it difficult to challenge them. (Msindo, 2011, p. 5)

Norma Kriger (2003) argues that in the case of Zimbabwe, this ritualisation of power is evidenced by how ZANU PF sought to create a party state and a party nation. She goes on to argue that the process of state making, and nation building were deliberately channeled to crystalise around ZANU PF and ZANLA liberation histories, symbols and regalia. The history of ZANU PF became the national history and its symbols the national symbols. While Day and Thompson (cited in Bhat, 2015, p. 37) postulate that a nation is deemed as a community whose norms, values and identity are negotiable and reflective and which gathers huge but diverse masses of people together under the same consciousness and sensibility and creates a single identity for all, the ideals behind the Zimbabwean nation were mainly based on politics of exclusion. All those who did not support the ruling ZANU PF were labeled as sell outs. The expression of patriotism became synonymous with donning of the ZANU PF regalia (with the picture of Robert Mugabe all over it) and the chanting of the party's slogan. According to ZANU PF politics, loving one's country and belonging in the opposition were mutually exclusive.

The rhetoric of ZANU PF requires a little more examination. Phrases like 'third chimurenga', a term coined by the former Minister of Information, Jonathan Moyo in 2002 are part of the nationalist rhetoric which Mugabe's government used to appropriate the liberation struggle as ZANU PF's, successfully writing out the efforts of those who do not belong to the party. This rhetoric was equally aimed at subjecting the Zimbabwean masses into lifelong servitude as gratitude for having been saved from colonialism. The term 'Chimurenga', used to describe early resistance to the establishment of colonial rule, served as justification for the use of violence in the seizure of farms mainly from white people and in issuing threats to take over fifty-one percent of the shares of foreign owned companies (Msindo 2011). Connecting anti-colonial resistance with the land grabs in this manner aimed at legitimising and disguising the act as those of an indigenous rights movement to get back stolen land. As Tendai Mangena (2015) observes, 'third chimurenga' was projected as an emancipatory project with redemptive objectives, a third war of liberation against neo-colonialism by Western imperialists. Consequently, the ZANU PF government gained public support for seemingly getting back the land for the black majority.

Vanha vevhu, another popular phrase which loosely translates to 'sons of the soil' was deployed to disguise the cracks within the state and present Zimbabwe as free of fissures. It can also be argued that this sense of unity was meant to downplay the *Gukurahundi* massacres which saw thousands of people from Matebeleland and Midland provinces killed for being sellouts. Though it happened in the early 1980s, soon after independence, this incident still haunts many, especially those from the affected provinces. It has understandably made them more amenable to supporting the opposition, MDC. By referring to Zimbabweans as 'sons and daughters of the soil', ZANU PF also tried to cover up for the factionalism within the party itself – some of the Shona supporters saw Mugabe's appointment as nepotistic.

It is against this background that Gappah pens her short stories, to acknowledge that the liberation struggle was made possible by more than few nationalist elites who continued to claim that they had 'died' for the country. It is this 'patriotic history' that Gappah seeks to challenge in her fiction. In the case of Zimbabwe, patriotic history can be regarded as Zimbabwe's master commemorative narrative in so far as it represents the political elites' construction of the past, which serves its special interests and promotes its political agenda (Zerubavel cited in Ndou, 2012, p. 16). Taking this political agenda to push a particular version of history which thrives on the exclusion of non-party members, explains why ZANU PF went to great lengths to shape Zimbabwe's collective memory through the media, which for a certain period aired clips of the liberation struggle, played liberation songs and linked this to the ruling ZANU PF party as shown by the quote below:

> I spent four days watching Zimbabwean television which presented nothing but one 'historical programme after the other, the government press-the *Herald* and the *Chronicle* ran innumerable historical articles… Television and newspapers insisted on an increasingly simple and monolithic history. Television constantly repeated documentaries about guerilla war and about colonial brutalities….. The *Herald* and the *Sunday Mail* regularly carried articles on slavery, the partition, colonial exploitation and the liberation struggle (Ranger, 2003, p. 4).

The above quotation by Ranger shows the intensity with which the Zimbabwean government tried to shape people's memory. Yael Zerubavel (1997, p. 8) argues that "the power of collective memory does not lie in its accurate, systematic or sophisticated mapping of the past, but in establishing basic images that articulate and reinforce a particular ideological stance". For ZANU PF, this ideological stance was pushed through the re-packaging of history which the ordinary Zimbabweans were bombarded with through state media. Delta Ndou (2012) argues that in instances where this "patriotic history was disputed, the disputation took place in the relatively limited sphere of the academy and was carried out by scholars whose views were largely inaccessible to the general public' (Ndou, 2012, p. 12). My reading of Gappah's stories will however show how she dramatises or stages the way ordinary Zimbabweans dispute this history in ways that are often taken lightly, methods which James Scott (1985) refers to as everyday forms of resistance. This can include things like rumor, gossip, disguises, linguistic tricks, metaphors and euphemisms.

The Grotesque and the ridiculous as literary devices in contemporary Zimbabwean Literature

Literature expresses human experience in an imaginative way. Ajibade (2017, p. 22) states that "whether it is in poetry, drama, or novel or short story, the writer's dialogue with his physical and human environment comes out as a mirror in which his people and society can see what they look like". In analysing the short stories, I lean heavily on Phillip Thompson's (1972) reading of the grotesque as he argues that it often involves the expression of the alienated world, in which the familiar world is seen from a perspective that suddenly renders it strange. He goes on to state that it "entails an unresolved clash of incompatibles, an ambivalent clash of opposites" (Thompson, 1972, p. 36). As a literary technique, the grotesque is concerned with the confrontation of the abnormal with the normal. It is also an aesthetic phenomenon which signifies through shock, confusion, disorder and contradiction.

According to Kizito Muchemwa (2011) some Zimbabwean writers are still dealing with the nightmare of the colonial past and the nightmare of the present and this makes the grotesque one of the ideal techniques to capture the surreal reality of the ordinary, powerless and the dispossessed man and woman of Zimbabwe. This disillusionment is captured in the quote below,

> The African had expected that with independence and black man ruling black man, the quality of life would change drastically for the better. These expectations might have been naïve, even utopian, but that is the reason dissatisfaction with post-independence reality is more intense. The reality of post-independence is a far cry from the utopian heaven it seemed to promise. (Balogun, 1991, p. 42)

As the grotesque is continuously trying to undermine some established order, the situation in Zimbabwe especially the way Mugabe's government tied the notion of patriotism with the ZANU PF party creates the special atmosphere of the grotesque, which captures the clash between the dominant narrative offered and supported by the government with the lived experiences of the ordinary people.

The above understanding of the grotesque is what informs Gappah's use of the technique, as the situations she describes speaks to the degradation of the masses; their exploitation due to Mugabe's governing policies. The degradation of the masses is so pronounced that only the use of the grotesque can capture the horrific effects the crisis has had on ordinary Zimbabweans. In these short stories, it is used as a tool and means of social criticism. The more horrifying the scenes and the characters described by the author, the more relevant they become in describing the condition of the post-colonial in most African countries, Zimbabwe included. Anthony Chennells and Flora Veit-Wild (1999, p. 102) aptly summarise this when they state that 'an abnormal reality demands an abnormal literary form and language'.

Clark (2015, p. 29) argues that "every society always contends with a radical protesting minority that seeks to question, alter, and replace the regnant society's mythologies". In a case like Zimbabwe, this protesting minority can be taken to include writers like Gappah, Mlalazi,

Bulawayo and Chikwava who try to capture the horrifying experiences of those in Zimbabwe and those in the diaspora despite the fact that they may be labeled sell-outs. The grotesque is often employed by authors who refuse to accept the dominant discourse which in the Zimbabwean context meant the ZANU PF's rhetoric.

Gappah's depiction of ordinary Zimbabweans is reminiscent of the way which Toni Morrison uses deformities and disfigured bodies as an emblem of the blacks' continuous rejection by white society (Khammatit 2010). I found Khammatit's argument on the use of the grotesque in Morrison's work important for my research as it supports the notion that it is often writers concerned with the marginalised of any society that employ this literary technique.

In this regard, one can link Gappah's grotesque literary figures to that of Bulawayo who also relies on her child narrators to reveal or rather express the ambiguities and contradictions of a society where the standards of living had deteriorated so much that there is need for new names, signaling a new beginning the people need to turn their lives around. Tafadzwa Ngoshi (2016) focuses on how the aesthetics of the vulgar and grotesque are used in *We Need New Names* to create carnival moments that undermine authority and give marginal subjects some kind of power, even if this is temporary. The carnivalistic moments, which can be traced to Bakhtin's *Rabelais and his World,* are a brief moment in which life escapes its official furrows and enacts utopian freedom and creates an alternative space characterised by freedom, equality and abundance (Robinson 2011). Despite the fleeting nature of these moments, they do undermine power in that they allow for alternative voices and the critiquing of leaders, things which are not normally tolerated. Ngoshi goes on to state that:

> The child characters in *We Need New Names*- the vulgar language they use and the parodic acts they perform are a reflection of the vulgarity of political and religious power as exercised over a society in the novel by the powerful on behalf of the nation state and other cultural institutions like the church. (Ngoshi, 2016, p. 57)

This vulgarity is also evident in Gappah's short stories. The stories reveal the excessive deployment of political and religious power over the lives of the characters and show how they manage to create spaces for survival.

Another mode Gappah uses to create satirical laughter in her stories is ridicule. Musila (2004) argues that satire is the "literary art of diminishing or derogating a subject by making it ridiculous and evoking towards it attitudes of amusement, contempt, scorn or indignation" (Musila, 2004, p. 107). She goes on to highlight that the mode of ridicule is through the use of a mocking, contemptuous laughter, which then holds up the vice for social ridicule. In her stories, Gappah manages to bring down the high and mighty politicians from their positions of power by exposing their actions and rhetoric for nothing but the pipe dreams that they are. In reading the postcolonial situation, Chinua Achebe argues that independence had begotten a pulverised reality in which the gap between nationalist rhetoric and political practice was becoming obvious and it was difficult for people to get a grip of the 'new cloud' that had appeared on the African sky (Achebe cited in Gikandi, 1991, p. 113). It is this gap that Gappah seeks to expose by her use of the ridicule and the grotesque.

'Undoing Patriotic History': Gappah's Use of the Grotesque and the Ridiculous

This section focuses on how the grotesque and the ridiculous are used to criticize and ridicule government institutions by examining the stories 'At the Sound of the Last Post', 'An Elegy for Easterly' and 'The Mupandawana Dancing Champion'. In traditional African societies, people ridiculed others through songs, proverbs, folktales and other verbal arts and this goes to show the role of the artist as a satirist is not unique to contemporary writing, as the phenomenon can be traced to earlier writings. In the three stories mentioned, there is what Simon Gikandi (1991) terms ironic discourse, which he defines as the total strategy the novelist adopts to deconstruct dominant or official discourse and thereby expose the 'cold facts' which official rhetoric conceals. Musila (2004) further exposes this official discourse as responsible for presenting public figures like the president and his ministers and their wives as dignified people who

command people's respect chiefly by virtue of their powerful positions. Ridiculing these figures displaces this misconception as they are exposed for what they are and in some cases they are often made to appear worse than they are. Their vices or appearances are exaggerated for emphasis and sometimes to solicit laughter. Writers aim to refract reality and the angle from which reality is perceived varies from one writer to another. The writer, disenchanted by the contradictions in a society, may use art as an instrument to re-construct, re-adjust and rectify the anomalies, through the ridicule of a certain class or social group in the country. By using the grotesque and the ridiculous in her short stories, Gappah entertains and speaks truth to power by using humour to present views that would otherwise not be tolerated.

The closure or shrinkage of democratic space in Zimbabwe created a "socio-political environment under which patriotic history thrived whilst counter-narratives were either obscured or discouraged through the enactment of arbitrary security laws" (Ndou, 2012, p. 8). These include the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA) and the Public Order and Security Act (POSA) which were gazetted into law on 22 January 2002 and imposed severe restrictions on the publication or communication of statements prejudicial to the state and undermining the authority of or insulting the president. Ndou (2012) argues that this socio-political environment led to wide-spread self-censorship in the public domain and limited the platforms upon which the veracity of the claims made by patriotic history could be tested without fear of reprisals. These arguments by Ndou illuminate aspects of Gappah's story, 'At the Sound of the Last Post' whose mode of narration draws attention to self-censorship which one had to practice for fear of reprisals.

The story is told from the perspective of Esther, a woman recently widowed and whose husband's burial ceremony provides the backdrop of the narrative. Her thoughts as she stands next to the president watching an empty casket being paraded in front of the mourners at the National Heroes Acre makes up the bulk of the story. The fact that most of the story is based on Esther's thoughts speaks to the lack of freedom of speech in Zimbabwe, where people are not free to express themselves for fear of being incarcerated. Mangena (2015) states that in the story, Gappah deploys an onomastic strategy of refusing to name most of her characters who are

however inspired by historical public figures. She relies on the use of political and social titles like the president, first lady, vice president; it however becomes easy for anyone familiar with Zimbabwean history to fill in the gaps and connect these titles to the historic figures. While seemingly concerned with a widow's musings at the funeral, the story runs a commentary on Robert Mugabe's government by turning the very symbols used to entrench its power to objects of ridicule.

In this story, patriotic history is challenged and symbols like the national flag and national shrines like the National Heroes Acre are ridiculed. The stated purpose of the Heroes Acre is to commemorate guerrillas killed during the war, and contemporary Zimbabweans whose dedication or commitment to their country justify their interment at the shrine. In the story, Gappah subverts this stated purpose as the widow narrates how ending up at the Heroes Acre was mainly influenced by one's standing with Robert Mugabe's ruling party as shown in the following quote:

> The newsreader who was my husband's mistress announced that my husband was to be made a national hero. The politburo had declared him a hero to be buried at the national shrine. What she does not say is that my husband is fortunate to have been awarded this status at all. Only those who had not disagreed with the president at the time of their deaths become heroes. A committee weighs the gallantry. It is sometimes necessary to upgrade those that were not gallant enough but sang well enough and danced high enough in the praise of the president to earn them a place there. (Gappah, 2009, p. 18)

The juxtaposition of the hero's record as a philanderer and the supposed grandeur of his political history works to undermine the edifice of official history which is depicted as contrary to the heroes' more private, hidden identity. The quote ridicules the idea of being declared a hero in this fictitious country: to qualify, one just had to be sure to be in good standing with the president at the time of one's death, instead of truly serving the country. The national shrine is reduced from its high and 'sacred' status to a fancy burial place to compensate the president's faithfuls.

Administration of the shrine in the story has thus far dismally failed to foster national unity but instead promotes partisan politics and division (Mapfurutsa 2004). Drawing from Mapfurutsa's observation on the actual Heroes Acre and the widow's musings in the story, one can conclude that most of those interred at the Heroes Acre are members or sympathisers of the ruling party.

The wife muses that instead of 'the gallant hero being buried today', her husband only 'consolidated the gains of the liberation struggle by devotedly introducing the president by his full totem name and knew nothing of the forests of Mozambique where the guerrillas trained'. By using sarcasm in exposing the 'gallant hero' for exactly what he was, through the eyes of his wife, Gappah ridicules the notion of the masculinised state hero in Zimbabwe. Many scholars have engaged with the idea of Zimbabwe's history of an often masculinised violent liberation war with the likes of Lene-Bull Christiansen negating the notion of the president as the father of the nation who needed to take care of his children- the rest of the nation. The idea of a masculinised liberation war is further evidenced by the use of terms like 'father of the nation' and 'sons of the soil'. This construction of national identity as a masculinised political power is also shown by the president's remarks to his political advisor in Mlalazi's short story 'Election Day' when he states that the political game they are playing is a game for true men, men larger than life. It is this masculinisation of the state that Gappah seeks to negate as Esther shows how these 'larger than life' men are nothing but liars, philanderers who worked hard to protect each other for the sake of saving face and playing at national unity:

> I could see around me eyes glazing over at this seventh oration at the seventh hero's funeral in four months. They are being culled, all of them, age and AIDS will do its work even among the most gallant of heroes; the vice president with the hooded eyes looks like he may be the next one to go. (Gappah, 2009, p. 6)

This description of these public figures as being culled creates the image of unproductive animals being led to slaughter one by one. It produces malicious laughter in the readers as we see these 'powerful' bodies being portrayed as weak "divorced from their powerful positions and apparent dignity of public functions, official appearances and ceremonies" (Musila, 2004, p.

111). The fact that they also succumb to old age and illnesses show they are mere humans as well, not the larger than life portraits they seek to project.

The most bizarre aspect of the story is the complete charade that happens at the National Heroes Acre. An expensive casket full of bricks and sand is sent off by a twenty-one-gun salute while the man they had all gathered to bury had already been buried at his rural village. This level of hypocrisy at a national level makes one wonder what else the government is covering up just to maintain the one narrative being spun to consolidate its gains.

The Zimbabwean flag is also held up for ridicule in the story. The colours and symbols of each flag convey the ideas, ambitions and values of a country or organization. The flag is a sacred item that holds great significance and in the case of Zimbabwe this is shown by the presence of the flag in every major establishment and school in the country. The Zimbabwean flag has five colours from the black which represents the black majority in the country, the green for vegetation, yellow for the valuable minerals found in some parts of the country, white for peace and finally the red which represents the blood of the sons and daughters of the soil which was split during the liberation struggle. The flag that is depicted in Gappah's story does not hold the same noble values as did the Zimbabwean flag of the early days after independence which has also been reapropriated by Zanu PF and has become synonymous with ZANU as the liberating party of the country. In the story, the flag is described as follows:

> Black is the dark of the gathered masses who listen to the youth choir dressed for battle in bottle green fatigues, voices hoarse in the August heat, singing songs from a war that they are not allowed to forget. Black and brown are the surrounding Warren Hills, the hills denuded, with stumps remaining where the trees were, the green trees now the brown wood that replaces the electricity that is not found in the homes (Gappah, 2009, p. 4)

This ridiculing of the national flag goes hand in hand with the disappointment that has been the post-colonial condition in Zimbabwe. The pessimistic tone of the narrator is brought out by the

use of phrases like ‘voices hoarse in the August heat’ suggesting that the people have been singing for a long time resulting in the hoarse voices. The ‘stumps’ that now remain where the trees were speaks to the critical shortage of electricity which saw the urban populace turn to the trees as a source of firewood so they could cook their meals. There is a somber atmosphere being conjured up as the narrator describes what is left of a once glorious country.

Gappah uses the symbol of the flag to show how those in power had betrayed the hopes and the dreams of the majority. Instead of the green representing the vegetation which was once the pride of Africa, it is now synonymous with the uniforms of the youth militia who are often used to discipline those who are suspected of supporting the opposition. This idea of youths being fed a propaganda to serve the interests of the ruling party is shown by the protagonist in Brian Chikwava’s *Harare North* who discovers a little late that what he thought he was fighting for was far from the truth.

This frustration on how the Zimbabwean flag had become meaningless to many ordinary citizens as they now came to associate it with the ruling ZANU PF is shown by how one Pastor Evan Mawarire took to social media and called for Zimbabweans to “re-own their flag, to stop wishing they lived in another country, and to force the politicians to answer questions on their lack of accountability and corrupt ways without fear” (Mawarire in Allison, 2016, n.p). Mawarire created the #ThisFlag on social media which went viral as Zimbabweans both at home and in the diaspora responded to this call to reclaim the flag from the clutches of ZANU PF and to making it a national symbol which it was meant to be.

There is also the discourse of sovereignty that is best encapsulated by Mugabe telling Blair ‘to keep your England while I keep my Zimbabwe’ and also the slogan ‘Zimbabwe will never be a colony again’ (The Guardian 2002). It is quite bizarre that while Mugabe was declaring Zimbabwe for Zimbabweans, millions of Zimbabweans were doing everything in their power to get out of the country, applying for refugee statuses all over the world.

While the ‘The Sound at the Last Post’ ridicules the official narratives surrounding the Zimbabwean nation, exposing the hypocrisy of the ruling party, the title story of the collection,

'An Elegy for Easterly' explicates how the grotesque captures the suffering of the people at the hands of those who made promises to protect them. The story shows how the residents of Easterly, a farm turned into a squatter camp, try and regain some form of agency despite the odds. Though the sufferings of the Easterly population are reported in gruesome detail, they are simultaneously rendered comic by the way the residents turn this harrowing poverty into opportunities to eke out a living. In the story, sinister and comic elements are combined to form broad and biting satire that has severely disturbing effects on the reader.

In recent Zimbabwean writing, some texts like Gappah's stories can be located in the need to challenge a series of omissions, additions and simplifications of ZANU PF's narration especially of the recent crisis (Mangena 2013). Emphasis is placed on the realistic representation of history and a guarantee of such reality is granted through the use of names of real people and places and reference to historical events. In 'An Elegy for Easterly', Gappah seeks to negate the official narrative especially concerning the government operation code named 'Murambatsvina' loosely translated to 'getting rid of the trash'. In support of this operation which resulted in a massive nationwide programme of destruction of unapproved urban structures, displacement of people, dislocation of families and criminalization of informal economy that had enabled the urban proletariat to escape the worst ravages of a post Economic and Structural Adjustment Program (ESAP) economy, the government continued to spin the tale that this was a much-needed operation (Muchemwa2010). However, the effects of this operation are what many writers – most prominently Tagwira, Chikwava, Bulawayo in *Uncertainty of Hope, Harare North and We Need New Names* respectively have been concerned with. Companies closed, which resulted in a lot of people losing their jobs and being left homeless. This was followed by "shortages of essential goods, fuel and other products and a decline in the country's social and health services" (Manase, 2014, p. 65). It is against this backdrop that communities like the fictional Easterly came to be.

Easterly Farm, "a symbol of betrayal, continued suffering and broken promises, is a slum made up of a "cluster of houses of pole and mud, of thick black plastic sheeting for walls and clear plastic for windows, houses that erupted without city permission, unnumbered houses identified

only by reference to the names of their occupants" (Gappah, 2009, p.23). The poverty levels of the inhabitants of Easterly Farm is evident in the fact that there is only one source of water for all the residents, which becomes quite glaring when compared to the conspicuous consumption of the elite as shown by the portrayal of the 'first lady' in 'At the Sound of the Last Post' who is known for her spending habits: "She wore hats of flying-saucer dimensions while cows sacrificed their lives so that she could wear pair upon pair of Ferragamo shoes" (Gappah, 2009, p. 15). This is the same first lady who told the nation's orphans that if she could, she 'would really, really adopt you all' (Gappah, 2009, p. 15). In the story, the author emphasizes both the deprivations of the daily life of the Easterly residents and the broken promises of the government.

The setting of the story, a 'refugee farm adjacent to the city, is itself telling of failed urbanity and the failures of the post-colonial state after the year 2000' (Muchemwa 2013). The residents of Easterly, just like those of Paradise in *We Need New Names* and Tagwira's poor urbanites in *Uncertainty of Hope* all speak to the rejection of citizens by the nation-state, where they are reduced to undesirables to be kept away from the public eye and scrutiny. One can also draw the irony in this situation by pointing out that the whole operation of displacing people from their homes to growth points and refugee camps resonates with what the Ian Smith government did when it unceremoniously relocated people into barren lands where they could not even rely on working the soil for their survival. Growth points were areas set aside for development in rural areas. The concept of growth points was mooted by the Zimbabwean government in the 1980s as a means to decongest cities and towns. This was done mainly to curb rural-to-urban migration through employment creation and the availing of basic services to the people in rural areas (Chifamba 2013).

In the story, Gappah uses setting and characterization, especially the abused body of Martha Mupengo, to create a grotesque atmosphere that speaks to the sad reality of the residents of the fictional Easterly farm. Frances Barascha (1985) argues that in the grotesque, "conflicting elements of ludicrous-horror occur simultaneously, producing in the reader a confused and uneasy tension between laughter and fear or disgust" (Barascha, 1985, p. 4). In the story, the

grotesque manifests itself through the mutilation and violent death of Martha Mupengo. One can argue that in the story, the grotesque mainly functions to produce a forceful anger against the injustice on the people by the government they voted into power.

Martha Mupengo's name is itself suspect as we later discover that it was a name given to her by the residents of Easterly Farm. When she turned up unannounced at Easterly Farm,

> as though from nowhere and did not speak much except for her request of twenty cents' she was immediately given the name Martha as she looked like another Martha, Mai James' husband's niece when her illness had spread to her brain', just like that, nothing in the face, just a smile, and nothing more. (Gappah, 2009, p. 27)

The author goes on to state that 'her name and memory, past and dreams were lost in the foggy corners of her mind' (Gappah, 2009, p. 26). The use of the term foggy suggests a confused mind which can be described as hazy or foggy suggesting that something was not right in her mind. In ChiShona, 'Mupengo' loosely translates to 'the mad one' and while it is a difficult phenomenon to define as it means different things depending on the socio-cultural and historical context in which it occurs, my reading of 'madness' leans heavily on Gregory Reid's (2002) assertion that "whether we consider 'madness' a physical disease, a brain dysfunction, a deluge of passion, divine intervention, possession, repression or the consequence of environmental stress, consistent in these understandings and aetiologies is the underlying concept that 'madness' entails estrangement from reality" (Reid, 2002, p. 55). Martha shows no sign of being in touch with reality and the only time she interacts with people is when she is lifting her dress and asking for money.

The way Martha's nudity is exposed for all to see including children, is another means used by the author to ridicule the way the post-colonial government takes advantage of its citizenry. The fact that it is mostly the children who follow her around, waiting for her to lift up her dress so as to see her naked body speaks to a society that has lost its moral fabric. Against a literary tradition that often depicts children as representing innocence and unworldliness, the sight of children

seeking to poke fun at a naked body is shocking. The madness that has taken over the fictional Easterly as shown by the use of children who in most cases are used as epitomes of innocence is another technique Gappah used to shock the readers into realizing how bad things have become in the country as shown in the following quote:

> 'Where are you going, Martha Mupengo?' they sang. She turned and showed them her teeth. 'May I have twenty cents,' she said, and lifted up her dress. Giddy with delight, the children pointed at her nakedness. 'hee, haana bhurugwa,' they screeched. 'hee, Martha has no panties on, she has no panties on.' (Gappah, 2009, p. 24)

In this instance, Gappah might have used this technique to shock the readers into realizing how bad things have become in the country. Yuleth Chigwedere (2015) states that it is ironic that the twenty cents she is asking for used to be a silver coin and, yet she is asking for this at a period in time when the country is using only bearer cheques printed on bond paper as its currency'. Leaning on this argument, one can argue that in insisting on twenty cents, Martha is asking for that Zimbabwe the children of Easterly had no idea once existed, a stable Zimbabwe where people 'danced to records at Christmas when we had our Christmas bonuses' (Gappah, 2009, p. 29). Martha's lifting of her dress to get that twenty cents also represents the many bizarre means people resorted to, to eke out a living. Mangena (2015) argues that the so-called madness of Martha and her silence in the face of a meaningless and absurd existence is emblematic of the simple citizens in post-2000 Zimbabwe who found themselves in difficult situations that virtually paralysed them and reduced them to taciturnity and inactivity. They go on to argue that if she is taken to represent the simple citizens and the hope that they once had for their motherland, then her violent rape and cannibalistic dispossession of her new baby shown by the way Josephat's wife (Josephat is the man who rapes Martha, impregnating her) had to literally chew off the umbilical cord so as to separate the baby from its mother, can be considered a portrayal of the manner in which those in power, in post-colonial Zimbabwe, literally snatch the dreams and hopes of the people.

If one is to take Martha to represent the vulnerable masses of the post-independence Zimbabwe, then her lost dreams can also mean the stolen dreams of the nation whose people have learnt to do almost anything and everything to survive. Just like Martha's mind which was frozen in time, the children of Easterly could not imagine a time 'before a loaf of bread cost half a million dollars' (Gappah, 2009, p. 28).

A joke is something that is said or done to make people laugh. Jokes can be read as manifestations of a symbolic victory over an enemy, a victory that is confirmed by the laughter of the third person who can be the audience or the reader. The joke about the president suffering from foot and mouth disease because he 'travels and talks too much' (Gappah, 2009, p. 32) is another way which was identified by Scott (1985) as another form of resistance. This joke about the president having foot and mouth disease is humorous in that the foot and mouth disease is a contagious viral disease of cattle and sheep, causing ulceration of the hoofs and around the mouth, but in this case the 'foot' is used to indicate those who travel a lot and 'mouth' those who talk a lot. By laughing at the joke one gets to share the hate and contempt of the narrator for the object of the joke which in this case is the former President Mugabe. Scott (1985) argues that powerless groups can employ strategies of resistance which hide their actions from the powerful or which use codes to make them invisible. With these jokes they share amongst themselves the residents of Easterly manage to express their discontent with the government without fear of being detected by the authorities.

In the story, the theme of madness has been used as a sign of the state of affairs under Robert Mugabe's regime. It is important to note some of the innovative ways which the residents of Easterly resort to, to make ends meet amidst the madness surrounding them,

> Under the bridge, cobblers making manyatera sandals out of used tires. The shoes were made to measure, 'Just put your foot here, blaz,'' the sole of the shoe sketched and cut around the foot, a hammering of strips of old tire onto the sole, and lo, fifteen-minute footwear. In Siyaso, it was not unknown for a man whose car had been relieved of its radio or

> hubcaps to buy them back from the man into the hands they had fallen.
> At a discount. (Gappah, 2009, p. 31)

As one laughs at the shoes which are 'made to measure under the bridge', there is a sobering tone as one fully appreciates the effects of the economic crisis on the characters in the story. It is a sad reality that is depicted in the quote but the way the scene is described makes one chuckle with laughter. The shoes are described as fifteen-minute footwear where not much is required except to put one's foot on the tyre for measurements. This is in direct contrast to the usual situation where one goes to a particular shop to buy a shoe according to size, not having to go under the bridge to get one's foot measured. This humourous depiction of the struggles for survival shows the resilience of the people to survive despite the odds.

The moment Josephat's wife literally chews off the umbilical cord as she tries to separate the baby from the dying mother can be taken to show how far the citizens would go to survive amidst the madness and the chaos of their condition. Martha's suffering and vulnerability and the way some of the characters engage in alternative means of living show the different reactions people had to the crisis.

Ofeibea (2016) states that whatever the setting, be it live standup comedy, in newspapers, on the radio, online, on social media, on television or waiting in long lines to try to withdraw hard to find cash from the ATMs and banks, Zimbabweans laugh at themselves, at life and their mounting problems. This attitude is aptly expressed in the story the 'Mupandawana Dancing Champion'. The story is about old M'dhara Vitalis who is forced into an early retirement because of the economic collapse of the country. In the story, Gappah uses comic writing to parody the madness of the socio-political and economic 'madness' that prevailed in the post 2000 era. The setting of the story is a growth point, Mupandawana. In as much as these areas were set aside for development and employment creation, the fact that characters like M'dhara Vita, were eking out a living in the capital city Harare and the students whose interest in Geography went only as far as it enlightened them on the 'exact distance between Mupandawana and London, Mupandawana and Johannesburg, Mupandawana and Gaborone, Mupandawana and Harare' (Gappah, 2009, p. 92) shows that the growth points have become another failed project

in the country. Instead of containing the people in the rural areas, both the young and the old cannot wait to get away.

Having served his company for thirty long years, for his pension, M'dhara Vitalis is only given three pairs of shoes, a pair for every ten years he was with the company.

> 'pension yebhutsu,' Jeremiah said, and, even as we pitied him, we laughed until tears ran down Jeremiah's cheeks and we had to pick Bobojani off the ground. (Gappah, 2009, p. 95)

The narrator, Jeremiah and Bobojani are M'dhara Vita's friends but they also cannot help but laugh at the absurdity of the situation. M'dhara Vita's circumstances would not normally call for this kind of reaction but laughing and trivializing things has become, in the context of the stories, a form of coping mechanism for the people. Despite his old age, Vitalis is forced to start from scratch and find ways of making ends meet for himself and his family. It is funny and sad at the same time that the only job that he could find is of making coffins and he is so good at it that his employer feels he did not need the other two employees, thus hastening their retirement as well. The fact that the only job M'dhara Vitalis can find is that of making coffins can be read symbolically to mean the death of the country's economy. The boom of the coffin business, despite the economic collapse in the country speaks to the many deaths resulting from the high rate of HIV/AIDs, making the real growth in Mupandawana – one of the biggest growth points in the country – "the number of people waiting to buy coffins" (Gappah, 2009, p. 92). It is quite ironic that while most of the people are forced into early retirements due to the failing economy, members of parliament get richer and richer as shown by M'dhara Vitalis' boss who owned all the lucrative businesses in Mupandawana as shown below:

> M'dhara Vita's employer was a member of parliament for our area. As befitting such a man of the people, the honourable had a stake in the two most important enterprises in the growth point, so that the profits from Kurwiragono Investments, t/a No Matter Funeral Palour and Coffin Suppliers accumulated interest in the same bank account as those from

> Kurwiragono Investments, t/a Why Leave Guest and Disco Bar. (Gappah, 2009, p. 97)

The fact that only one man owned all the lucrative businesses in the Growth Point shows the unfair distribution of the economic resources. This does not deter the people however as they find ways to enjoy themselves despite the circumstances, shown by all the drinking and the merry-making that happens at the local 'Why Leave' bar.

Though the story seems to revolve around the sufferings of M'dhara Vitalis, political absurdities are exposed in the story as shown by how the owner of the bar in which the dancing competition is held, who is also the Member of Parliament, gets into trouble because of the advert his fourth wife has made to publicise the dancing competition. It is not an accident that the Mupandawana Dancing Champion acronym is MDC, which is the name of the main opposition party in Zimbabwe: 'what business does a ruling party MP have in promoting the opposition, the puppets, those led by tea boys, the detractors who do not understand that the land is the economy and the economy is the land and that the country will never be a colony again, those who seek to reverse the consolidation of the gains of our struggle' (Gappah, 2009, p. 103). In her review of the story, Novuyo Tshuma (2009) states that the quote is reminiscent of the many tired speeches laced with obsessive paranoia that one hears from the ruling party of Zimbabwe. Making false accusations and the general distrust of others are symptoms of paranoia which can be a sign of madness and this is evident within the ruling party as they suspect and accuse all non-supporters of ZANU PF to be their perpetual enemies.

'Of the Pounds, the Dollars and the Rand': The Zimbabwean experience in Diaspora

Many writers and critics have tried to map the post-colonial condition of post-2000 Zimbabwe in relation to the "phenomenal outward migration by some Zimbabweans to Western metropolitan cities such as London in search of economic opportunities and a better life" (Manase, 2014, p. 60). Though some fictional works like Ruby Magosvongwe's 'Esther's Breakthrough' (2010) portray the positive side of 'hunting in foreign lands', some works like Brian Chikwava's *Harare North* and some stories in *Writing Still, Waiting Still* edited by Irene Staunton and *An Elegy for*

Easterly show how the metropolitan experiences of these migrants were characterized by fragmentation and traumatic alienation (Manase 2014). The two stories analysed in this section show how Gappah uses sardonic humour to ridicule the notion of the diaspora being in 'greener pastures'.

Just like the home described by Thabisani Ndlovu (2010) which emerges 'as a challenging physical and emotional space, from which the youth, especially, feel a dire need to escape', the homes in the short stories 'Something Nice from London' and 'My Cousin Sister Rambanai' have become barren, in terms of lost opportunities and hopelessness. Mangena and Mupondi (2011) argue that the beginning of the Zimbabwean crisis marks one of the greatest periods which saw Zimbabweans trying to move from this 'confined space to 'enabling spaces'. Most scholars have associated this grand movement of people to that of the colonial period where people moved to South African mines and cities in search of economic opportunities. The 1980s also witnessed many people fleeing from the Gukurahundi killings into neighboring countries. The point I am trying to make here is best captured by Rosemary Moyana (2010):

> The current trend in Zimbabwe, therefore, where young and old decide to leave their country to seek economic empowerment elsewhere is strictly speaking not new. The current trend where Zimbabweans are going 'hunting in foreign lands falls into the category of the second phase of the liberation struggle, namely the need for economic empowerment which liberates one from the clutches of poverty (Moyana, 2010, p. xii)

One of the first fictional characters to leave home in search of greener pastures is Lucifer Mandegu from Charles Mungoshi's *Waiting for the Rain* (1975). Lucifer is an interesting character because of the way he denounces his home because of colonially induced poverty.

> I am Lucifer Mandengu. I was born here against my will. I should have been born elsewhere-of some other parents. I have never liked it here, and I never shall and if ever I leave this place, I am not going to come

> back. It is the failure's junk heap. Those who go to the towns only come back here to die. Home is a cluster of termite eaten huts clinging on the slope of a sun-baked hill. (Mungoshi, 1975, p. 162)

Like Lucifer who distances himself from everything that makes up a home, the characters in short stories flee and try to reinvent themselves elsewhere. My reading of 'home' leans on Dan Ojwang's idea of home as "a dwelling house, a site for family making, a geographical site of origin, a native land and an imagined place of national ethnic, religious and personal belonging" (Ojwang, 2013, p. 5). Belinda Chivizhe (2016, p. 5) also states that a home is "also meant to make one feel secure, content and fulfilled and the economic collapse in Zimbabwe can be seen as the collapse of a home that rendered many Zimbabweans homeless and created a desperate search for greener pastures in the diaspora". The hardships they encounter in these foreign lands resonate with one of Zimbabwe's prominent artists, Oliver Mtukudzi's songs 'Nhava izere mhepo' which loosely translates to 'the bag is full of air'. This speaks to the shattered dreams of these hunters in 'foreign lands' as shown by Chikwava's *Harare North* where he also uses humour to portray the shocking conditions in which his characters find themselves in.

The pressures faced by these sojourners do not emanate from only the need to 'fight melancholia of finding themselves in strange lands' but also from fulfilling the many expectations from those left back home. This is the background of Gappah's stories 'Something Nice from London' and 'My Cousin-sister Rambanai'. In both stories, Gappah explores what is known as the push and pull factors of London, commonly referred to as "Harare North" due to the many Zimbabweans who find themselves trying to eke out a living there. Push and pull factors are those factors which either forcefully push people into migration or attract them to move into that particular place.

The stories explore the hunger experienced by the characters, hunger which is both for food and for better opportunities. The stifling political conditions where people are bombarded by state propaganda every five minutes, "a voice reminds us that the land is ours, it will not be taken from us again; the country will never be a colony again. The message is repeated three times in twenty minutes that it takes Jonathan to drive us home" (Gappah, 2009, p. 64) also contribute to

people running away to places where they could be allowed to exercise free will. This could be taken to be one of the pull factors, along with the powerful pounds and the dollars which could then be traded for billions in Zimbabwean currency on the black market. Gappah shatters the above myths by exposing the sufferings of those 'supposedly' enjoying the diaspora and showing that all that glitters is indeed not gold

Both stories revolve around death, which may be taken literally or seen as expressing the death of dreams and hopes of the many Zimbabweans both at home and in the diaspora. In 'Something Nice from London' it comes as a surprise to the reader that the awaited parcel from London is not a bag full of clothes, shoes or money but it is actually Peter's body who had died mysteriously in the streets of London. In 'My Cousin Sister Rambanai', Rambanai travels from the 'States' to Zimbabwe to bury her father. Her brother does not travel for the burial because he did not have proper travelling documents but sends the little he has to help with the burial. Both incidents somehow taint the picture of the 'greener pastures' of the diaspora.

Normally, one would expect the tones of such stories to be loaded with pain and sadness, but we find that Gappah cleverly lightens the mood through humourous characterisation and dialogue. In 'Something Nice from London' the juxtaposition she does between those arriving from London and the relatives waiting for them touches on the poverty-stricken lives led by those at home as compared to those who managed to escape. Though there is relative difference between those who travel and those who remain, Gappah shows that it's not always as rewarding as people assume hence the performance of those returning home. She humorously describes 'those being waited for and those doing the waiting' to lighten the situation so as 'not to induce shock and denial in the spectator' (Chitando et al., 2015, p. 21). This is how Gappah captures the moment,

> They have made an effort for the flight, the women in manicured wigs and weaves, their England clothes fitting them well, their skin lightened by years and maybe even by just as little as six months of living out of the heat and stress of poverty. Those receiving them have also made an effort, or maybe it is not such an effort. They will have been happy to put

> aside their quiet desperation to wear the shining joy of welcome. (Gappah, 2009, p. 63)

As the narrator and the other relatives who had gone to wait for Peter's body at the airport finally get home without the body as it was not on that particular plane, they are welcomed by the official criers who do their best to 'outcry' each other as shown by Mai Lisa "who outdoes them all as she hops first on one leg, then on the other, bends low from her waist, raises herself and puts her hands on the head with her face to the sky" (Gappah, 2009, p. 64). The description of Mai Lisa is so hilarious that one can be forgiven for laughing out loud despite the sadness which comes with funerals. One can link this to the notion that people always find something to laugh about, no matter the circumstances.

The way Gappah describes Rambanai's reaction the moment she spots her family who have come to welcome her at the airport is also hilarious as shown below:

> I did not expect that, however, that she would send wails across immigration and customs as soon as she saw us. We looked down at her from the observatory platform at the airport, with my parents, my aunt and small cousin brothers, we saw her disembark from the airplane, cast her face towards us, and break into a loud keening that startled the cluster of white visitors waiting in line immediately in front of her. (Gappah, 2009, p. 169)

Just like the official criers in 'Something Nice from London', we also have a fair share of comic relief in 'My Cousin Sister Rambanai'. The way Rambanai reacts when she sees her relatives contrasts with the new airs she has picked up as a 'have been', a well-travelled cosmopolitan. When she sees her relatives she starts wailing, forgetting her dignified, re-invented dignified persona. Rambanai's story is not so much of her father's funeral as about her hustling to get new papers to go back to the 'States' after her original passport has been cancelled due to her violation of her visa conditions. The activities she engages in after her passport is cancelled are "emblematic of the agencies and tactics of prospective migrant characters" (Manase, 2014, p.

65). Her new name ‘Langelihle’ which means a beautiful day is meant to signify new beginnings for Rambanai which fail however, to materialize in the diaspora. Her failure to pay back the money she borrows from her cousin may be read as Gappah’s way of rejecting the notion of the West as the place where dreams come true and all aspirations fulfilled. Na’ima B. Robert (2011) equally captures this disillusionment when she states that many black Zimbabweans have to counter racism and unemployment when they go to work abroad – the indignity of being treated like an immigrant scrounger, like someone with no history, with nothing to offer is the price they pay for working far from home.

Peter in ‘Something Nice from London’ is another character who shows that everything is not as rosy in these western metropolitan spaces as people imagine. He goes to London to pursue his education, meant to help him get a job and help out his family back home. The family’s hopes are completely dashed as Peter fails to finish his course and is thus unable to secure a job. Instead of sending ‘something nice’ from London, his mother is forced to send him money from Zimbabwe, to the dismay of his siblings. Sadly, things do not get better for him as he gets involved with bad company and is plunged into a life of drug abuse. He dies mysteriously on the streets of London and it falls on Lisa, his cousin to bring his body home. Due to financial constraints, Lisa has the body cremated which is still a taboo in most African societies. Unlike the other relatives who did receive ‘something nice’ from London, Peter’s relatives go back home with an urn full of his ashes.

In “My Cousin-Sister Rambanai’, we are taken all over Harare with Rambanai acting the part of the tourist. The hilarious observations she makes during these trips mark the contradiction between yearning for home and feeling superior to those left behind. As stated earlier, this is the plight of those who chose to go and survive in foreign lands. The two stories touch on the reasons behind the movement of many Zimbabweans to places they think are ‘enabling.’ The stories go on to complicate these ‘chosen homes’ by showing how they are still closed to immigrants, with many left with little choice but to engage in jobs they would have sneered at back home. The humour in these stories however lessens the pain without reducing the impact of the message on the reader.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I have tried to show how the use of humour opens up a space for critique and the interruption of the everyday by jokes which often allow something that is routinely disallowed to be seen or spoken of (O' Doherty cited in Euchler and Kenny 2012). In the stories analyzed in this chapter, Gappah not only pokes fun at Mugabe's government officials but she also subverts 'patriotic history' by turning the symbols normally used and associated with power into objects of ridicule. Criticizing officialdom is not something many people could get away with in Zimbabwe but Gappah's location, considering that she is based in Geneva might have helped her evade some of the censorship laws which her fellow writers could not. By employing humour especially the grotesque and the ridiculous she manages to comment on criminalised subjects like mocking those in power. In the words of Alexander Bain (cited in Saumi 2014), all humour involves the degradation of something. It need not be a person that is derided, it may be an idea, a political institution, or indeed, anything at all that makes a claim to dignity or respect. This is evident in the short stories as Gappah not only takes swipes at the ruling party but also the idea of nationalism in Zimbabwe is ridiculed. Ironically laughter is also used to elegise, to lament over the shattered dreams of many as shown by the residents of Easterly who use jokes as a way of gaining some agency. In the stories analysed, Gappah not only exposes the situation at home but she also lays bare the struggles of those in the diaspora as they struggle not only to get gainful employment but acceptance as well. In the stories analysed, there is what Ojwang terms the "flight from undesirable homes and the scattering of communities and attempts to restore a sense of wholeness amidst the threat of alienation" (Ojwang, 2013, p. 21). Ojwang goes on to argue that it is these feelings of alienation and isolation that result in one's attempts to import the idea of home into the host country. The short stories show the characters struggle to create a sense of home as the diaspora is not as welcoming as imagined.

CHAPTER THREE: 'Laughing with the side of the mouth': Incongruity and Irony in *Laughing Now: Short Stories from Zimbabwe*

Introduction

Laughing Now: New Stories from Zimbabwe is a collection of short stories edited by Irene Staunton and published by Weaver Press in 2009. These are stories by Zimbabwean writers from all walks of life, some still based in Zimbabwe and some having relocated to other parts of the world. This chapter examines the use of irony and the incongruent in the selected short stories from the anthology as it works to destabilize the official narrative of the crisis and the way the ordinary citizen responds to it. This fictional Zimbabwe might be taken to represent the lived experiences of Zimbabweans post 2000. This assumption is based on Chidi Amuta's (1989) assertion that art imitates life and writers as artists are influenced by the society they live in. Amuta makes the argument that because of the inseparability between the writer and his/her society, the writer is a producer within a specific socio-historic context who changes reality by compelling an imaginative understanding to it. She goes on to propose that the writer is the conduit through which and through whom socio-historical experiences enter a fictional narrative and the literary product that he/she creates is in itself informed by society's realities. However, it is not always the case that literature is a one to one representation of reality as sometimes writers distort this reality, making the unfamiliar familiar depending on the writer's intentions.

The writers under consideration in this section also had to be extremely prudent in their representation of Zimbabwe, not only to escape censorship but to provide an escape route for the reader as well albeit temporarily. This chapter begins by introducing the writers and the stories selected. This is followed by looking at irony and the incongruous as a literary technique and how it has been used in contemporary African literature. The following section looks at the stories selected, citing instances of irony and how this device helps the authors advance their main themes. The section also contextualises these stories to enable full appreciation of the use of irony in advancing central themes.

The stories I consider are 'Last Laugh' by Shimmer Chinodya, 'Minister without Portfolio' by Julius Chingono, 'A Land of Starving Millionaires' by Erasmus Chinyani, and 'The Chances and Challenges of Chiadzwa by Edward Chinhanhu. The selection of these stories is mainly influenced by their thematic concern with the economic and social anarchy of Zimbabwe. The two stories, 'Minister Without Portfolio' and 'The Chances and Challenges of Chiadzwa' are a scathing attack on corrupt politicians who continue to prosper at the expense of the ordinary people while 'The Last Laugh' and 'The Land of Starving Millionaires' shows the resilience of the people to survive despite the odds. As the title of the chapter suggests, there is ironic laughter in the stories suggested by the 'laughing with the side of the mouth', a form of laughing that has to be disguised for certain reasons which might include censorship. I now turn to the authors briefly to establish how their previous works tie up with their thematic concerns in the short stories.

Chinodya is one of the literary giants of Zimbabwe. He was born in Gweru, Zimbabwe in 1957. He is the author of several books and short stories some of which are *Dew in the Morning* (1982), *Farai's Girls* (1984), *Child of War* (1986), *Harvest of Thorns* (1989*), Chairman of Fools* (2005) and *Strife* (2006). Through his work, Chinodya revisits memories of suffering and refashions, softens and lyricises them, developing in the process something which is more palatable and endurable (Herald 2012). He states that for him, writing is like revisiting old pains, memories and doing something to them that results in something which is more digestible. Writing then is about witnessing suffering and the artistic endeavor to create something out of pain. This ability to create something palatable out of pain is shown in his story 'Last Laugh' where the protagonist Mai George states that joking, like breathing, has made people's lives easier. The ironic twists scattered throughout the story are not only commentary on the economic downfall of Zimbabwe, but they also provide some comic relief too.

Chingono, mostly known for his poetry was born in 1946 and died in 2011. Jabik Veenbaas (2002) describes Chingono as a poet of Zimbabwe, saturated with strong feelings about his society and its predicaments. He goes on to state that his deceptively simple poetry is written with compassion and clarity, feeling deeply as he did for the hardships of the poor and

marginalized, while his honesty, humour and ironic eye make him a sharp and witty observer of those who abused their station through corruption and hypocrisy. His simple language disguises the complexity, the irony, the double entendre that lies beneath the surface. Like Petina Gappah, he looks at situations that many would shy away from for fear of victimization, but which must be remembered for the sake of historic memory. In his short story 'Minister without Portfolio' Chingono does not disappoint as he exposes the dark, untold side of the Zimbabwe's land grabs, albeit humorously.

Chinhanhu's stories are more concerned with the plight of the ordinary man, the father figure as he fails to provide for his family. In one of his short stories 'These are the days of our lives' which was featured in the anthology *Writing Still* he presents an emasculated father bearing the brunt of the nation's socio-economic annihilation (Mlambo 2011). This preoccupation with the father's inability to provide for the family's basic needs is carried over to the story under consideration in this chapter 'The Chances and Challenges of Chiadzwa'. The desperate need to feed one's family has old men like Magwegwe having to fake death in order to survive. This need to survive despite the odds is carried over to Erasmus Chinyani's 'A Land of Starving Millionnaires'. In the story, Chimbadzo, the protagonist is presented as a man who has fallen into hard times and can no longer support his family. From a man who could support multiple wives and children, the economic meltdown in the country renders him useless, unable to support not only his family but himself as well.

Irony and the Incongruous in Contemporary African Literature

Irony is a multi-faceted literary device that writers use to point out the discrepancy between reality and initial appearances and expectations. When a writer uses irony in their work, there is incongruity in regard to the behavior of character, the words that they say or the events that take place. I use the incongruity to refer to things that are out of place or absurd in relation to its surroundings. Patricia Gyimah (2013, p. 269) argues that "satire has been a method of social commentary and contains criticism and humour and the main tools by which the satirist effectively produces humour and still launches criticism include irony, exaggeration and invective". In the same vein Okleme (2002) states that irony is the art of saying something

without really saying it. It is double-layered with lower and upper levels and usually manifests itself as a contradiction, incongruity or incompatibility.

There are three main types of ironies which are classified as verbal, situational and dramatic irony. M H Abrams (1993) describes verbal irony as a statement in which the meaning that the speaker implies differs sharply from the meaning that is ostensibly expressed. He further explains that the ironic statement usually involves the explicit expression of one attitude or evaluation but with indications in the overall speech situation that the speaker intends a very different, and often opposite attitude or evaluation. Dramatic irony involves a situation in a play or a narrative in which the audience or reader shares with the author knowledge of present or future circumstances of which a character is ignorant. Situational irony is an outcome that turns out to be very different from what was expected. Though these types of ironies are different, they often overlap as I demonstrate in my analysis of the selected short stories.

According to the *Encyclopedia of Rhetoric* (2001), a writer seeking irony uses indirect references instead of direct statement to point out the problematic relationship between the perceptions and the truth. The object of irony maybe a person, an attitude, religion, a whole civilization or even life itself (Gyimah 2013).In simple terms, irony is the expression of meaning by saying the opposite often to humorous effect.

Holoch (2012) states that as a mode of literature, irony is often deployed to convey a meaning other than what is directly said and the humour for the reader who 'gets it' often lies in the interstices between what is said and what is not said. She goes on to state that to appreciate a speaker's irony, the listener must recognize that the speaker is not being straightforward and that there is in fact an incongruity between the idealized version of 'what ought to be done' and the real version of 'what is actually being done', a gap the speaker is satirically exploiting through indirect articulation. Linda Hutcheon (1994) concurs stating that in irony, the implied meaning subverts the straightforward or surface meaning, which makes irony, the intentional transmission of both information and evaluative attitude other than what is explicitly presented. As irony relies mostly on a shared situational and socio-cultural background which is shared experience and knowledge, it becomes a powerful weapon against oppression in situations where no other

defense is available. Odun Fidelis Balogun (1991) further asserts that African short story writers create verbal irony using mainly the devices of sarcasm and understatement. He however acknowledges that sarcasm and understatement are independent devices in their own rights and only become instruments of irony when they function within a verbal statement primarily to reinforce the "incongruity between belief and reality, or between an expectation and its fulfillment, or between the appearance of a situation and the reality that underlines it" (Balogun, 1991, p. 49).

As stated earlier, irony is deployed to convey a meaning other than what is directly said, and this is the case in the novel *I Do Not Come to You by Chance (2009)* by Adaobi Tricia Nwaubani. The book which has been praised by some for giving a human face to the 419 scammers (the scams that begin with an email designed to deplete the savings accounts of the gullible recipient) uses irony to expose how the Nigerian post-independence government has failed its people, whom it had promised prosperity once they voted it into power. The protagonist Kingsely firmly believes that getting an education is one way that is going to ensure that he does not end up like Cash Daddy, his uncle whose life revolved around the 419 scams. In an ironic twist, Kingsely ends up working for his uncle after failing to secure a job. By also partaking in his uncle's criminal activities, he is able to support his family. Again, we see the gap between expectation and reality and it is this gap that the writer exposes humorously throughout the novel.

In her debut novel *We Need New Names,* Bulawayo also employs irony to comment on the condition of her fictional characters who are affected by the government operation code named *Murambatsvina* which loosely translates to 'restore order' in Zimbabwe. The name of the shanty town where Darling and her friends live is called 'Paradise' which is quite ironic as the lived experiences of this shanty town are a far cry from the bliss of Adam and Eve's paradise. Through the eyes of her ten-year-old narrator, Bulawayo vividly portrays both the horrors and the everyday lives of the poverty-stricken in her native Zimbabwe. She documents the woes of her country, ravaged by AIDS, unemployment and one political disaster after another. In another ironic twist, she exposes the American dream for what it is for the immigrants, when she refers to it as a prison: "we stayed, like prisoners, only we chose to be prisoners and we loved our

prison. And when things only got worse in our country, we pulled our shackles even tighter and said, we are not leaving America, no we are not leaving" (Bulawayo, 2013, p.248). It is quite ironic that the diaspora which has been viewed as a 'safe haven' for immigrants is shown to be a prison especially for those who are undocumented as they could not even travel back home. Bulawayo thus manages to expose not only the failed governance back home but the disenchantment of those who find themselves outside the country's borders.

Chikwava in *Harare North* gives us a tale of a member of 'a youth militia trained to kill enemies of the state for the Mugabe government' who finds himself seeking asylum in 'Blair's England'. The irony here lies in the nameless protagonist fleeing from the same government that he literally killed for. As part of the 'green bombers', a section of the armed forces which was used to intimidate and dilute what was perceived as opposition in the country, one would have expected the same government to protect him but we see him being hunted like an animal forcing him to seek refuge in the same places that the president denounced at every opportunity.

The above examples on the use of irony by some contemporary writers are in line with Scott's *(1985)* assertion, where he argues that many forms of resistance in dangerous circumstances are intended to be ambiguous, to have double meaning, to be garbled so that they cannot be treated as a direct, open challenge and hence, invite an equally direct open retaliation. The next section then, zones in on the specific stories in the anthology to show how through irony, the writers critique the socio-political and economic conditions of Zimbabwe post 2000.

'Of hypocrisy and the men of the people': Irony in 'Minister without Portfolio' and 'The Chances and Challenges of Chiadzwa'

The stories in the collection were conceived at the height of economic decline in Zimbabwe, the era of galloping inflation, foreign currency and fuel shortages. In his review of the anthology, Richmore Tera (2008) states that the stories are remarkable for the way the authors employ humour and satire to critically appraise life while constructively scoffing at the follies and frailties besetting people. Even though some artists take it upon themselves to record lives as lived in their societies, the situation in Zimbabwe calls for one to be most prudent in his craft to

show how the rhetoric has shifted from anti-colonial to anti-government thus the use of irony. Someone who is prudent is careful or wise in handling situations and exercises good judgment and common sense. As the French semantist Berrondonner argues, by presenting his position ironically, the speaker leaves himself an escape route so that he, if later attacked for dangerous or aggressive veiled intentions he can claim that the hearer has misinterpreted his intended meaning, reading irony in an innocent statement (Berrondonner in Onyeoziri 2011).

This need for an escape route might explain why seasoned authors like Chinua Achebe, Armah and Ngugi wa Thiongo resort to irony to critique their governments. In *A Man of the People*, Achebe's use of irony is evidenced even from the title of the book itself as Chief Nanga, the 'supposed' man of the people is anything but one. This becomes apparent through the "discrepancy between what he says and what he does, what he is meant for and what he acts for" (Wren, 1981, p. 18). In 'The Minister without Portfolio' by Chingono, we see the same traits in the Minister who is supposedly there to protect the gains of independence but is actually using his power and his 'ill-gotten wealth' to snare young girls into sleeping with him.

In 'Minister Without Portfolio', what happens is the total opposite of the expectations of the masses. This can be considered to be situational irony. The story is set just after the invasion of white commercial farms by the government with the help of the war veterans. While the international community was condemning this act which some saw as being barbaric and a violation of human rights and property, Mugabe's government was selling the operation as the re-appropriation of the land back to their rightful owners which in this case comprised black Zimbabweans. The government packaged the land invasions as a people driven or centered operation which was meant to promote, salvage and enhance the human worth and people's significance in society by ensuring some more equitable access to resources which is land in Zimbabwean discourses and struggles for liberation (Magosvongwe 2015). This background on the land grabs helps bring about the ironic twist present in Chingono's story as it shows how the lived experiences of ordinary Zimbabweans was far removed from their expectations and from this national rhetoric.

As stated earlier, the story is set against the backdrop of the Zimbabwe's land grabs post-2000. Instead of these newly acquired farms benefitting the ordinary citizens by alleviating their poverty, the Minister and his cronies are the only ones reaping the benefits of this operation. I argue that it is the elite who benefitted the most from this operation as the ordinary citizens who got resettled into the farms were ill equipped to handle the challenges of being new farmers thus could not reap the full benefits. The Minister has more farms than he can remember and has to rely on his driver cum personal assistant to record his newly acquired properties into the memory machine lest he forgets all these properties acquired illegally. A memory machine is a digital voice recorder which he uses as a form of a diary. In the story, farms are somehow used as compensation for loyalty. This use of the land already implies a sense of exclusion for all those labelled opposition supporters.

Just like the play 'The Honourable MP' by Gonzo Musengezi, which subtly captures Zimbabwe's socio-political environment with its pot-bellied politicians who drain the national coffers, abuse young girls and abandon the electorate only to surface towards election time (Rwafa 2010), the Minister in the story is described as a "huge and fat man" (Chingono, 2007, p. 7) which can be read as a symbol of excessive greed and 'consumerism of the powerful' at the expense of the ordinary citizens. MP Shakespeare Pfende whose snobbery and exhibitionist character is depicted when he boasts about buying a TV, tape and radio from France is like our Minister without Portfolio who only drinks expensive imported whiskey which he orders from Europe as the local liquor "made him suffer from stomach cramps"(Chingono, 2007, p. 9). This preference for expensive and imported whiskey plus gadgets like the memory machine all speak to performance of power which seems to be a common trait in our 'men of the people'.

In his quest to impress Agnes, one of the many women in his life, the Minister is seen spending money with seemingly no care in the world: "if your trousers are soiled, I will buy two suits in Masvingo. I like my women to look smart" (Chingono, 2007, p. 7). This conspicuous spending is in line with what Musila (2004) refers to as the 'politics of consumption' where because of the power and economic success one is not shy to perform one's success. The Minister goes on to describe women like Agnes as "the flowers of this country, our great Zimbabwe, you (the) girls

who were liberated by the blood of the gallant fighters like us" (Chingono, 2007, p. 9). It is quite ironic that instead of protecting 'the flowers of the nation', the Minister joins those who parade their conquests and exercise their political power through the use of female bodies. The deliberate use of words like 'girls' and 'liberated' all point to the Minister's condescending attitude towards women. The term 'liberated' suggests that women did not play any active part in the struggle for independence and instead waited for men like the Minister to liberate them. Now that they have been liberated, these 'girls' have to see to the sexual gratification of the powerful as a sign of their gratitude.

Chingono subverts this narrative by giving us Agnes, a self-proclaimed prostitute who plays the game on her own terms. She is portrayed as a manipulative woman who knows what she wants and what she needs to do to get it. Even when she discovers that the Minister has other extra-marital affairs, she does not seem to mind, as it did not get in the way of her getting money and other benefits from the Minister, which included having the road to her home town fixed and tarred. Instead of a hopeless woman who is just following orders from the Minister, we are given a woman who is holding her own and playing the system to make ends meet.

Another ironic twist in the story is when the Minister directs Agnes to the black-market currency to change the US dollars he gives her in exchange for sexual favors. As part of the ruling government, one would expect the Minister to follow the official channels for foreign currency exchange. Chingono uses irony in this instance to comment on the unstable economic climate of Zimbabwe which saw hordes of its people preferring deals done on the black market so as to guarantee high returns on their hard-earned cash.

As they pass the farms, they notice children who are meant to be in school hunting for mice and working the land. The grownups for their part are making merry: singing, dancing and drinking. Though the Minister takes this behavior for laziness, it actually shows the people's helplessness in the face of the challenge of utilizing the newly acquired land. The irony in this instance lies in the fact that these farms, instead of providing the new settlers with new opportunities to turn their fortunes around, present fresh problems that they are not ready to deal with. Some are resettled in areas that are not conducive for economic and social growth as they lack the

necessary infrastructure like proper sanitation facilities, schools and farm equipment and the know-how to work the newly acquired land. The new settlers have to find other ways to entertain themselves since they do not have the means nor the know-how to work on the farms. The Minister is full of revolutionary talk and how the owners of the "idle prime land are sabotaging the revolution" (Chingono, 2007, p. 13). Ironically the son of the soil who has dared to leave the land idle is none other than the Minister himself. Thus, in castigating those whom he feels have betrayed the gains of the revolution, he is actually castigating himself and Mugabe's government which had not planned the operation properly.

Humour is often rooted in incongruities and irony is founded in an incongruity between the ideal and the real- the pretense that an idealized version of the world is in fact the real version of the world. While politicians like the Minister without Portfolio are busy with the revolutionary talk of "having have died for the nation" (Chingono, 2007, p. 8), the reality on the ground shows that the ordinary citizen still awaits the next 'Chimurenga' which will liberate him from what has turned into another version of colonialism under the leaders they voted into power. Odili, the protagonist and narrator in *A Man of the People* (1988) by Achebe has the following to say concerning post-colonial leaders when he states that:

> We ignore man's basic nature if we say, as some critics do, that because a man like Nanga has risen overnight from poverty and insignificance to his present opulence he could be persuaded without much trouble to give it up again and return to his original state. A man who has just come in from the rain and dried his body and put on dry clothes is more reluctant to go out again than another who has been indoors the whole time. The trouble with our new nation as I saw it then, lying on that bed was that none of us had been indoors long enough to say to hell with it. We had all been in the rain together till yesterday (Achebe, 1988, p. 37).

This statement might help explain why, instead of protecting and taking care of the electorate, which has voted them into power, politicians like the Minister and Chief Nanga are busy accumulating personal wealth at the expense of the people. The minister grabs farms because

he can but fails to utilize them for the benefit of the masses. The story provides insights into leaders that are governed by the drive of unrestrained acquisitiveness, unchecked political corruption and unbridled self-interest (Bhardwaj 2014). If anything, this behavior begs the question, who then is betraying the gains of the revolution?

In *The Trek and other Short Stories*, Lawrence Hoba (2009) portrays the arrival and experiences of ordinary Zimbabweans on the government acquired farms. The Mugudu's lack of resources as they travel to their new farm shows the gap between the available resources and the huge new farming task ahead of the new settlers. The confusion and lack of planning presented in Hoba's stories is echoed in Chingono's story. The operation ceases to be the dignity-restoring act that was sold to the people. This huge gap between the people's expectations and their actual experiences on the farms shows the incongruity between what ought to be done and what is. This is the gap Chingono exploits through indirect ironical articulation.

The detestable traits in many politicians in post-colonial literature like corruption, greed and mismanagement which Chingono seeks to satirise in his story are further exposed in the story 'Chances and Challenges of Chiadzwa'. The setting of the story is a rural village Chiadzwa, in Mutare, Zimbabwe, one of the world's richest diamond deposits. Though the story is a work of fiction, the author Edward Chinhanhu draws largely on real events, as the controversy surrounding the diamond fields in the story largely reflect the real conflicts surrounding the diamond mines. The diamond boom in Chiadzwa, Marange district that started in 2006 "coincided with the total collapse of state institutions in Zimbabwe" (Kabemba, 2010, n.p). Because of the deteriorating conditions in the country, the politicians in the area initially allowed the villagers to dig for the diamonds but these villagers were soon declared illegal miners and the army and the police force descended on the unsuspecting villagers, arresting them. It was soon declared that the government was going to take over all mining activities at Chiadzwa. Just like the land which was earmarked for the resettlement but was soon covered in controversy as shown in the story, 'Minister without Portfolio', the administration of the diamond mining was

also quick to fall into the hands of unscrupulous politicians who formed syndicates to pillage and smuggle diamonds. It is this abuse of power and corruption that is the focus of the story.

The story presents a group of villagers who are willing to do everything to beat the system. With the militarization of the Chiadzwa area evidenced by the "roadblocks mounted on all main roads out of and into the Chiadzwa, large numbers of soldiers, plain clothes and uniformed policemen and women were deployed throughout the district" (Chinhanhu, 2007, p. 16) life becomes harder for the locals as they are denied access to the diamonds which could have saved them from the brink of starvation. Instead of the locals having access to this natural resource, it is the politicians from the city who are benefitting from it while the locals wallow in poverty. Chinhanhu attempts to exhibit the self-indulgence and the corruption behind greedy government officials who choose to ignore the general poverty and want of the people around the Chiadzwa minefields, even when times are really trying (Chitando et al., 2015, p. 85).

> The Marange District itself, in which the village of Chiadzwa is located, is one of the driest in the country. Very few crops do well, and even the so-called drought-resistant ones such as *rapoko* and *mhunga* barely survive. When they do, birds and locusts, mice and baboons and other wild creatures wreak havoc on them, leaving very little to harvest. Only the oldest men and women of the district, those in their eighties and nineties, could reminisce with nostalgic smiles about one or two 'real' harvests, and they were many, many years ago. (Chinhanhu, 2007, p. 16)

With the dire situation described above, one would expect the government officials to consider the plight of the villagers but instead the story portrays the villagers suffering the most as they watch outsiders benefitting from what they had perceived as a blessing from the ancestors.

When diamonds are discovered in Chiadzwa, "like the proverbial bolt from the blue, like manna from heaven" (Chinhanhu, 2007, p. 17), the frenzy that follows is captured in the following passage:

> With the first successful clandestine sale, the news spread fast, and in no time the whole village awoke from its slumber. Like a disturbed nest of ants, the district was abuzz with life, men and women, young and old, strong and weak, able and disabled, all joined in the frenzied search for the precious mineral. School teachers and their pupils abandoned classes and fled to the mountains, where shoulder to shoulder, they jostled for space. (Chinhanhu, 2007, p. 17)

The above description of the villagers creates a humorous image as one pictures teacher and student, working shoulder to shoulder looking for the mineral. The positioning of words like 'abandoned' and 'fled', creates a sense of urgency yet is comic at the same time. One can argue that this humour is achieved through the use of exaggeration which also works as a comic device. Rowan Atkins in his documentary on humour, argues that an object or person can be funny in three ways- behaving in an unusual way, by being in an unusual place and by being the wrong size. The story presents teachers and students who are behaving in an unusual way and are in an unusual place. Instead of being in school, the students are portrayed as having given up on education as a way of achieving one's dreams. The teachers are also seeking alternative means of survival as their salaries can no longer sustain them.

In the story, the old, young, weak and strong, able and the disabled all rush to the mountains in search of the diamonds. The author uses exaggeration in this case to show how desperate everyone was. The elderly, the weak, the young and the disabled did not have the luxury to sit idle and wait for the able-bodied to bring the stones to them but they also had to join in the frenzy.

Nyawo et al. (2012) argue that since the discovery of the vast fields of diamonds at Chiadzwa, life has not been the same for the people of the area and the surrounding districts especially Marange, Mutare and Buhera. Not only has the normal life of these people been disrupted by the arrival of the outsiders in search of the diamonds but the residents have also become prisoners and slaves in their own home town. In the story the euphoria which greeted the discovery of the diamonds soon turned to despair as soon as the villagers realized that the government had taken

over and like everything the government oversaw, the locals suffered. The locals are forcibly pushed out and the area is declared government property. It is important to understand the discovery of these diamonds in the context of the unstable socio-economic climate in the country so as to understand why characters like old Magwegwe resort to extreme means to secure a share of the national cake.

The depiction of the elders of the village as the ones spearheading the smuggling operation, shows that the 'crisis' had affected all corners of society and everyone had to play a part to reverse the effects and be able to feed one's family. During the meeting chaired by Magwegwe, which was held in the strictest confidence due to political reasons, it becomes clear that the locals want justice, "so everything is in your hands, to be brave and save your fellowmen, or be cowardly and watch them die one by one as before" (Chinhanhu, 2007, p. 20). Magwegwe is challenging his fellow men to stand and fight for what he considers "God given wealth" (Chinhanhu, 2007, p. 21). At the end of the meeting, the members come up with a plan to fake Magwegwe's death so as to bypass the many roadblocks in their plan to smuggle the diamonds out of Chiadzwa.

It is quite strange that people now resort to using something as sacred as death to beat the system and this strangeness speaks to the times, which saw everyone, young and old doing what they could to survive, for Magwegwe, this meant being carried out of the village in a coffin.

The charade that happens as Magwegwe's body is transported out of Chiangwa to be buried at his 'supposed' son's home, speaks to the desperate situation the people find themselves in. The occasion resonates with the fake burial of Esther's husband at the Heroes Acre in the story 'At the Sound of the Last Post' where death is presented as a new lease of life. For Esther, the burying of her husband at the Heroes Acre means a new Cabinet post for her and other benefits which are going to set her up for life. The ending of the story 'The Chances and Challenges of Chiadzwa' which sees old Magwegwe in his coffin, winking at his accomplices once they have been cleared by the police is the beginning of a new life. They could now share the diamonds and start over a new life.

‘Laughing it off’: The Incongruous in ‘A Land of Starving Millionaires’ and ‘The Last Laugh’

Musila (2004) argues that within a political context, humour lends itself to the critique of power and its wielders in situations where overt or confrontational attack and criticism are not viable alternatives due to socio-political inhibitions. This is the case in Shimmer Chinodya’s story ‘The Last Laugh’. The story is about virtually everyone who visits the Home Industries Centre during lunchtime to buy food at Mai George’s open place kitchen. To show that her kitchen is open to all, the author describes her clients as including ‘motor mechanics, glaziers, garage attendants, electricians, cobblers, plumbers, the butcher, teachers and the jealous landlord’. Whilst the story centers on Mai George, more striking are the fearless, nameless characters and their undeterred and unbridled voices whose jokes and subtle observations demonstrates Shimmer Chinodya’s mastery of words, satire and humour (Mlambo 2011).

The story is told from the perspective of a woman, Mai George, whose husband has fled from the ruins of what had been a once thriving country. He leaves for Botswana in search of greener pastures, having failed to secure a job back home. Mai George reacts to this desertion by sending her children to her mother in the rural areas where there are “cheaper schools, simpler meals, no transport fares and more room to play in plus God’s fresh country air” (Chinodya, 2007, p. 24). Left on her own, Mai George is able to devote all her energies to her business so as to fend for her ageing mother and children. Her situation shows the disintegration of the family unity. The family has dissolved in an attempt to survive, and it is this survival that the story is about. Not only the survival of Mai George, but her many customers who can be taken to represent the ordinary citizens of Zimbabwe. It is important to point out that the term ‘ordinary’ in this instance is used to refer to the people who have no access to the privileges enjoyed by those in power.

Just like the way education was ridiculed in ‘Chances and Challenges of Chiadzwa’, teachers who are responsible for educating the nation are also being ridiculed in this story. Educated people like the teachers, who have sacrificed to attain their qualifications are now earning far less than they deserve such that an informal trader like Mai George with her open kitchen is now

capable of paying five teachers, "Surely Mai George, you are now earning enough to pay five teachers every month" (Chinodya, 2007, p. 26). This scenario speaks to the failing economy and the betrayal of people's dreams. Previously noble professions such as teaching are being used as a yardstick for poverty.

The story uses irony as the main tool in advancing the theme of social and economic anarchy as evidenced by these town dwellers trying to survive against the odds. Mlambo (2009) states that the humorous and decidedly derisive jokes that the ordinary people recite are a record of their daily lives, their struggles, ingenuities and deprivations. The jokes are also a form of comic relief, therapeutically giving them the energy to dream of a better tomorrow for, "joking like breathing made people's lives easier" (Chinodya, 2007, p. 26). Not only do the jokes run a mocking commentary on the failing economy, "did you hear that the dairy company has closed down in Masvingo province and that you will soon have to ask lactating mothers to squirt their milk into your tea" (Chinodya, 2007, p. 28), but they also comment on how people are using religion as a means to an end, "don't mock other people's churches, guys. What about your *wapusawapusa* sect-grabbing each other's wives as soon as they switch off the lights to pray or the pastors of these rabid Pentecostals, marrying their own sisters' daughters or impregnating under-age celebrants?" (Chinodya, 2007, p. 28). This seemingly jovial banter between friends is heavy with social criticism as certain religious practices and leaders are being exposed for the immoral sects they have become. We often realize even in a tragic and serious story that writers still find time to recreate humorous ideas and events that have a way of easing the pains and seriousness which the particular work has already elicited (Asika and Eboh-Nzekwue 2017). In 'Last Laugh' these moments are presented as jokes which according to Asika and Eboh (2017) serve as an embellished satirical tool with which a writer hopes to point at the other side of life which he obviously mocks and criticizes.

Musila (2004) argues that the primacy of satire as a vehicle of socio-political critique in comic art lies in its capacity to visit derisive laughter upon the object of ridicule. In the story, this figure of ridicule is Mai Sibanda, the landlord who can be taken to represent those in power. By renting out the rooms at exorbitant prices, Mai Sibanda is cashing in on the economic ruins the

government has created. Mlambo (2009) states that in the face of a tyrannical and despotic Mbuya MaSibanda the land lord, who preys on her tenants, it is laughter that registers the marked contours of rebellion and resistance. By highlighting the humorous incongruities between what the autocrat purports to be and what he is in reality as in the case with Mai MaSibanda, humour is used to highlight the complexities and the hardships of the ordinary people in Zimbabwe post 2000. One would expect Mai Sibanda, as the landlord to be self-sufficient but we see her taking advantage of her tenants demanding total access to their lives, making demands of them by virtue of being their landlord: "the dollar is going down and your business is booming and there are dozens of people asking for your room every week. See, child, that's the name of the game" (Chinodya, 2007, p. 37). After stomaching her landlord's ridiculous requests for a while, Mai George finally erupts into derisive laughter. The only way which she could react to her landlord's ridiculous requests is through laughter, to expose the ridiculousness of the situation.

> Bravely following Mbuya MaSibanda to the door and shooing her out, almost, Mai George began to LAUGH. She laughed freely now. She laughed and laughed at the brazen jokes that had plagued her day, at the sudden future that now glared in her face. She laughed and heard the voices of the other lodgers in the adjoining rooms shrieking with hers, conspiring with her against the ageless tyranny of the world. Her ears drowned in the echoes of her mirth as warm tears coursed down her youthful face. (Chinodya, 2007, p. 37)

This mirth shared by the tenants, in as much as it is liberating brings out the major irony in the story. Both the nameless characters in the story and Mai George all turn to laughter, when in actual fact they are mourning the fall of their beloved country. With the harsh reality evidenced by the ruins mentioned throughout the story, one would expect the characters to be drowning in sorrow, but we see them shrieking with laughter. One can argue that it is this laughter that has become a way of mourning for the marginalised.

Mlambo (2013) describes the Zimbabwean dollar as a currency denomination which stretched from as little as one cent note to a fifty billion dollar note, where prices changes became a daily if not hourly event and one's take home salary could not take one home. This description of the economic crisis where one's salary is not enough to take one home is the background of Chinyani's story 'A Land of Starving Millionaires'.

Chinyani tells a story of small scale micro-lender who is struggling to collect his debts because his customers face serious economic challenges as a result of the collapse of the economy. Despite the odds, the millionaire is determined to collect his debts even if it means manipulating the relatives of those who owe him. We only get to know the name of this millionaire later on in the story and this might have been the author's way of showing the irony in being a millionaire- which implies a lot of money thus a life of luxury, with the way the millionaire in the story is struggling to survive. Usury Chimbadzo, the millionaire has not eaten anything for a while but "the national staple they now call air-pie- a euphemism for one big slice of nothing!" (Chinyani, 2007, p. 38). It is this hunger and the fact that he cannot feed his large family, his three wives and his twenty-nine children that becomes the motivation he needs to try every trick in the book to collect his money from his debtors. His children once a source of pride and joy are a burden causing him sleepless nights.

The incongruity in the title sets the mood for the whole story. There is nowhere in the world that one could anticipate meeting a 'starving millionaire' but that is the case in the fictional country. Butale (2015) argues that the story in a straightforward way follows the life of a man who had a thriving money lending business who gets impoverished by the collapse of the economy because his debtors are unable to pay him and even if they pay, the money is worthless. After tricking the family of the man who owes him into giving him the money their sick relative owed him, Chimbadzo is unable to buy even a loaf of bread with it, thus remaining a starving millionaire: "one million three hundred thousand dollars in single notes. And I want a loaf of bread and a packet of sugar" (Chinyani, 2007, p. 38). It is quite ironic that this huge sum of money could not even get him half- a loaf of bread, as the prices had quadrupled that morning. The story paints a

desperate picture of abject poverty and despair amongst the people, everyone being a millionaire but failing to put food on the table for their families.

The situation is so dire that the respect that is often afforded to the dead is non-existent. On his debt-collecting mission, Chimbadzo discovers that one of the men who owe him has died and instead of paying his condolences he starts "jumping up and down, he yelled unprintable obscenities at the coffin's mother and 'father' and their reproductive anatomy" (Chinyani, 2007, p. 40). This behavior goes against everything associated with funerals. Ironically no one tries to stop him as they saw "the murderous glint in his eye as he unleashed volleys of vulgar, homicidal insults, which convinced them to leave him alone" (Chinyani, 2007, p. 40). It is quite comic that he threatens 'to kill' an already dead man yet his behaviour speaks to the desperation of his situation, the desperate need to fend and provide for his family in a hostile economic climate.

It is a comic yet sad figure of Chimbadzo, staggering home with a sack filled with a worthless million that gets hit by a car on his way home: "perhaps his ears had been deafened by hunger, his mind too loaded by the sack full of poverty and his eyes too blinded by rage and despair, that he neither saw nor heard the sudden emergence of the local MP's car" (Chinyani, 2007, p. 42). It is no coincidence that the car belonged to the Minister, the one meant to protect the people. By killing Chimbadzo, he kills the dreams and hopes of the citizens and the fact that no one rushed to pick up the money which lay scattered beside the owner shows how useless the Zimbabwean dollar had become. It is ironic that in a land of starving people, no one rushes to pick up the money which in normal circumstances would be highly priced.

Conclusion

The stories analysed in this chapter all grapple with the economic and political turmoil in Zimbabwe and because of censorship laws the authors rely on irony and the incongruent to expose the paradoxes that obtain in situations, people and utterances. These incongruencies manifest themselves in the gap between the appearance and reality. In their different ways, the authors considered in the chapter seek to expose the gap between the national rhetoric and the lived experiences of the people. They do this by exposing the hypocrisy and the greediness of the

politicians which is contrary to the conditions of the offices they hold. In the words of Musila (2004), incongruity works within the scope of satire as an art of revelation, one which unveils social infelicities and draws our attention to these vile practices, which are well concealed, or which we have chosen to ignore. In the instances discussed throughout the chapter, attention is drawn to what is wrong with our society and the writers try to locate where 'the rain started beating us' (Achebe 2012), using irony and the incongruous. The stories show how irony establishes its critique largely through what is unsaid in the space of the text, unspoken but implied in elements such as the strategic word choice and narrative structures (Holoch 2012). The stories not only expose the ills of the society but the tenacity of the people to survive against all odds, the ability to laugh the pain off as one gets busy with the business of living. In showing the resilience of the people, the reading of the stories also showed that even though in the postcolony dictators cling to their image of being untouchable and all powerful, the same symbols can be appropriated in puncturing the illusion of power through humour.

CHAPTER FOUR: CONCLUSION

In this research report, I have examined how writers engage with the political and socio-economic crisis in Zimbabwe through the genre of the short story. The research restricted itself to the short story genre largely due to its qualities, especially its brevity which allows it to provide maximum aesthetic pleasure within minimum time as compared to the novel. Despite its brevity, the study shows how the short story seeks to awaken critical consciousness, interpret, keep record and provoke change. The two anthologies I looked at, *An Elegy for Easterly* by Petina Gappah (2009) and *Laughing Now: Short Stories from Zimbabwe* (2007), edited by Irene Staunton both have the Zimbabwean 'crisis' as the backdrop to most of their stories. This period which has been termed the 'lost decades' of Zimbabwe is characterized by the immense suffering of the people, evidently manifest in shortage of basic commodities, erratic supply of electricity and water, closure of companies and galloping inflation. The stories considered in the research capture the turmoil and chaos of the time. The experiences of the characters in the stories resonate deeply with the actual Zimbabwean experience of the time. This buttresses Ngugi wa Thiong'o's (1972) assertion that literature does not grow in a vacuum and is given impetus, shape, direction and even an area of concern by social, political, economic forces in a particular society. One must, however, be mindful of the fictional nature of the texts. Fictionalizing the events necessarily involves forms of distortions, refraction and over or under emphasis of certain elements as they suit the author motive. Following Susan Reichl and Mark Stein's (2005) assertion that laughter has always been seen as arising out of some kind of incompatibility or some incongruity "the concrete manifestations of laughter arising from such a constellation range from subversive laughter, carnivalesque and exhilarations, wry smiles, self-deprecation, gallows humour or black humour to more conciliatory and healing humour, or to the wild and eerie laughter of the otherwise silenced 'madwoman in the attic'. All these reflect a struggle for agency, an imbalance of power and a need, a desire for release" (Reichl and Stein, 2005, p. 9).

This research has tried to show both the subversive elements and the emancipatory potential of laughter. In examining these functions of humour, it also shed light on how laughter keeps control of challenging or stressful situations and allows people to work with life situations that

are shot through with ambiguity, paradox and incongruity. In short, the questions this research tried to answer were: What is brought under the gaze of humour in the short stories? How are they portrayed? And lastly, why is humour the preferred or chosen mode? In this concluding section, I highlight my findings from the preceding chapters before evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of laughter as a strategy employed in literary works.

In the preceding chapters I have looked at how the grotesque, the ridiculous, the ironical and the incongruent are woven into the stories and how the elements of humour enable writers to metaphorically stand outside society and contemplate the socio-political scene with a critical eye (Musila, 2004, p. 108). This parallels Musila's further assertion that the artist also espouses a commitment to the betterment of his society and positions himself as a custodian of moral intergrity and as a kind of social thermometer which picks out socio-political follies and vices and ridicules these.

The study shows how the workings of power in postcolonial Zimbabwe is not much different from many other postcolonial states in Africa. By reviewing relevant literature, the research showed how, like other postcolonial states like Nigeria and Ethiopia, postcolonial writers in Zimbabwe also have to contend with power struggles over representation. In answering the first question on what is brought under humorous focus in Gappah's stories, I have unpacked the rhetoric of patriotic history which capacitates the privileging of official narrative of the crisis over other versions of the same event. Kriger's argument that the process of state making and nation building was deliberately channeled to crystalise around ZANU PF and ZANLA liberation histories, symbols and regalia proved very useful to my reading of the short stories as they made Gappah's position very clear in her anthology. My reading of the stories shows how Gappah negates this official truth and tries to strip the political leaders of their powers and dignity by turning them into figures of ridicule. In the first story from her collection, 'At the Sound of the Last Post' the fictional ministers and their wives, including the president and the first lady, are all shown as ordinary beings with their own vices to contend with. She employs the grotesque and the ridiculous to burst their illusions of power and pretense at invincibility, as the reader is told that even if AIDS did not kill them, old age will do the job. This suggests to the

reader that the fictitious leaders are old men who should have retired but continue to cling to power. The title story, 'An Elegy for Easterly' shows the resilience of the people, their will to survive despite their degradation shown by the grotesque body of Martha Mupengo. This use of the grotesque in postcolonial settings finds resonance with Ogude's summation that "in these bleak circumstances, where dehumanization is stark, where the unfamiliar is made familiar and the fabulous true, humanity finds voice through insanity" (Ogude, 2000, p. 96). The Easterly residents refuse to die, they refuse to give up and they find alternative spaces to express their humanity, which they have been denied by the powers that be. The jokes that the residents make amongst themselves give them respite from their pain and at the same time show their discontent with the government. By reading the short stories in this manner, the research showed both the subversive and emancipatory qualities of humour.

The research report also showed how Gappah complicates the diaspora as she subverts its popular reading as greener pastures. Her fictional migrants are shown struggling to make ends meet and failing to set roots in host countries. From this portrayal of her migrants, I conclude that there is a huge gap between the lived experiences of the migrants and the performance they put up for the benefit of those at home. My reading of the stories shows how the portrayal of the diaspora subverts the idea of the West being the giver and Africa always on the receiving end as the poor 'other'. In 'Something Nice from London', instead of sending the pounds home to help out his family, it is quite ironic how Peter expects to be sustained by those back home. His mother has to constantly buy the pounds from the black market to send to him. It is this portrayal of the diaspora that further exposes how emigration does not necessarily equal escape from hardship; it sometimes simply involved facing the same kinds of challenges in a different context, or even worse, as immigrants have to tackle the feelings of unhomeliness as well.

The fact that the two anthologies considered in this research paper were conceived at the height of the crisis might explain the similarities in their thematic concern. In Chapter 3 where I looked at *Laughing Now: Short Stories from Zimbabwe* I focused on the way irony and the sense of incongruence have been employed in the stories to deal with the effects of the crisis on the marginalized while also exposing the hypocrisy of the leaders. The blurb of the anthology states

how '*Laughing Now* suggests that we are finding new ways to reflect our reality; that however many zeros we add to the rate of inflation, and however hungry we may become, humour is as good a response as any' (Staunton 2007). My reading of the stories does indeed show that the ironic situations the characters find themselves in deserve laughter, if not to diffuse the tension, then to stop from crying. Mai George's patrons constantly share jokes as they wait for their food and these touch on a number of topics from politics to religious and social issues. By creating this space where they turn their pain into object of laughter, the fictional characters show resilience in their struggle to survive. The research also showed how sometimes these 'everyday forms of resistance' such as joking, slander and feigned compliance as shown in 'Chances and Challenges of Chiadzwa' are the only avenues available to the masses due to the high policing of the expressive space by the state agents. Scott (1985) argues that in repressive regimes, open declarations of defiance are replaced by euphemisms, metaphors, clear speech by grumbling, and open confrontation by concealed non-compliance or defiance.

It is important to note that even the most transgressive works of literature do not in general immediately send their readers into the streets carrying banners and shouting slogans, but work more subtly by gradually chipping away at certain modes of thinking that contribute to the perpetuation of oppressive political structures (Mlambo 2014). Mlambo further states that in as much as we cannot measure the actual political power of literature, its effects can be shown by how much totalitarian regimes have regarded literature as dangerous, resulting in the banning of certain books and other works of art. As in the instance of the writers I considered in this research, subversive talk has been couched in humour in its different forms so as to sidestep the censorship by the state.

The work of humour is considered incomplete if its impact does not profoundly alert us to the serious human foibles or weaknesses in ways that compel us to imagine corrective measures. Through the reading of the short stories, the study managed to show how laughter becomes not just a way of expressing mirth but a form of resistance, a kind of language that refuses to be captured by the official narrative. The images created by the choice of diction, characterization,

vivid description of setting and the tone attempt to subvert the once accepted assumptions of the official narrative of the crisis, the diaspora and workings of power in the postcolony.

In as much as it is a powerful tool employed by writers in postcolonial literature, Holoch (2012) raises considerations that complicate the work of humour in postcolonial Africa. One has to note the fragility of humour in the sense that what may be considered funny by one person may not produce the same effect on the next, putting in play the idea of audience positioning and perception. In the same vein, humour has the potential to erect boundaries as well as break them down. It does this through the laughter it creates around shared language, a shared past and a common present. Most of the stories in the anthologies considered are based on actual historic moments and figures. The reader's ability to laugh at the incongruences found in the text may be the result of their identification with the particular scenes, which then raises the question of the kinds of challenges readers outside the shared context might have engaging with the text.

In conclusion, the research has explored humour as a feature of events presented in ways likely to induce laughter in various ways. The study, guided by humour and James Scott's (1985) concept on 'everyday forms of resistance', limits itself to the instances of irony, the incongruent, the grotesque and the ridiculous in the stories as a critique of the socio-political and economic crisis post 2000 in Zimbabwe. The study concludes that the use of humour in the short stories has allowed for certain ways of thinking and being which resist official narratives and other manifestations of power.

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