

Childhood, History and Resistance: A Critical Study of the Images of Children and Childhood in Zimbabwean Literature in English

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ABSTRACT

The study explores the ways in which childhood is constructed and represented in a wide range of black Zimbabwean novels and short stories written in English from 1972 to 2000. In particular, it considers how representations of childhood bear upon questions of history, politics and resistance. The argument is advanced that, instead of seeing childhood in romantic or idyllic terms, it is possible to see it as a contested terrain, one in which the larger tensions and conflicts of the society manifest themselves. Childhood is accorded by Zimbabwean writers represented in this study a central role in social, political, and cultural concerns by being depicted not only as a matter of focalization and characterization, but a tool for the construction of a wide range of culturally and historically specific sets of ideas and philosophies. They include the ways in which childhood is constructed as a powerful sentimental mythology of a culture's "original beauty"; the political trope of children of resistance; the uses of girlhoods as counter-memory; and the deployment of dystopian childhoods as counter-strategy. The study explores the ways in which the imagining of the child and childhood by the writer is tied to the history of the nation that inflects it. It also examines the possibility of what could tentatively be termed post-childhood, following the glimpses of an emerging post-national discursive space. In other words, the study seeks to read the history and politics of Zimbabwe through the ways in which its writers depict the lives of children.

Keywords: childhood, history, resistance, memory, nation, children of resistance, girlhoods, dystopic childhoods, post-childhood, post-national.

DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at any other university.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R Muponde', written over a horizontal dotted line.

Robert Muponde

10th Day of August 2005

Dedication

To the childhoods of Tino and Tatenda, without whom I would know none.

To the motherhoods of two irreplaceable women, the two Chipos in my life. I cannot know of childhood without the one that made mine, and the other with whom I make others'.

To the fatherhood of him whose name I carry, and whose blood I pass on, in the old ways and in words.

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CHAPTER 1: CHILDHOOD, HISTORY, RESISTANCE

Introduction

In Zimbabwe, the adult imagination of the child and childhood is central to the construction of national literary history. The imagining of the child is fundamental to the task of creating cultural values for the nation. The child and childhood are invoked in order to serve 'as some sort of imagined reservoir for the adult fantasy writ into the daily functioning of society' (Taussig 2003: 456).

Adult imagination of childhood is rooted in social practice which obtains in conditions that are culturally, historically and politically inflected. In the Zimbabwean context, the imagination of childhood is 'an intentional act of consciousness' which enables us 'to envision the world as if it were otherwise; to make absent alternatives present to the mind's eye' (Kearney 1998: 6). As the present study will demonstrate, this imagination is the 'act of responding to a new demand for new meaning, the demand of emerging realities' (ibid.: 149). In this sense, the adult imagination of childhood becomes 'a staging ground for action, and not only for escape' (Appadurai 1996: 7). To follow Claudia Castaneda (2002), according children and childhood a central role in social, political, and cultural concerns is consequently important. In her words, and as I will argue, 'Asking how and why the child as a figure has been made a resource for wider cultural projects brings the child into the foreground of analysis regarding its uses and value for adult

discourses, and provides the groundwork for imagining an alternative order of things' (2002: 2).

Paul Chidyausiku was the first black Zimbabwean writer to bring the child figure to the fore of a fledgling literary culture. Like Lisa McNee elsewhere, he 'suggest[ed] that we actually construct childhood as an object of concern' (McNee 2004:20). He came up with something close to what McNee calls 'languages of childhood' (ibid.) in Zimbabwean national literary history. These 'languages of childhood' are 'usually foreign to children and to childhood taken as a phenomenological experience, for they are produced by adults attempting to understand their own or others' childhood' (McNee, 20). Yet they point to the value that accrues to an understanding of childhood as a social and cultural construction. The 'recognition of childhood as a social construct allows for the idea of multiple childhoods, as embedded in local cultural constructions, to prevail' (Balagopalan 2002: 21). In addition, it 'provides a strong critique of existing work on children in the fields of developmental psychology [for instance] and its construction of a singular figure of "the child"' (ibid.: 21).

When Chidyausiku spoke at the first Creative Writers Conference in colonial Zimbabwe (known as Rhodesia) in 1964, he emphasized the need to centralize the child in black literature. 'Let us then examine our literature accordingly: Which role has the child played in our novels? The answer is: a very minor one' (1966: 44). At that time only twenty-one black authors had been published, and between them had

published thirty books (Krog 1966: 13). Chidyausiku proceeded to suggest, *inter alia*, a programme for the aestheticisation of the child ‘as a subject matter for writing with an *adult approach*’ (45). He proposed that, ‘Any such story must tell the story of a child *in depth*’ (45). His reasoning was that: ‘Is it not the child who gives richness, fulfillment to our lives, to the life of every African?’ (44). But he did not mean to paint an idyllic memory of African childhood in the colonial context because, ‘We know from our childhood that our early years were not so smooth, that there were conflicts; there were shocking experiences, struggles for something or somebody’ (45). He cautioned against ‘tribalism or racialism’ (48) in depicting these conflicts. While he seemed to be aware of the possibility of a multiform childhood, he tended to prefer to depict it in ways that ironically suggest a singular figure of the child, shorn of the trappings of the politics of the epoch. There is a way in which his concern for the child figure, and his conception of childhood, is limited when compared to the multifarious childhoods that black Zimbabwean writers went on to depict. Nevertheless, his observations provided an important starting point for later, more complex, elaborations.

The repressive political situation in colonial Zimbabwe was characterized by what Kizito Muchemwa calls the ‘never ending attritions of human dignity and the fear of the unknown’ (1978: xxiv). Black writers who were based in the country found the range of what they could write about severely restricted by discriminatory censorship laws. This harsh and uncertain political situation notwithstanding, the need to foreground childhood as an aesthetic category in adult fiction, and especially

fiction, and especially right at the beginning of a national literary history, was taken up by subsequent generations of black Zimbabwean writers. At the outset, the child, and the imagining of childhood, became more than an imaginative necessity, but a reconstitutive trope in the imagining of cultural and national identities. In Zimbabwean literary works, as I will demonstrate, childhood became not only a matter of focalization or characterization, but a tool for the construction of a wide variety of worldviews and philosophies. In other words, imagining the child and childhood was an act of self-discovery, and an act of construction and invention in which the writer's imagination was being asked to possess 'a projective sense' (Appadurai 1996: 7). But, in spite of the assorted nature of childhoods in the literature, there is no remarkable corresponding critical discussion that complicates their emplacement and propagation in a complex national literary history.

In this study I trace the genealogy and proliferation of these archetypes of childhood and identities within a literature engendered both in the anti-colonial and post-colonial struggles. Visions of childhood, the resistances and histories they refract, and the strategies adopted by various black authors to site and animate them, are multifaceted¹. They do not necessarily rehearse Chidyausiku's aesthetic programme,

¹ For future studies, I suggest that similar analyses be devoted to white writing in Zimbabwe as well as Shona and Ndebele literatures. These are subjects which have traditionally been treated as separate in the Zimbabwean academy. For example, white writing in Zimbabwe has often been associated, fairly or unfairly, with the Rhodesian (oppressor's) canon (Chennells 1995), and thus remains largely restricted to the study of vestiges of colonial culture, or what Karin Alexander (2004) calls 'orphans of the empire'. Ashleigh Harris (2005: 109) describes instances in which white childhoods in Zimbabwe may be considered to be situated 'in a place that denies one's belonging, and offers no recourse to the discourses of reconciliation and redemption through which to articulate white identity'. The first major step towards remedying the fragmented approach to the literature as a whole (Shona, English [black and white], and Ndebele) is reflected in Muponde and Primorac's (2005) edited volume, *Versions of Zimbabwe: New*

but engage with it, and very often, contradict and upend it.

Aim

This study, therefore, explores and critiques visions, images and uses of childhood in selected black Zimbabwean fiction written in English from 1972 to 2000. The main objectives of this study are to: analyze both the changing patterns and variable uses of images of childhood as portrayed in black Zimbabwean literature in English; examine the range of literary strategies used by selected Zimbabwean writers to depict childhood; explore the extent to which childhood in black Zimbabwean literature works as a basis for the depictions of concepts of resistance by Zimbabwean authors; and investigate the extent to which an analytical approach to the study of childhood can be developed and sustained in Zimbabwean literature in particular and African literature in general. In the process of satisfying the above objectives, a secondary but important aim is the need to view childhood/children in literature as a legitimate and fertile subject of literary criticism.

Demarcation of Area of Study

This study tracks and critiques the multiple configurations of childhoods in black Zimbabwean literature in English from 1972 to 2000. The starting point is determined by what I consider to be the point at which the centrality of childhoods

Approaches to Literature and Culture. But for the purposes of the present study, which is neither a catch-all nor comparative study of Zimbabwean childhoods across race or languages, my focus is on black writers who write in English. Hence, throughout the study, unless indicated, I refer to their literature as Zimbabwean literature.

in the literature became more pronounced. In the work of the selected writers under study, there is a continued proliferation of a multiplicity of childhoods during and after the moment of national resistance. My cut-off point is informed by my perception of what I tentatively consider the emergence of a post-national reordering of narrative politics via the figure of the “post-child” in Memory Chirere’s short stories (see Chapter 5 and 6 of this study).

Black Zimbabwean literature in English is a fairly youthful and complex literature². There was no imaginative literature in English by black Zimbabweans until 1966 when the first, significantly titled, novel by Stanlake Samkange, *On Trial for My Country*, was published. The second recorded work of fiction, *Coming of the Dry Season*, was published in 1972 by Charles Mungoshi (for a detailed chronology, see Kahari 1990: 38-42). *On Trial for My Country* and kindred titles had a functional role to play, ‘to put us into historical perspective [...] to restore national and human pride and dignity in the face of an aggressive colonial culture determined to ruin our natural image of ourselves as worthy humans’ (Zimunya 1982a: 4-5). Kahari (1980: 10) ascribes the same role to the novels published between 1966 and 1980. Samkange’s *On Trial for My Country* does not, however, exhibit any critical concern with childhood, and so will not fit into my study, hence my starting point is 1972, the year *Coming of the Dry Season* is published.

² The fact that it is fairly youthful has led critics to develop sometimes a very limiting and condescending habit of wanting to insist on writing catch-all volumes on the literature (eg. Zimunya 1982a; Kahari 1990; Wild 1993; Zhuwarara 2001). There are however good signs of a new trend emerging. Critical work devoted to new areas of enquiry (Vambe 2004, 2001; Christiansen 2004; Muponde & Primorac 2005), and critical volumes on the work of an individual author (Muponde & Taruvinga 2002; Willey & Treiber 2002; Pattison 2001; Chennells & Wild 1999) is an indication that the criticism of the literature is becoming interestingly complex and specialized.

However, there was also, in the same stream of writing identified by Kahari (1980) and Zimunya (1982a), a strong current of black literature in English, represented by authors such as Marechera (1978; 1980), Mungoshi (1975) and Nyamfukudza (1980). This current of writing cultivated an antagonistic and skeptical attitude to the narration of history, as well as the modes of counterculture, proffered by the ideologues of black nationalism in Zimbabwe such as Ndabaningi Sithole (1977), Stanlake Samkange (1966; 1975), and Lawrence Vambe (1972; 1976). It is this continued, unique manifestation of contested modes of writing in the literature that justifies the mainstreaming of history and resistance in the title of my study.

Black Zimbabwean literature in English was born in resistance, by which I mean that the moment of writing coincided with the moment of the black writer's and his/her people's struggle for liberty. Ian Douglas Smith, the then Rhodesian Prime Minister, made his Unilateral Declaration of Independence from Britain in 1965, and intensified the repression of the black people. In 1966, the first group of black guerrillas launched the armed struggle. Of interest to my study is the literature's particular way of articulating and re-visioning resistance and history through the construction of archetypes of childhood. This is particularly evident in Mungoshi's *Coming of the Dry Season* (1972), Katiyo's *A Son of the Soil* (1976), Marechera's *The House of Hunger* (1978), Ndhlala's *Jikinya* (1979), and Chinodya's *Dew in the Morning* (1982). This trend persists to the present day as exemplified in Chirasha's *Child of War* (1985), Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988), Hove's *Ancestors*

(1996), Vera's *Under the Tongue* (1996), and Chirere's stories 'Keresenzia', 'An Old Man' and 'Plastics and Cardboards' (2000). I interrogate the work of these writers to consider the significance of its obsession with childhood/children in a literature situated in a history of anti-colonial and post-colonial resistance. Hence the critical nexus of childhood, history and resistance in the focus of my study.

Literature in the indigenous languages in Zimbabwe was heavily censored and restricted to 'apolitical' subjects by the Literature Bureau, an arm of the colonial regime, 'to make certain that colonial interests were not undermined in the nascent Shona literature' (Chiwome 1998:1). Literature in English seemed to enjoy some form of autonomy during the same colonial era, and escaped censorship and other restrictions by being published outside the country. It is not within the scope of my study to examine or contest Kahari's and Chiwome's views on Shona and Ndebele literatures.³ My interest lies in exploring the ways in which childhood is 'made and remade in particular sites' (Castaneda 2002: 2) of black Zimbabwean literature in English, which Kahari (1980: 50) calls the literature most 'intricately bound up with the whole social and cultural future of the people of Zimbabwe'. Kahari commends Zimbabwean literature in English of the 1970s for its 'strong political commitment' which he saw as resulting in 'a recovery of identity' that would 'help in reminding both writers and their readers that they are not misfits in the land of their birth'

³ Many of the factors that led to the underdevelopment of literature in Shona and Ndebele as to render it almost irrelevant to the decolonizing processes are well documented in Kahari (1990), Chiwome (1996), Furusa (1998) and Wild (1993). This is not the place to engage with them. I do believe though that there is room for further scholarship on Kahari, Chiwome and Wild. Vambe (2005), in his pioneering study, exposes some of what he calls the 'poverty of theory' in the approaches adopted by Chiwome, Kahari and Wild in making assumptions about the nature of Shona and Ndebele literature in Zimbabwe. However, Vambe's critique is not concerned with childhood at all, so is not relevant to my study.

(ibid.:10). In spite of, and in studied opposition to, Muchemwa's prescriptive and exclusionary understanding of what constitutes 'truly' committed black Zimbabwean literature⁴, I find it fruitful for my study to concentrate on a spatially, politically and intellectually unfettered black literature in English. I believe this approach enables us to trace the most discernible and complex patterns and strategies in the conception of childhood as a trope implicated in history and resistance culture in Zimbabwe.

Thematic Concerns

Literature in English by black writers in Zimbabwe should be viewed as an inseparable part of decolonization. Concepts of childhood in this literature are tied to the various strands and competing modes of counter-culture in the decolonizing processes of the colonial and post-colonial phases. They are constructed both as vectors and critiques of the modes of resistance and visions of history as portrayed in the literature. While in a general sense these childhoods bear the markings of the history that conditions the literature, they sabotage Richard Coe's and LeSeur Geta's generalizations on what constitutes and shapes experiences and features of childhoods in a particular history and culture. Richard Coe (1984) observes how a

⁴ Muchemwa (1978) seems to believe that what defines the 'true' identity of a writer and the literature he/she produces is physical cultural and political location. For instance, he does not believe that the Zimbabwean writers who were in exile could have made a significant contribution to the development of the literature, because they were not physically present in the day-to-day political processes of a bounded geographical space called Rhodesia. He instead fears that 'their return is probably going to undermine the poetic tradition which is being created here' (xxiv). His take on the exiles has an uncanny resemblance to the paranoid Robert Mugabe's attitude to the current (post-2000) Zimbabwean diaspora, whom he accuses of undermining the sovereignty of the country, by virtue of being out of reach of his dictatorship, and hence they cannot be true Zimbabweans. In Muchemwa's logic, 'The poetry of this country will be written in this country. A poetry distorted by exile or clouded by the sentimentalities of homesickness can never provide a valid foundation on which the poetry of Zimbabwe can be built' (ibid.).

particular socio-historical experience produces a particular childhood that is marked by, and partakes of, that history. He notes how, for example, depictions of Jewish, Irish, and French-Canadian children are 'inebriated' with 'the history of the calamities attendant upon the races to which, respectively, they belong' (280). Similarly, LeSeur Geta (1995) writes: 'Childhood as presented in the African American bildungsroman is depressing, like America's Black history' (4), while 'Childhood in the West Indies is not always idyllic by any means, but that [the] "season of youth" is sharply delineated and imprinted on the child's consciousness forever' (3). Coe's and Geta's observations on childhoods in their respective areas of interest tend to essentialise and limit the diversity that is possible in the representation of childhood experiences. In the context of childhoods in Zimbabwean literature, the seeming lack of consensus on what constitutes childhood, resistance and history, and the uses to which childhoods are put, means that even in the same culture, there cannot be one way of experiencing and resisting history. Therefore these childhoods resist any attempt to corral them into a universalized essentialism of experience.

In this section I will sketch five broad thematic frames within which the images of childhood I explore in this study are constructed in order to demonstrate their contradictory diversities. They include the ways in which childhood is constructed as a powerful sentimental mythology of a culture's "original beauty"; the political trope of children of resistance; the uses of girlhoods as counter-memory; and the deployment of dystopian childhoods as counter-strategy. I have chosen these broad

thematic frames because I consider them to be representative of the salient features of childhoods in black Zimbabwean literature in English. These thematic frames are by no means exhaustive, or mutually exclusive. To the contrary, they demonstrate how interconnected and differentiated the childhoods are, perhaps in stark contrast to Coe's and Geta's homogenizing generalizations. They do however have a bearing on the way my study is structured. This is because each of the chapters in the present study takes as its object particular figurations of childhood in specific sites and contexts. As in Castaneda's study, in my study 'the broad aims and the specific instances of the child's figuration discussed in each chapter is not straightforwardly additive, but has a more cumulative form' (2002: 8).

Childhood as "original beauty" and space of memory

A good number of Zimbabwean writers engage with the idyllic, pastoral romances of the pre-colonial past which they invariably contrast with what Marechera calls the 'syphilis of the white man's coming' (1978: 75), in spite of the writers' deep and committed engagement with Western culture. Musaemura Zimunya (1982c) captures the underlying mythology implied by the remembrance of the pre-colonial past in the context of colonial occupation, starting from the 'early youthful days of tender nature and passion' to the time when 'the original beauty is submerged in the confrontation with the subhuman condition imposed upon us by the racist oppressor' (x-xi). In other words, the childhoods portrayed in novels such as *A Son of the Soil* (Katiyo) and *Jikinya* (Ndhlala) reveal 'the underlying mythology of a whole culture' (Coe 1984: 279). It is a culture that has been defined and constructed by the moment

of colonial occupation, and hence the constant reference to the ‘violent birth’ of the Zimbabwean nation as a ‘symbolic point of reference for representations of the nation’s history’ (Christiansen 2004: 105).

Childhoods in *Jikinya*, *Dew in the Morning* (Chinodya) and *A Son of the Soil* offer complex visions and interpretations of the trajectory of historical experience that Zimunya describes. While in these novels there is a tendency to locate the ‘early youthful days of tender nature’ and ‘the original beauty’ of the culture at the mythical pre-colonial signpost, there are internal contradictions in the ways the childhoods are represented. They do not glibly underwrite the belief ‘that establishes childhood as a pure point of origin in relation to ideological structures’ (McDowell 2002: 214). For instance, a white girl child, rescued from a war between white settlers and black Africans, and adopted by a black villager in Ndhlala’s novel *Jikinya*, is a space within which to imagine the exclusivity and singularity of the pre-colonial moment. But the implosion of that space, through its own contradictions, which are described in Chapter 2 of this study, points to the involution of the resting places of the colonized culture. Although *Dew in the Morning* is steeped in romantic reminiscences of boy childhood in a rural past, the child in the novel embodies the complex tensions of the past and the present, and demonstrates how spaces of memory are multiply layered (Muponde 2004d). In this novel, childhood not only ‘condenses’ ‘but also brings a particular version of the world into being’ (Castaneda 2002: 4). It suggests the ways in which childhood may be considered as a capacity for aspiration and dissent, without always being tied to the anti-colonial project.

Children of Resistance or Sons of the soil

A Son of the Soil and *Child of War* (Chirasha) are a seemingly logical development from the sentimental mythology of 'tender nature and passion' in inevitable confrontation with 'the subhuman condition' of colonial oppression. They accrue symbolic value in being the "sons of the soil" or "children of resistance", rallying tropes of the nationalist struggle (Muponde 2005). The social attachment to place and identity represented by the childhoods in these two novels is couched in political tropes relating to the land and its reclamation through the space and agency of armed struggle. Hence these are childhoods that embody the spectacle of the 'violent birth' of the nation. But as I point out in the study, at the same time as post-war communities begin to realign power structures, the institution of childhood is also altered, making the social idea of childhood elastic and malleable. What is undeniably significant in the literature is that the archetypes of male childhoods hewn out of the tropes of "sons of the soil" are questioned by representations of girlhoods that claim different signposts for their narrative spaces. They do often suffer at the hands of "sons of the soil", and make different claims on the suffering caused by the "violent birth" of the nation. Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*, Vera's *Under the Tongue* and Hove's *Ancestors* are examples.

Childhood and the narrative of becoming

The portrayal of an idyllic past in which the white man is absent both from history and the landscape is also fertile ground for the growth of the liminal novel (the novel

of “becoming”) which helps us ‘better to account for the problem of coming of age in the colonial situation’ (Nyatetu-Waigwa 1996: 3). In the liminal novel, according to Nyatetu-Waigwa (ibid.: 9), the rite of passage is a ‘crucial device explicitly pointing to the initial impact of the colonial encounter and its threat to the old order’. The novel of becoming is thus generally implicated in the master narratives of nationalism in Zimbabwe. But a critical study of its traits, and the childhoods that it portrays, shows that its vision of “becoming” may not always be in harmony with the realism of the nationalist narratives.

In the novel of becoming, there is a close ‘identification between childhood and mutability itself’ (Castaneda 2002: 2). According to Castaneda, ‘[it] is not simply that “the child” is a sign, category, or representation that can be read in multiple ways. What is distinctive about the child is that it has the capacity for transformation’ (ibid.). *Dew in the Morning* (Chinodya), *A Son of the Soil* (Katiyo), *Nervous Conditions* (Dangarembga) and *The House of Hunger* (Marechera) are versions of the category of the novel of becoming. But a close examination of the ‘ways in which the child’s potentiality is made and remade’ (Castaneda, 2) in these novels, demonstrates how the child in the novel of becoming can be transformed into ‘a resource for wider cultural projects’ in adult discourse and ‘provides the groundwork for imagining an alternative order of things’ (ibid.). In *The House of Hunger*, for example, the condition of childhood finds value in a different kind of potentiality. It contests the ‘teleological model of the child’ where ‘the child’s ever-changing body is slowly transformed into the comparatively stable, physically

mature, and culturally inscribed adult form' (Castaneda, 4). It contests this teleology not only by depicting a childhood that does not grow in expected ways, but by transforming that childhood into an ideology of subversive writing, rather than an affirmation of the inevitability of the "culturally inscribed adult form" of the nation.

Memory Chirere, in his short stories, 'Keresenzia' and 'An Old Man', portrays childhoods in the process of becoming. But these are killer children. They are hardly the sort of childhoods that adults can turn back to 'to repair the adult or reclaim "the child within"' (Castaneda, 5). In Chirere's stories, in which children break all taboos, and subvert the adult investments made in the idea of childhood itself (Muponde 2004a), there is no chance that 'the child is primarily valuable insofar as the condition can be revisited in order to be left behind once again' (Castaneda, 5), as in the conventional novel of becoming. Childhood in Chirere's stories remains a point of origin that is not available for appropriation by narratives of communal order and continuity. There is therefore a subtle but strong counter-current to the standard nationalistic projections of culture and history in the Zimbabwean narratives of becoming, in which tropes of childhood are predominant.

Girlhoods as counter-memory

Indeed much of Zimbabwean literature depicts the space of childhood as a counter-memory to the appropriations of space, memory and history both by the colonizer and black cultural nationalists. *The House of Hunger*, *Under the Tongue*, *Nervous Conditions* and *Ancestors* are good examples of this trend that renders the idea of

counter-memory messier. Smith and Mitchell (1998), for example, view *Nervous Conditions* as a novel that uses 'the space of childhood [...] to interrogate memory so as to understand the trauma of a colonized people'(546). They go further to suggest how 'novels of adolescent girlhood such as *Nervous Conditions* map the space for dealing with the trauma of a society about to be liberated from its colonial domination, and in so doing, allow of (sic) positive social change' (550). Smith and Mitchell restrict the understanding of girlhood in *Nervous Conditions* to the experience of colonialism and trauma. The girlhoods portrayed in *Nervous Conditions*, *Under the Tongue* and *Ancestors* are attempts by Zimbabwean authors to reject a realism which 'limits itself to certain inevitably national horizons' (Kortenaar 1997: 39). These girl childhoods are about asserting a space in which women's rather than men's sensibilities predominate. In this context, as Elleke Boehmer (2005: 108) argues, '[b]y writing themselves as children and citizens of the nation, [women] rework by virtue of who they are the confining structures of the national family to encompass alternative gender identities.' The girlhoods portrayed in their narratives are therefore the means by which a 'viable polyphonic narrative of the nation' (Christiansen 2004) is rewritten.

- Dystopian childhoods as counter-strategy

The overtly cultural and political decolonizing sentiment in novels such as *On Trial for My Country* (Samkange) is continually subverted by a stream of dystopian visions of nationalism and history in novels and short stories of what Flora Veit-Wild (1993) has described as the 'non-believers' of the nationalist struggle, or 'the

lost generation in search of roots' (Muchemwa 1978). The fiction of 'non-believers' or 'the lost generation' co-exists in tension with what George Kahari (1990: 39) terms a stream of equally influential biographical, historical and political writing of the 1970s and early 1980s, such as the works of Lawrence Vambe (1972: 1976), Ndabaningi Sithole (1977), Stanlake Samkange (1966; 1975) and Solomon Mutswairo (1983a; 1983b), 'concerned with the dissemination of historical facts[...] opposed to facts presented by settlers.' It is in the fiction of these 'non-believers', mostly viewed as critical of and cynical about the nationalist struggle, that the dystopian images of childhood are most predominant. Charles Mungoshi's *Coming of the Dry Season* (1972), *Waiting for the Rain* (1975), *Some Kinds of Wounds* (1980); Marechera's *The House of Hunger* (1978); and Nyamfukudza's *The Non-Believer's Journey* (1980), for instance, construct dystopian tropes of the 1970s that construct and articulate what Zimunya (1982a) has characterized as the metaphorical 'drought and hunger' in the Zimbabwean cultural imagination. But as I demonstrate in this study, the dystopian tropes of childhood subvert the vulnerabilities implied in the topoi assigned them by critics such as Zimunya (1982a) and Zhuwarara (2001).

The use of dystopia as resistance (Muonde 2002), and dystopian childhoods (Muonde 2004b), is a counter-strategy to the totalitarianism of an all-embracing black narrative and experience. It subverts the representations of mythologized pasts such as you find in Samkange's and Mutswairo's novels of the black struggle. The sense of an unending critical war on a monolithic memory of the past, such as

lost generation in search of roots' (Muchemwa 1978). The fiction of 'non-believers' or 'the lost generation' co-exists in tension with what George Kahari (1990: 39) terms a stream of equally influential biographical, historical and political writing of the 1970s and early 1980s, such as the works of Lawrence Vambe (1972: 1976), Ndabaningi Sithole (1977), Stanlake Samkange (1966; 1975) and Solomon Mutswairo (1983a; 1983b), 'concerned with the dissemination of historical facts[...] opposed to facts presented by settlers.' It is in the fiction of these 'non-believers', mostly viewed as critical of and cynical about the nationalist struggle, that the dystopian images of childhood are most predominant. Charles Mungoshi's *Coming of the Dry Season* (1972), *Waiting for the Rain* (1975), *Some Kinds of Wounds* (1980); Marechera's *The House of Hunger* (1978); and Nyamfukudza's *The Non-Believer's Journey* (1980), for instance, construct dystopian tropes of the 1970s that construct and articulate what Zimunya (1982a) has characterized as the metaphorical 'drought and hunger' in the Zimbabwean cultural imagination. But as I demonstrate in this study, the dystopian tropes of childhood subvert the vulnerabilities implied in the topoi assigned them by critics such as Zimunya (1982a) and Zhuwarara (2001).

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Zimunya (1982c) attempts to present, continues to engage some Zimbabwean writers such as Vera and Kanengoni (see Chan 2005) and critics such as Muchemwa (2005). It is specifically the presentation of childhood as a contested, pluralistic narrative, and resistance as multi-faceted, that informs my study.

Rationale

This study tackles specific constructions of childhood archetypes born of specific socio-historical processes in Zimbabwe during and after colonization. It investigates the relationship of the identities of these particular childhoods to the culture of resistance engendered both in the anti-colonial and post-colonial discourses and practices obtaining in Zimbabwe. The relationship between images of childhood and history is of critical importance as it provides the defining context of the subject, that is, the conception and uses of a specific image of childhood in a culture characterized by resistance to colonial domination and various forms of post-colonial repression and betrayal. The link to history enables the study to trace the development of the lineaments, conceptions and uses of varied images of the literary child across historical and cultural contexts and in relation to the culture of resistance in Zimbabwe.

No researcher has so far adequately explored and critiqued the varied visions, images and uses of childhood in Zimbabwean literature. Much of the writing on Zimbabwean childhoods as depicted in the fiction has been limited to issues to do with characterization and sensitivity to children's vulnerability (Zhuwarara 2001).

As I demonstrate in the literature review, this is in spite of the fact that portraits of childhood are endemic in Zimbabwean literature, and so are diverse concepts of resistance that the visions of childhood in this literature are freighted with. Visions of resistance, and the strategies used by different Zimbabwean authors to site these visions, are as multi-faceted as the depictions of childhood. By drawing on global critical work on childhood, I bring Zimbabwean literary childhood to the centre of cultural and political debates by suggesting that it can be structured into a discourse which goes beyond the mere noting of its presence, characterization and (mis-)fortunes.

The imagining of the child and childhood is tied to the history of the nation that inflects the literature. The novel, and the short story, as genres with varied stylistic markers, are tied to ideas to do with self-naming, self-writing, and selfhood that Zimbabwean nation-building, founded on a brutal nationalist armed struggle, is a signifier of. The marker of this inward-looking imagining of the child and childhood is the intensity of the local, by which I mean the particularities of geography, culture and experience that make the childhoods distinctively “Zimbabwean”. The local is at the core of this literature and lends colour and historical complexity to the childhoods that it depicts. Thus the literature itself, and the assorted childhoods it depicts, participates in convening multiple meanings of history, politics and the nation. The nation itself is figured as an institution and a discursive space. Imagining and writing childhoods becomes, in some writers’ work, a foundational act in which childhood is transformed into multifaceted symbols of some kind of origin. This is

one of the instances in which, in telling their own childhoods, cultures recreate themselves (*cp* Ricoeur in Kearney 1998: 169).

The idea of nation in Zimbabwe is what Foucault called a 'discursive formation' which is not simply an allegory or imaginative vision, 'but a gestative political structure which the Third-World artist is very often either consciously building or suffering the lack of' (Brennan 1989: 4). The uses of the idea of nation should therefore be understood in the sense of craftsmanship, 'where nationalism is a trope for such things as "belonging", "bordering" and "commitment"', as well as 'the institutional uses of fiction in nationalist movements' (Brennan 1995: 170). As Boehmer (2005) argues, the 'nation has historically not only offered important ways of recovering self and reclaiming cultural integrity after colonial occupation'(4), nationalism itself is 'an unforgoable phase of opposition to the destructions of colonisation'(9).

Nevertheless, the construction of childhood in Zimbabwean literature is fraught with contradictions. It is complexly implicated in, and subversive of, the informing vision of nationalism. Hutchinson and Smith (1994: 5) neatly summarize this founding vision of nationalism as the quest for 'autonomy, unity, identity.' In another instance Homi Bhabha has identified the temptation of 'nationalist discourses persistently to produce the idea of the nation as a continuous narrative of national progress, the narcissism of self-generation, the primeval present of the *Volk*' (1990:1). Marechera's *The House of Hunger* and Chirere's stories demonstrate how such an

understanding of nationalism is upset and disrupted. Furthermore, a close reading of Vera's *Under the Tongue* and Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* reveals that '[a]s in the cross-section of a tree trunk that is nowhere unmarked by its grain – by that pattern expressing its history – so, too, is the nation informed throughout by its gendered history, by the normative masculinities and femininities that have shaped its growth over time' (Boehmer 2005: 3). The writings of Vera and Dangarembga demonstrate how 'women writers use the novel as a powerful instrument with which to reshape national cultures in a way more hospitable to women's presence' (Boehmer, 12). As Bhabha argues, the "'locality" of national culture is neither unified nor unitary in relation to itself'. Its boundary teems with 'political antagonism and unpredictable forces [struggling] for political representation' (Bhabha 1990: 4). This is because, as Stephen Daniels argues, 'even apparently singular histories and geographies may be open to varying interpretation, even appropriation, by those once marginalized in, or excluded from, the dominant national culture' (1993: 5).

The images of childhood in my study coalesce into a dynamic pattern which Reinhard Kuhn describes elsewhere as 'a kinetic and yet coherent corpus' (1982: 15). Even so, and perhaps because of it, there are internal dislocations and splinters within what could be conceived of as monolithic narratives of national resistance in Zimbabwe. For Barbara Harlow, 'the emphasis in the literature of resistance is on the political as the power to change the world' (1987: 30), and it is viewed as engaged 'in a struggle against ascendant or dominant forms of ideological and

cultural production' (ibid.: 28-29). But as I have suggested, this need not be the only way of understanding resistance in Zimbabwe, because it portrays an 'excessively dichotomized view' (Chabal and Daloz qtd. in Hofmeyr 2004: 130) of resistance and history. As Preben Kaarsholm has demonstrated, Zimbabwean literature itself is 'structured by dialogue' in which 'patterns of inter-textual relationships come out prominently, with texts quoting, echoing and debating each other – and in the process reformulating and challenging earlier tales' (2005: 18). Nevertheless, in the context of Zimbabwean literary history, what Isabel Hofmeyr (2004: 130) calls elsewhere 'a growing "post-resistance" critique' coexists on contradictory terms with what she has described as 'hydraulic models of domination and resistance' (ibid.). Harlow (1987) seems to suggest a 'hydraulic model' of resistance, where, to adapt Hofmeyr's critique of 'the popular', literature 'becomes a site of improvisation in which strategies of opposition, survival and subversion are constantly formulated' (Hofmeyr 2004: 129) for deployment against the oppressor, or in the case of Harlow's study, the occupying force. In a context such as the one Kaarsholm describes, I follow Stephen Slemon's (1995: 107-108) argument that resistance is 'grounded in the multiple ways and contradictory structures of ideological interpellation'. To adapt Bhabha, this is something that points to some of the ways in which 'the cultural temporality of the nation inscribes a much more transitional social reality' (Bhabha 1990: 1).

I have therefore chosen a range of writers to reveal an array of possibilities in the uses of the literary child, and to demonstrate that there is no one concept of

childhood, history and resistance. Like Michael Green, I have adopted 'a critical practice that will allow the objects of its study to adequately resist the appropriations of totalizing concepts like nation, literature, and history, yet at the same time, recognize the ways in which these concepts construct those objects of study' (1997: 296). History itself is present in the object of study, that is constructions of childhood, as a mediated and transformed experience. It is present in the text 'in disguised form, so that the task of the critic is then to wrench the mask from its face' (Eagleton in Selden 1988: 467), and to 'explore the multiple paths that lead to the unmasking of cultural artifacts as socially symbolic acts' (Jameson 1981: 20). Literature itself is 'one more symbolic practice among others that make up cultural history' (Armstrong & Tennenhouse 1989: 2).

In this study, I trace the ways in which the constructions of childhood, the 'social artifact' (Postman 1994: 143), make it possible for us to appreciate how 'local conditions associated with the national, literary, and historical are especially marked by plurality, fracture, contingency, and contestation' (Green 1997: 292). Childhoods, as I understand them in my study, are reflective and 'appropriative of the discontinuities, unevenness, resistances, that are the chief features of the experience of material histories' (Green, 295). By alerting us to the ways in which 'different writing modes work as strategies of dissent' (Parry 1994: 15), the literature itself 'not only demands recognition of its independent status and existence as literary production, but as such also represents a serious challenge to the codes and canons of both the theory and the practice of literature and its criticism' (Harlow

1987: xvi). Implied in these different ways of representing resistance are the different ways in which visions of childhood are conceived and articulated 'into culturally specific sets of ideas and philosophies [...] which combine to define the "nature of childhood"' (James & Prout 1990: 1) in Zimbabwean literature.

Concepts of Childhood

Childhood itself is an emotive subject which enjoys overprotection from legions of what I have called elsewhere 'anti-critic militia'⁵ (2000: vii) in Zimbabwe. This "militia" would rather have a protected, romantic, unchanging and unchangeable notion of childhood. It is a perception that contradicts the evolutionary and transient nature of childhood itself. Researchers such as Aries (1962), Sommerville (1982), Shahar (1990), Archard (1993), Postman (1994) and Cunningham (1995) have shown childhood to be especially vulnerable to changes in history and culture.

In this study, I explore the depiction of childhoods through three broad conceptual frameworks as I have extrapolated them from scholarly literature on the subject. It should be noted that I do not intend to suggest that these frameworks exist in the literature in the order in which I present them here. In fact, they are complexly embedded and intertwined in the literature. They can be summarized as: an understanding of childhood as incompetence and vulnerability; childhood as a

⁵ In my study of children's literature in Zimbabwe, I have noticed a trend among critics to protect children's literature from criticism, and discourage critics from scrutinizing children's writings. As one such critic, Ben Hanson, explains, 'Do not stultify it by too much analytical studying of these works', because it would kill 'that love and enjoyment' (Muponde 2000: 3). Criticism of children's literature, especially that produced by children themselves, is viewed as a parasitic, if not philistine activity, and hence children have to be protected from it.

shifting set of ideas; and childhood as a worldview. These concepts are of course not mutually exclusive, not even exhaustive and definitive. They exist in varying degrees in any number of Zimbabwean narratives. I maintain that a close exploration of their uses would bring a distinctive knowledge to the criticism of the literature and the contexts in which it is written.

The child as incompetent other and vulnerable

John Hood-Williams (1990: 157) is concerned with writers and societies that 'continue to render the child as the incompetent other,' and argues that, 'Our very understanding of childhood is constructed out of our notions of adulthood' (171). Most of the work on the concept of childhood is therefore, according to Ann Oakley (1994: 23), 'adultist.' The image of the child as the incompetent other, vulnerable and innocent, and needful of protection, is a 'sentimental mythology' (Ward 1994: 145) of 'socially constructed vulnerabilities' (Mayall 1994: 4) spawned by adults about childhood. These sentimental mythologies of childhood are prevalent in the adult fiction in my study. They reveal something of what Marina Warner (1994) considers the compelling desire of societies to keep childhood innocent. But as she argues, 'Childhood, placed at a tangent to adulthood, perceived as special and magical, precious and dangerous at once, has turned into some volatile stuff' (Warner, 35), as I demonstrate in Chapter 4 and 5 of this study.

Childhood as a shifting set of ideas

Pamela Reynolds (1996: xxxiv) argues that ideas about childhood tell us about

social forces, and that childhood as a construct 'refracts on social, political, economic, and moral concerns.' Concepts of childhood are therefore 'contested, temporal, and emergent' (ibid.: xxiii), just like the concepts of history and resistance of which they are constructs. Childhood is viewed in contemporary social sciences and history as 'a shifting set of ideas' (Cunningham 1995: 1); 'a set of memories' (Oakley 1994:28); 'a continual construction' (Graue & Walsh 1998: 35); 'mutable factors, open to historical contextualization' (Shahar 1990: 1); and as 'not only a life phase but a cultural, economic, and social construction' (Frones 1994: 145).

Childhood as worldview

Cunningham (1995:2) considers it 'possible to go further to look at the role played by childhood as an idea in a society's explanation of the world as a whole.' Childhood is therefore central to the construction of worldviews, and cannot be studied in isolation from society as a whole (ibid.: 5). Oakley (1994: 28) believes that childhood is not only something to be studied, 'it is something we all hold within us: a set of memories, a collection of ideas.' These memories of childhood are implicated in society's techniques of self-discovery and self-perpetuation. Urie Bronfenbrenner (1974: 1) comments on how representations of childhood are deployed as a 'technology' to predict how well a nation will survive, and argues that thoughts about childhood reflect 'the concern of one generation for the next.' Thus, according to Harry Hendrick (1990: 55), different generations have always sought to incorporate childhood 'into a larger philosophy.'

In this study, I demonstrate how the links between these concepts of childhood and notions of resistance and history have largely been ignored in the criticism of Zimbabwean literature in English. Yet Zimbabwean literary criticism will be the poorer in scope and vision by ignoring key tropes and concepts in both the literature and the nation itself. It is, therefore, my hope that the research will result in an analytical approach to the study of literary childhood in Zimbabwe being developed and sustained. My desire, as expressed in my recorded interest in children's literature (Muonde 2004e; 2004c; 2003; 2000; 1999), is to cultivate critical respect for this neglected subject which I believe can be developed to a level where it can be viewed as a viable and legitimate area of academic and literary enquiry.

Literature Review

Much of the criticism of childhood in Zimbabwean literature has not shifted significantly from the staple concerns of Kahari (1980) and Zimunya (1982a). Neither of them has meaningfully explored and critiqued the varied visions, images and uses of childhood in Zimbabwean literature. In most cases their interest in it, if it is shown at all, is rather accidental or ancillary to their major project. It is a criticism still preoccupied with the celebration of Zimbabwean literature's tenacity and resilience in the face of the pandemic brutalities of colonialism, which, ironically, sired the literature. Any childhood encountered in the fiction is explained as an illustration of authorial sensitivity and dexterity in handling characters.

In Flora Veit-Wild's *Teachers, Preachers, Non-Believers: A Social History of*

Zimbabwean Literature (1993), childhood is referred to chiefly to illustrate a biographical element of the authors, and how the circumstances of their childhoods shaped how, where and what they wrote. Veit-Wild concedes that in one generation of Zimbabwean writers, 'Childhood memories influence the setting of stories' (38), but her book is not a study of childhoods, but a social history of the development of the Zimbabwean novel. Zhuwarara (2001), like Zimunya (1982a) and Kahari (1980), is mainly concerned with taking stock of the development of Zimbabwean literature in English since its birth in 1966. Like Zimunya, any childhood encountered in the literature is explained in terms of how well an author renders childhood vulnerabilities and memories. George Kahari (1990), like Zimunya (1982a), is preoccupied with justifying the existence of Shona literature to the world, which colonialists vehemently denigrated. Chiwome (1996), partly in a riposte to George Kahari's uncritical celebration of the emergence of Shona literature, is concerned with documenting the colonial factors that debilitated the vision of literatures written in the indigenous languages.

There are, however, some useful studies on the subject elsewhere on the continent that have contributed significant insights to my research, specifically on how the subject can be approached and developed more comprehensively. Particularly, I am interested in those studies that render childhoods as texts that can be understood independently of childhood as a biological phenomenon. This is because, for me, and as Allison James and Alan Prout (1990) put it, childhood is 'socially constructed, that is constituted in discourse' (27). There is therefore the need to go

beyond the staple, and very often unhelpful language of “vulnerability” and “innocence” which characterizes the criticism of the writing on childhood in Zimbabwe.

Eldred Durosimi Jones (1998) devoted a special issue of *African Literature Today* to the theme of ‘Childhood in African Literature’. In his editorial article titled ‘Childhood Before [sic] and After Birth’, Jones writes that the journal was compiled out of a recognition that ‘African authors have consistently returned to childhood to find their personal as well as their racial roots’ (7). He continues: ‘Far from being merely nostalgic yearnings for a lost paradise, many of the treatments of childhood have exposed a grim reality of cruelty, harshness, parental (particularly paternal) egocentricism and extraordinary bruising of the vulnerable child psyche’ (ibid.).

A noticeable weakness of the special issue, as far as my study is concerned, is its thinly veiled moralistic project to exhort African authors to uphold ‘social responsibility [...] in their portrayals of childhood’ (ibid.: 7). This moralistic interest, ironically, gives the impression that childhood in African literature is a monolithic subject that predictably induces monolithic visions of itself, in itself an indication that the variegated nature of the articles in the journal have not been sufficiently interrogated by the editor. What is needed – and what is important in my study – is not moralism, or constructions of undifferentiated monoliths of literary childhood, but a rigorous critical engagement with the subject, and an analytical approach which clearly explains the specific socio-historical dynamics of literary childhood

in Africa in general and Zimbabwe in particular.

Chidi Ikonne, Emelia Oko and Peter Onwudinjo's (1992) book, *Children and Literature in Africa*, contains eighteen essays from various scholars concerned with the critical study of West African children's literature, or children in literature. In many cases, the essays conflate depictions of children in literature with actual children, hence the strident cries for good parenting theories in essays by Julie Agbasiere, Grace Eche Okereke, W. Onoriose and Emma Nnabuko.

More than half of the essays in Ikonne, Oko and Onwudinjo's book are blighted by romantic archetypes of childhood, the 'child of the rose' (Muponde 2004c) with all the innocence, beauty and vulnerability or what Zelizer discerns as 'a sacralization of childhood' (in Cunningham 1995: 184) in literature. But these are not constructed in the same progressive way as conceived by Laurence Wright (1992). Discussing representations of childhood in Romantic literature affords Wright the opportunity to explore the history and contours of English 'thoughtways.' He views the trope of childhood as implicated in the construction of the iconography of nationhood. Literary childhood can then be viewed as a construct. Its values of 'freshness, immediacy and imperative urgency' (ibid.: 19) are not a natural consequence of the inherent innocence of children. They are 'essentially myths, or imaginative projections, deriving from a mixture of cultural and ideological sources' (Archard 1993: 29).

To the contrary, writers in Ikonne et. al. endow childhood with mystical innocence and resilience which do not have the symbolic import of Wright's Romantic child. Uche A. Ogike, in the same book, enthuses over 'the secret of the African child's survival, the innate force which pulls him through both natural and man-made obstacles' (125). Ogike dehistoricises this 'innate force', investing childhood with what John Hood-Williams (1990:156) calls a 'firmly exclusionary status', and makes it appear as immanent in every child. Ogike, for instance, does not mention the endless civil wars, disease and malnutrition which threaten and actually kill African children every year. Childhood cannot be studied in isolation from society as a whole (Cunningham 1995: 5; Buchner 1990: 71-72; Oldman 1994: 154). Ogike's mystification and ahistorical conception of the African child in literature are prototypical of much of the scholarship in the book.

In the same book, Julie Agbasiere starts off by making an important observation that 'the traditional milieu is the point of departure in the assessment of the evolution of the child as changes can be established in the light of departure from the traditional model' (127). However, she tends to portray the traditional milieu in idyllic terms, as if it is an Edenic space. She believes that traditional society shields the child 'from the adverse effects of mental agonies and inner conflicts that are the lot of adults' (132). This interpretation of 'mental agonies and inner conflicts' as exclusively present in adults is shorn of historical context, and fails to explain how the disruption of traditional society by colonialism resulted in a life 'strewn with strife' (ibid.: 131). However, the strength of Julie Agbasiere's essay, and its

relevancy to my study, is that it gives us a starting point for the critique of colonialism as it is apprehended by African authors through the image of the child. The romantic retreat into the past where the white man was *terra nullius* is invariably the basis of a sustained cultural and political resistance to colonial rule in Zimbabwean literature, and often is associated with what Nyatetu-Waigwa (1996:3) terms the novel of growth and 'becoming'.

The potential of the novel of 'becoming' as a vector of historical vision is explored in a brilliant essay by Julie Phelps Dietche (1992) entitled 'Child of War: Askar in Nuruddin Farah's *Maps*.' In Dietche's essay the child is viewed as a symbol of 'the age's spirit', and the spirit of the age is war. Askar's growing up is inseparable from the spirit of the age: the journeys that he makes from infancy through to boyhood and adolescence are linked to the war in Somalia. 'But these moves can also be seen as the normal and natural progression that any child must follow as he moves along toward adulthood' (ibid.: 200). This parallel growth is linked to both the coming of age of Askar and the growth of the nation, a concern which is also discernible in Zimbabwean novels such as *A Son of the Soil* and *Child of War*.

Dietche writes in the same vein as Don Burness (2000) who views the romantic visions of Alda Lara's literary childhood as both 'itself a lost continent once we reach the geography of mature years' (193), and a continuous narrative of 'hope where none can be found' (196). This absence of hope is situated in the context of what Niyi Osundare (2000) has characterized as 'the graveyard of liberty and

freedom'(67) which Africa has become, 'a dangerous place to think, a risky place to argue'(ibid.: 63). Childhood is thus constructed in Alda Lara's poetry as, in the words of Niyi Afolabi (2000: 210), a 'pretext for questioning'. Lara's literary childhood is therefore an artefact implicated in the grand quests for an enduring vision of resistance in conditions that are inimical to human freedom and hope.

While youth literature is not of direct interest to my research, its burgeoning features as reflected by Smith and Mitchell (1996; 1998) and Flockemann (1992; 1999) reveal rhetorical strategies which are also embedded in the adult novel in which the child is a trope, as discussed by Medalie (2000) and Coetzee (1997), the critique of which is central to my study.

Smith and Mitchell (1996) discuss what they describe as a 'relatively recent genre which explores issues of identity-formation and the process of "becoming"'(174) in post-apartheid South Africa. The literary and socio-political significance of these recent genres is tied to the 'social changes in the country' (ibid.). Thus Smith and Mitchell are able to make critical links between the growth of the genre and the stream of the literature of protest and resistance in South Africa. Miki Flockemann (1992) sees this 'recent' genre, which is tied to the political process of transition in a democratic South Africa, as providing scope for 'an analysis of the kinds of political socialisation replicated through youth literature' (140). Flockemann further observes that 'many of these texts deal with a youthful protagonist's entry into, exclusion from, or resistance to dominant hegemonies' (140). What is then required, '

according to Flockemann, is 'not just a new way to speak, but also perhaps a new way to read' (ibid.: 142) these genres. David Medalie (2000) takes up the call by adopting a strategy of reading the new genres by stringing together South African literary boyhoods. This strategy enables him to interpret the boyhoods described in the novels as both iconic and a function of memory 'preoccupied with the need to capture the past, either to render nostalgically its passing or to set it right, to reconfigure it from a position of hindsight' (ibid.: 41).

In 'Relational Reading' Flockemann (1999) develops perspectives on fictions of diasporic childhoods 'which track an emerging subjecthood located physically and metaphorically between developing and developed countries'(176). She locates these fictions of childhoods in the post-election period in South Africa where 'current repositionings of identity politics' (177) are crucial. Childhood, as a literary construct, is viewed as a 'barometer for the ideological shifts during periods of political transition' (190). The shifts, and resultant 'ambiguity and fluidity'(ibid.) in the macropolitics of South African transition point to the potential 'facing the developing self, as well as the developing nation' (ibid.). This way, the fictions of childhood are closely bound with the politics of narrating the nation, as well as reclaiming 'suppressed identities' (179).

Carli Coetzee (1997) also discusses the connection between political processes and the insertion of archetypes of childhood in the rhetoric of nation-building in the Afrikaans adult *plaasroman* (farm novel). The idealized sons in the farm novel are

seen as tropes in 'a continuous and evolutionary differentiation from the forefathers'(114), but moving towards the attainment of 'lineal consciousness' (118) 'as members of the familial nation' (ibid.).

In my view, and for the purposes of my study, Dietche (1992), Burness (2000), Flockemann (1999) and Wright (1992) clearly provide the missing dimensions in the study of the literary child. They, like Medalie (2000) and Smith and Mitchell (1998; 1996), site the visions of childhood as texts that can be understood independently of childhood as a stage of biological growth and maturity. James and Prout (1990: 27) view childhood as 'socially constructed, that is constituted in discourse.' Neil Postman (1994:143) characterizes childhood as a 'social artifact' whose 'continued existence is not inevitable' (xii), because it will always be reconstituted under specific socio-historical conditions. There is therefore the basis for working towards the structuring of a discourse on literary childhood which goes beyond the limiting conceptual framework of Ikonne et al. (1992) and Durosimi Jones (1998). A rigorous critique of images of literary childhoods, informed by a critical understanding of the dialectical nature of socio-cultural reality, should be able to go beyond the fixities of a conceptual framework of childhood where, as Berry Mayall (1994: 4) puts it, 'concern for the natural vulnerabilities of childhood is displaced or augmented by concern for socially constructed vulnerabilities.'

Theoretical Framework

I find it important to situate my study within a cultural materialist understanding of

the function and nature of literary art. This is because, for me, and as Jonathan Culler (2000: 276) puts it, '[t]o ask "what is literature?" is in effect a way of arguing about how literature should be studied.' My appreciation and explanation of Zimbabwean literature is informed by cultural materialism in general. I must point out at the outset that I do not draw directly on a particular materialist theory or theorist as a way into my study of childhood. This theoretical framework constitutes only the broad outlines and articulations of what informs my appreciation of the body of literature under study. I accept Raymond Williams' broad definition of cultural materialism as 'the analysis of all forms of signification, including quite centrally writing, within the actual means and conditions of their production' (qtd in Hampton 1990: 171). I am aware that there are varied schools of materialist thought, but important as they are, this is not the place to engage them singly on their particularities and differences. For the purposes of my study, it is adequate for me to outline just what sort of questions a cultural materialist approach addresses to a literary text. The rest of the section is devoted to answering some of the questions, as well as to explaining the socio-historical nature of literary art, and how its genres and conventions help us to reconceptualize reality.

A materialist approach explains the content and form of literary works in close relation to the socio-historical contexts that engender, and impact, on them. According to David Maughan-Brown (1985:13), it addresses the following questions to a literary work: ' a) What sort of necessity does a work reflect? b) What are its effective historical and ideological determinants? c) What is its dialectical

relationship to history and to the ideology of that history which it reveals?’

Zimbabwean literature is intricately bound up with the whole social and cultural history and experience of its people. It emerged as a form of cultural revolt against colonial domination and oppression. It is, in a complex way, closely associated with national resistance and the emergence of nationhood. Michael Chapman (1998:13) describes how a liberatory aesthetics would emerge in a context where ‘the rituals of artistic intervention and the rituals of social survival cannot easily inhabit separate moral terrains.’ I find it therefore appropriate to structure my reading of Zimbabwean fictional texts in a way that takes into account a strong national historical perspective. As Ranka Primorac has argued, such an approach would ‘enable us to appreciate in more depth not only Zimbabwe’s literary history, but also wider Zimbabwean social and discursive trends’ (2005: 162).

The socio-historical context is central to the appreciation of Zimbabwean literature. Christopher Hampton defines context as ‘the underlying conditions which define the functions and limits of cultural activity, including language and literature as forms of creative social practice’ (1990: 3). Hampton’s assertion undermines, rightly so, the viability of any linguistic or literary theory, for that matter, which ‘conceives of language as an abstract self-contained system which separates it from the social process that generates it’ (ibid: 14). Nor is it possible that a piece of writing can exist for its own sake. ‘It is a potentiality, and its language speaks of many things carried by the words – meanings, possibilities implicit with resonances and echoes

from the world it was produced in and (however indirectly) refers back to, as well as the new historical contexts it may exist as a commentary on or a counterpoint to' (Hampton, 23). It is important to speak of a work of art's potential to mean, because, as Yuri Borev explains,

'Art is born many times. Firstly, the artistic text, once it is brought into being by the author's pen or brush, is then born many times, over and over again in the acts of reception, emerging each time anew in communication with the reader, spectator, or listener. Secondly, owing to epochal shifts in the receptive field, a work is read each time "with the fresh eye of today" at each new period of history' (1988: 286).

However, even when materialists ask a text questions about its dialectical relation to history and social reality, and given the fact that a literary text is "born many times" owing to epochal shifts, it is not given at the outset 'where or how literature fits into the structure' (Forgacs 1982: 136). According to Gella Yermash, 'the relation between the reality of the world and the picture presented by a work of art is not one of simple isomorphism. In a work of art we perceive reality as it is interpreted by the artist, as a new world, a world that interprets empirical reality' (1988: 287). As Hampton has argued, the literary act as work of art 'seeks not reduction but intensification, the kind of illumination that transforms and penetrates the surfaces of things to enrich and deepen our experience of reality' (1990: 11). Because 'the process of artistic thinking is inalienably linked with cognition of life' (Yermash 1988: 288), it abstracts and transforms objective reality and material facts of life into 'thoughts and convictions' (ibid.) as well as imaginary experience through the artistic image. For

example, when history enters the text, it is mediated and transformed into an imaginary experience. Thus, as Yuri Lukin reminds us, literature is not 'a mere transmutation of ideas and notions into something specifically sensual, thus turning the objective content of artistic images into simple illustrations of political and social ideas' (1988: 55). The uniqueness of literature, as a form of cognition of life, lies in its ability to anchor 'our notions of reality through a system of artistic images rather than through categories, concepts or speculative conclusions' (Lukin, 55) as in science. In Gella Yermash's words, in the 'artistic image of life, human thought acquires a sensuous reality [...] and appeals to the perceiver's feeling and imagination as well as to [sic] his reason, channeling, as it were, the process of his reflections about the world' (1988: 289).

The foregoing is important to underscore in my study. I critique the strategies and signifying practices deployed by Zimbabwean authors to articulate concepts of resistance and history through their constructions of childhoods. In this regard, I need to make a few comments on form and genre, because they 'add to an understanding of the contents' (Lukin 1988: 70) and the nature of the "reflections" about the world evoked, elicited or implied by the artistic images and devices. It must be understood at the outset that cultural materialism does not restrict an artist's quest for 'new forms and new means of expression and possibilities of literature' (Lukin, 71). To the contrary, as Lukin argues, 'The continual enrichment of the contents of literature with the life and social experience of mankind generates the search for new, more perfect forms of artistic expression of this content. The variety

of reality around us [...] also generates a variety and wealth of forms of its reflection in literature' (71).

In mediating and articulating varieties of reality, Bakhtinian cultural materialism holds that what 'determines the formal unity of any genre is its double orientation towards social reality', that is the 'extrinsic' and the 'intrinsic' (Morris 1994: 175). Where the extrinsic relates to the specific conditions of the 'actualization' of the work of art 'in real time and space', the intrinsic relates to the "thematic unity" of the form understood as the total conception of reality produced by the generic structure as a whole' (ibid.). 'In any genre', observes Pam Morris, 'these intrinsic and extrinsic orientations are mutually interactive and are simultaneously influenced by and actively influence other social and ideological conceptions of life' (ibid.). For Bakhtin '[d]ifferent generic forms develop different artistic devices and structures [...] so they offer different ways of comprehending social reality' (Morris, 175). Genres and conventions, then, are devices, or strategies of conceptualizing and representing reality to ourselves. For instance, one thinks of the 'open, discontinuous, improvisational, indeterminate, or aleatory structures' (Ihab Hassan in Selden 1997: 202) of a Vera text; and the fragmented, '*bricolage* of forms and genres' (Selden et al.: 1997: 203) of Marechera's postmodern text (eg *Mindblast*, *Scrapiron Blues*, *The House of Hunger*).

The materialist explanation of a Marechera text, for example, would be located within the 'specific historical strain' (Ker 1997: 2) occasioned by colonialism. This

‘strain’ is the cause of a ‘profound sense of ontological uncertainty’ (Selden 1997: 202), and ‘a crisis of culture’ (Ker op.cit.:2) when ‘neither the world nor the self any longer possess unity, coherence, meaning’ (Selden op.cit.:202). I would place the Vera text within the broader context of a Marechera text, but specifically working within a ‘feminine space’, a ‘gap or absence that troubles and destabilizes the master narratives’ (Jardine qtd. in Selden ibid.: 215) of nationalism.

Thus Fredric Jameson (1981: 20), a cultural materialist critic himself, makes it clear that ‘there is nothing that is not social and historical.’ Cultural artifacts, such as literary texts, and ideologies such as postmodernism and feminism, cannot be ‘sheltered from the omnipotence of history and the implacable influence of the social’ (ibid.: 20). Postmodernism as an ideology can be explained and understood as ‘a symptom of the deeper structural changes in our society and culture as a whole’ (Jameson 1994: xii; also Jameson 1988: 111). Feminism, for example, which is defined by Pam Morris (1993) as a political perception which seeks ‘to understand the social and psychic mechanisms that construct and perpetuate gender inequality and then to change them’ (1), is understood by Rita Felski (1989: 1) as ‘both a product of existing social conditions and a form of critical opposition to them.’ It is not ‘an abstract literary theory... in isolation from the social conditions of (the) production and reception’ of literary texts (ibid.:2).

To conclude, my understanding of the nature and function of literary art is therefore situated within a materialist framework in which literature is viewed as tied to the

social in complex ways. The nature of the social itself may be volatile, as are the artistic and theoretical means to unveil, apprehend and articulate it. In a positive sense, theory 'become[s] impure as it engages the social and political world through the reading of literature' (Butler, Guillory & Thomas 2000: x). Thus in my study I insist on an appreciation of literature that is read within the dynamics of its socio-historical determinants, and emphasize that genres and conventions, as they appear in Zimbabwean literature, are not only pleasurable as aesthetic tools, but are consciously honed means to engage the social.

Research Methodology

The study is based on close, contextual, analysis of the primary texts. It is structured in such a way that it reflects the complexities of the notions of childhood in Zimbabwean literature; the diversity of the strategies deployed by the authors to depict these childhoods; and the varied visions of, and internal dislocations in the concept of resistance. A structure like this has the advantage of being able to acknowledge and critique the heterogeneity of perceptions of childhood, history and resistance; and the multiplicity of the contexts and contradictions that constitute and define resistance within a contested history. The selection of the primary texts, and their placing into chapters, is therefore based on representativeness: thematically, stylistically and ideologically, rather than on a chronology inspired by publication dates. The study is divided into six chapters as follows.

Chapter 1, the introductory chapter, defines the area of investigation, justifies it,

outlines objectives and the significance and scope of the study. It reviews the literature on literary childhood and its definition across selected historical and literary contexts, and discusses the theoretical framework and methodology used in the study.

Chapter 2 considers the ways in which Ndhlala's *Jikinya* and Chinodya's *Dew in the Morning* are kinds of symbolic excavations of the past and a search for the resting places and spaces of memory in which competing imaginaries of belonging are constructed. I demonstrate the way in which childhood in *Jikinya* allows the idea of the nation to be recreated as a utopian, albeit unstable political imaginary, while in *Dew in the Morning* it may be thought of as pointing to the manner in which the constructedness of the sense of place and belonging can be individually willed or exited.

Chapter 3 discusses narratives that go beyond reminiscences of the security and confidence of the past. The social attachment that constitutes belonging to a place and history is couched in political tropes relating to the land and the war. Here, through the fiction of Katiyo (*A Son of the Soil*) and Chirasha (*Child of War*), I trace how the imagining of childhood, especially boy childhood, brings to light the relationship between conceptions of childhood and nationalist visions and structures of feeling.

Chapter 4 suggests a counter-narrative to **Chapter 3**. I demonstrate how the

narrative of suffering, engendered by the exclusions inherent in nationalist tropes, is not a preserve of the nationalist aesthetic. It operates differently when placed in the space of women's fiction as well as the sensitively gendered novel of a male writer such as Chenjerai Hove (*Ancestors*). I argue that, although the girlhoods represented in *Nervous Conditions*, *Under the Tongue* and *Ancestors* are shaped by dystopian symbols of death and disability respectively, they are intricately connected to the quest for voice in ways that subvert the standard constructions of female childhood in the nationalist aesthetic as an unending and inescapable nightmare of silence and suffering.

Chapter 5 describes a major turning point in the (re-)construction of childhood in Zimbabwean literature. Here portraits of childhood shatter the linearity of nationalistic discourses and memory. Specifically I explore the ways in which these childhoods, as portrayed by Mungoshi (*Coming of the Dry Season*); Marechera (*The House of Hunger*); and Chirere ('An Old Man'; 'Keresenzia', 'Plastics and Cardboards'), may be considered to represent new, if somewhat depressingly dystopic, figurations of an alternative narrative order in what could tentatively be thought of as a post-national space.

Chapter 6 is the **Conclusion**. It synthesizes the findings of the preceding chapters and moves towards suggesting an analytical approach to the literary depictions of childhood in Zimbabwean literature. I argue that the constructions of literary childhoods by Zimbabwean authors are contested sites for the textualisation of a

range of diverse concepts of resistance and history.

CHAPTER 2: SPACES OF MEMORY

Introduction

In Ndhlala's *Jikinya* (1979) and Chinodya's *Dew in the Morning* (1982) we are presented with the construction of spaces of memory through reminiscences of childhood. Childhood itself is converted into an archive of memory, or what Pierre Nora (1996) called *lieux de mémoire*, that is, places of memory, which are 'complex things' (in Krips 1997: 46). Valerie Krips understands *lieux de mémoire* to 'represent a will to remember'. She argues that they 'thrive because they also retain a capacity to change, to generate new meanings and to resurrect old ones. They are sites which, through their representations, offer the promise of re-connection to the past' (Krips 1997: 46). In Nora's and Krips's sense, childhoods as places of memory are not immobilised resting places, or what Raymond Williams (1973) has called golden moments of desired or imagined stability in the social order. Instead, they are a combination of history and memory. Memory is defined by Nora as 'life, always embodied in living societies and as such in permanent evolution' while history 'is the reconstruction, always problematic and incomplete, of what is no longer' (qtd. in Krips 1997: 46).

In *Jikinya* and *Dew in the Morning*, the seemingly innocuous portraits of childhood in colonial situations can be understood both in the sense of reconstruction of 'what is no longer' and embodiment of a 'permanent evolution'. Because '[m]obility is of the very essence of the Childhood' (Coe 1984: 17), recollection of childhood in *Jikinya* and *Dew in*

the Morning is not only a glance over the shoulder to the past, but an attempt to trace the trajectory of the past to the present, and the present to the past. Historical imagination and national politics are therefore embedded in complex ways in the figuring of childhood in *Jikinya* and *Dew in the Morning*. These two novels confirm to some extent Richard Coe's generalised characterisation of the realms of childhood memories in the so-called Third World. In these realms of memory, authors of childhood narratives 'are unable to dissociate any aspect of their past selves from the visible or invisible factor of the White Presence' (Coe 1984: 280).

There are two broad ways in which the 'visible or invisible' colonial moments are depicted in these two novels. In *Jikinya* childhood is depicted as essential to the re-dreaming and remaking of Africa, while its recollection in *Dew in the Morning* is imaged as 'an itinerary of self-search, a balance-sheet of all that made up the alchemy of growing up' (Okolie 1998: 31). In both novels, childhood is conceived as a tool by which the colonial subject revisits and reconstructs himself, through a 'kind of archaeological excavation of the past, to see what he used to be that he is no more, or seek deliverance from the snares of a hostile present' (Okolie, *ibid.*: 31).

In this chapter I consider the ways in which *Jikinya* and *Dew in the Morning* can be considered a kind of archaeological excavation of the past, and a search for resting places, by exploring the ways in which tropes of childhood are deployed to interrogate the predicament of being 'trapped between a disappearing familiar world, and an invidiously pervading Westernism' (Okolie 1998: 31) in which things 'tumble with increasing rapidity

into an irretrievable past' (Nora qtd. in Krips 1997: 45). The patterns of these tropes range from the conceptualisation of 'the edenic harmony between man and the cosmos' (Okolie 1998: 31) in pre-colonial Africa, a "perfection" which 'belonged to all Africans before the "fall" brought about by the devouring, conquering hands of colonization' (ibid.) as depicted in *Jikinya*; to the evocation of a rich, rural childhood in a context in which the "nervous conditions" of colonization are muted, but the atmospheric effects of that disruptive influence are visible through oblique metonymic references in *Dew in the Morning*.

I will begin my exploration with *Jikinya*, in which the pre-colonial world is depicted as seemingly prelapsarian but threatened by external colonial forces, and end with *Dew in the Morning*, in which an unravelling childhood world, a counter-pastoral to *Jikinya*, conjures a "golden age" into the hostile colonial present. I contrast the treatment of spaces of memory and resting places in *Jikinya* with that in *Dew in the Morning*, in which childhood is presented both as a narrative of tactical remembrance and appropriation of place, and as a test site for a re-entry into place and memory after the rupture of the protective and mythical exclusivity of pre-colonial black spaces in *Jikinya*. I argue that the exclusivity and singularity of the pre-colonial moment as depicted through childhood in *Jikinya* allows the nation to be recreated as whole, the desire being to resuscitate a political imaginary that restores 'the imprisoned nation to itself' (Said 1994: 259), while in *Dew in the Morning* the tactical selection of options and items that signify belonging to a place is shown to be a process that can be individually willed and exited.

Jikinya

The story is about a white girl child who was rescued from the ruins of the First Chimurenga (anti-colonial resistance) of 1896-7 by a stray African warrior named Chedu ('ours', 'our own'). The white baby, who was abandoned when her parents were killed by the freedom fighters of the First Chimurenga, is picked up by Chedu who, for some reason, has no knowledge of the anti-settler war that is going on, although he is an accomplished warrior himself from Ngara, a secluded village in the valley. Chedu and his wife Tsitsi ('mercy') decide to keep this child as their own, and the village elders agree to keep the child in the village. The child is given the Shona legendary name Jikinya by Chedu and Tsitsi, and hence she becomes the eponymous heroine of the novel. Things change when a missionary-explorer, John Brown, wanders into Ngara village and discovers a white girl lost among "savages". His immediate impulse is to "rescue" the girl from what he thinks of as captivity. The girl refuses to go with John Brown, preferring to live among her "people". The issue of colour, difference and racial superiority appears to be John's obsession, and an unknown feeling in Ngara. A war breaks out when John brings in settler soldiers to the village to rescue the girl, and the people of Ngara put up a brave fight to defend Jikinya, who unfortunately perishes in the battle.

Musaemura Zimunya (1982a) expresses a tremendous amount of critical despair when faced with the incongruities that characterise the story of Jikinya. Zimunya believes that its setting as a place of memory and history 'deceives our perception of our own history' (ibid.: 43). *Jikinya* stretches from 1896-7 to about the beginning of the First European World War (1914-1918). In 1896-7 settler colonialism suffers a setback, when faced by

the combined forces of the Shona and Ndebele people, but succeeds. Zimunya (1982a) wonders, and justifiably: 'The clans of Ngara do not appear to have experienced the Chimurenga of 1896. [...] they had never set their eyes upon strangers of the pale skin [...]. What African territory was not already colonized by that time? But for Ndhala, the people of Ngara were free and unspoiled by colonial conquest' (ibid.: 43). But to dispel what Zimunya calls its 'airy-fairy' (54) quality, the story is hemmed in by two apocalyptic visions of war. The first vision reconstructs the first Chimurenga in 1896-7, and the second, which occurs at the end of the narrative, is a symbolic reincarnation of the Chimurenga spirit and a rehearsal of 'the people's storm' (Mugabe 1983: 27) prior to 1966 when the official Second Chimurenga was launched. These two visions of war, which bind the narrative together like the terrifying mountains that enclose Ngara and Changani villages from the outside world, smash the pristine rhythms of the valley, displacing them into a violent, culturally disembowelling colonial modernity. These visions and contacts show that the meeting of the two antithetical cultures is characterised by immense loss. However, for Zimunya to reduce Jikinya the child to 'only a nymph, a fictional symbol of racial reconciliation – only that' (ibid.: 54), is to miss the meaning-making potential of the fantastic as represented by Jikinya herself. Jikinya the white child, a liminal figure standing between allegory and historical fact, affords us a much more complicated exploration of the architecture of a specific resting place and a space of memory. It is through the insertion of Jikinya the white child into the "unspoiled" African space, represented by an enclosure, that we come to understand how 'a tradition chooses its own future' (Vansina 1990: 259).

Jikinya the folktale

The versions of the girl child in the Jikinya legend, and the possibilities they may offer to a critical understanding of the complexity of the “unspoiled” African space, have largely gone unremarked by critics in Zimbabwe. It can be argued that the girl childhoods represented in versions of the Jikinya legend point to the options and possibilities in the uses of the space of childhood as memory. That the white child Jikinya could easily be placed in the space of the Jikinya legend, and become a scion of that legend, points to the openness, and therefore the porous nature of African folklore, in spite of it being represented as an enclosure of blackness in *Jikinya*, as well as in Zimbabwean cultural nationalism. Ndhlala subverts the idea of the enclosure by showing the capacity of African folklore to expand in order to adopt and domesticate the “anomalous” and the “stranger”, while he also reveals the contradictory processes by which the folklore can be used to eliminate or ritualise the threat represented by the anomalous childhood of Jikinya.

In order to clear the ground for a more nuanced understanding of the dynamics of Jikinya’s childhood and the attendant symbolisms of her emplacement in the “unspoiled” African space, it is necessary to engage with the multiple manifestations of the legend of Jikinya in the Shona oral tradition. We should start by rejecting Maurice Vambe’s (2004: 34) severely limiting quest for ‘the outstanding features of the original story as it is retold in Shona orature.’ The futility of Vambe’s quest for the ‘original state’ (ibid.: 34) of the story of Jikinya is captured in his attempt to limit the Jikinya legend to a single space of origin, where original meaning could be sourced. He therefore attempts to limit the nature of the childhoods that could be placed and performed in the space of African memory. In

order to succeed in his search for a stable originary moment of the legend, Vambe will have to identify the first mouth to tell the story, or the first scene of its performance. His impulse to hunt for the “original state” of the story is a tropism fashioned by the calls of Zimbabwean cultural nationalism for a stable, unified identity, and single loyalty. It recalls what Jonathan Moyo (1993: 7) called elsewhere the ‘tactic of exclusion by inclusion under the guise of “one state, one society, one nation, one leader”’ in Zimbabwean nationalist politics.

Ndhlala’s calling a white child Jikinya, and inserting her into what may be called an enclosure of blackness and African “authenticity” in Ngara village, defeats Vambe’s attempts to confine the story to one, original space of memory. Vambe is hardly aware of the potential of the Jikinya narrative to proliferate, much like a rhizome, each version becoming its own original depending on the circumstances of its production and performance.

In the version that Vambe gives as the original state of the story, where Jikinya, a beautiful girl is lured by the sound of a drumbeat, wanders alone towards it, is captured by wild animals in the forest, and escapes by singing a beautiful song that stupefies the animals, it is possible to notice the irrepressible desire in the girl child to cross boundaries of tradition and space. In this sense, it is correct to suggest as Vambe does, that the story of Jikinya, and its variants, gives ‘a sense of a threshold being crossed’ (Vambe 2004: 34). In spite of his awareness, Vambe misses the connection between the threshold-crossing by Jikinya the young girl in his version of the story, and that of Jikinya the white

girl in Ndhlala's novel. She too is a very beautiful girl child who crosses the spaces of memory and history, tradition and time, and moves between the present and the past of the novel, just like in a time-warp fantasy, her allegorical status hinting at the connection between fact and the fantastic. It is therefore important for us to consider the implications of calling the white child Jikinya as does Ndhlala.

Jikinya is the name of a Shona folk dancer of legendary beauty. She represents the distilled vision of folk harmony and integrated Shona cosmology. Musaemura Zimunya poeticises the memory of a carnivalesque Jikinya in his *Kingfisher, Jikinya and Other Poems* (1982b). In a poem 'Jikinya (Dancer)', Zimunya envisions the legendary Jikinya whom he eulogises: 'She knew how to apply Vaseline on a song'. Jikinya metamorphoses into a modern-day entertainer in beerhalls, but the cultural roots of her name is a reminder to the revellers: 'but all the time we know there is a revolution,/and laugh ha! ha! ha! ha! ha!.../all seeking juvenation' (26). The laughter is an affirmation of the black person's resilience, if not defiance, and is an attempt to map out a spiritual terrain inaccessible to the vandalism unleashed upon the land by the colonizer. In 'Jikinya (An African Passion)', a poem written in 1978 at the height of the liberation war in Zimbabwe, Musaemura Zimunya (1982b) writes:

While metals roar and flame
Heads and feet smell of burning
Men enthuse about commanding Death
and a sad wind ululates across the raped land

Jikinya is an African figure of resistance and self-renewal 'abundant with celebration' (Zimunya 1982b: 49). Alec J. Pongweni (1982) wrote of how the 'song' won the liberation war in Zimbabwe, much in the same way dance and music became figures of struggle elsewhere in the so-called Third World where they became both 'the legacy of the enforced meeting of two cultures, and [...] a dynamic working out of the conflict between white superstructure and black folk' (Regis 1999: viii). By naming the white child Jikinya, Ndhlala is making her heir to African resistance, in which she becomes a figure of self-renewal, thus questioning its tendency to represent itself as a wholly black experience, and an uncompromisingly undiluted black burden. Jan Vansina's (1990) study of the properties of traditions is instructive in this regard. If we agree to view Jikinya as both white and black, or as inhabiting an in-between cultural space, in terms of her origins in black folk culture as well as her descent from a white family, then it is possible to understand her childhood as a way of viewing place, tradition, resistance and change. As will be illustrated below, drawing Jikinya the white girl into the Ngara tradition is a function of innovation, the equivalent of what Vansina called 'fundamental acquisitions' (1990: 258), but not necessarily a change of tradition. 'These fundamental acquisitions then act as a touchstone for proposed innovations, whether from within or from without. The tradition accepts, rejects, or molds borrowings to fit. It transforms even its dominant institutions while leaving its principles unquestioned' (Vansina 1990: 258).

The following episode in Ndhlala's novel when Jikinya is named is crucial to the

understanding of the contradictions and dynamics of the novel, and the tradition, as a whole. It is necessary to quote it at length.

“Once upon a time”, [Tsitsi, Chedu’s wife] said, “there was a girl. She was the most beautiful girl in the land and the best dancer too. She used to go out dancing most nights and often came home very late. Her bed-hut she shared with her grandmother, and for recognition she had a song which, when she sang, her grandmother heard and opened the door to her. Each night she sang the song, and each night her grandmother admitted her to the hut.

“It happened that that area was infested by hyenas. Each time that the girl sang, a hyena heard her and saw the door being opened. The hyena thought and thought, until it had a brilliant idea. It started practising the song and its efforts were at length put to the test.

“One night the hyena came to the door where the girl used to be admitted, having made sure that the girl had already gone, and began to sing the same song that the girl sang in a voice that was very much like the girl’s own.

“Grandmother heard the song and, thinking that her granddaughter had come home, opened the door to the hyena. She was eaten immediately.

“The hyena praised itself for its cunning, shut the door, and waited for the girl to arrive.

“Not long afterward the girl came home. As was her custom, she began to sing. The door was opened. Least suspecting what awaited her in that hut, she walked in and...”

“Jikinya!” echoed Chedu, a smile broadening on his face.

“That was the girl’s name. I suggest the same name for her,” Tsitsi said (17-18).

Child-naming in this Ngara community links the child to the fate of the society. It is a ritual 'that understands community as having the sacred allegorical dimension, always implicit and available at any time' (Revard 1987: 446). In this version of the legend, Jikinya is the name of a girl who was destroyed because the secrets and codes of her culture had been cracked and stolen by the hyena. Her singing abilities do not save her from the jaws of wild animals as in Vambe's version; nor do they represent a death-defying joy of life in the face of adversity as in Zimunya's carnivalesque version. In fact her song, which is an open sesame to her bed-hut, attracts the hyena and the inevitable doom of her grandmother and herself. With her destruction comes the total disarrangement of her culture and roots. Also, with the entry of the white Jikinya, the threat of instability and doom hang over Ngara, hence the allegorical dimensions of her name.

We must note the similarities between the invasion of the serenity of the enclosure between mountains by John Brown and the intrusive and malicious interest of the hyena in rote-learning the song that leads to the opening of yet another serene enclosure, the bed-hut. Both destroy established patterns and codes of a particular tradition. The grandmother, who is destroyed first, is the repository of African wisdom and culture, and hence Jikinya returns to her after each nocturnal performance. In other words, the grandmother is the axis of Jikinya's soul and culture. The moment the hyena dupes the old woman, it becomes easier for it to replicate the same duplicitous behaviour to get at the core of the culture and destroy it from within. It points to the potential instability that may occur in a tradition that does not have the capacity for periodic self-renewal.

John Brown, the explorer-cum-settler in the novel, is the hyena. He patiently learns the codes and symbols of the Ngara society in order to bring disaster to it. Jikinya herself, the white child, enters Ngara society precisely because Chedu has broken long-held taboos of the society. She is, in this sense, as external and destructive to Ngara society as John Brown and the cohort of white settlers/soldiers he leads to rescue her from Ngara, her home. What is interesting to note is the unusual coincidence of meaning attached to the childhoods in the Jikinya legend. The child is ironically represented as a constant threat of instability and danger to society in Vambe's version as well as Ndhala's version. In the three versions, the child conjures the 'wild' world of either the hyena or its human version such as John Brown to threaten and/or destroy the community. The threat to society posed by the girl child in the Jikinya legend, is however matched by the potential threat to the body of the girl child in Zimunya's version of Jikinya as a pub song. The white Jikinya inherits and amplifies the paradox of being both a trope of vulnerability and invincibility, and a threat to tradition and its insurance against closure.

Without negating the above, it can also be argued that the presence of the white child in Ngara society signals the society's desire to re-codify its ritual world in order to remain relevant to itself and the invading world. In this sense, the trope of the white child is a lens through which we may explore how a tradition chooses its own future. According to Vansina (1990), 'the basic choices are followed by subsidiary choices, which close certain options for the future and leave other options open' (259). But the most important thing for a tradition is autonomy. Vansina argues that, 'A tradition is maimed when autonomy is

lost. Given its capacity to accept, reject, or modify innovation, a tradition will not be overwhelmed by another major tradition as long as its carriers still retain enough liberty of choice' (1990: 259). The idea then of Chedu stumbling upon an abandoned white orphan and adopting her into his culture is a desire by the Ngara people to demonstrate autonomy and choice. But this brings into the enclosed space volatilities to do with ethnicity and belonging which cannot be resolved by adoption.

If Jikinya the white child signals the presence of a troublesome fluke ethnicity, the anomalous other, she also points to the dilemma of crafting a polyethnic national identity with roots in the Ngara landscape. Jikinya maps onto the Ngara consciousness the quintessence of an anomic experience which puts a severe strain on the indigenous knowledge systems that are called upon to rationalise her presence on the land. When asked why Jikinya, obviously an anomaly on the landscape, should not be killed, Tichafa, the village elder racks up a myth from the distant past which has a bearing on the present predicament. He explains that in the past, a certain woman gave birth to a crippled baby and decided to dump her by the village well. When the baby was discovered, the village elder decreed that she should be killed. The whole village suffered a devastating drought as a result, and more calamities were in store for the elders because the spirits were angry:

"We all heard about the people beyond the mountains. This child might belong to them and what would we say if they came here seeking her? Who knows what magic they may have for telling them where to look for whatever they have lost? If we destroyed the child, would not their wrath fall upon our village and annihilate us all? I bid you beware.

“There is no harm in letting the child live among us, my children.” (24-

25)

Ultimately, Jikinya was spared her life because the Ngara people feared the unknown, and they wanted to appease the unknown force both through a show of generosity and domestication of the threat into ritual knowledge. The process of assimilating Jikinya into Ngara culture is similar to a strategy identified by Mary Douglas (1966) as used by many other societies to confront events and anomalies that seem to defy their assumptions. Douglas argues that, ‘by using symbols of anomaly, [cultures] can incorporate evil and death along with life and goodness, into a single, grand, unifying pattern’ (1966: 40).

Adopting Jikinya into the old-time community of Ngara shows that the community has the capacity to reinvent itself in anticipation of the impossibility of genealogical purity where family, and by extension nation, is viewed as lineage. But even if Jikinya consents to live within the cultural ideals of the Ngara, her foster family, it is not because the sacred principle of the new ‘nation’ is cultural diversity and fusion, but elimination of the anomalous other through adoption. But there are complications involved in using adoption as a way of eliminating anomaly.

Commenting on the American Indian historical novel, Alide Cagidemetro (1989: 32) notes that ‘adoption is a constant motif, an American structure of compromise between blood and symbolic parenthood.’ However, Cagidemetro cautions that ‘the “secret” that adoption hides is the superior right of the father’s blood, both when it chokes its offspring to death and when it restores it to land and property’ (ibid.: 33). In Ngara, Jikinya’s

adoption has not turned symbolically into regular blood descent, so is not irreversible. Hence John Brown manages to tempt Jikinya with returning her to her rightful culture and family, and Changani, Ngara's neighbours, continue to view her as a stranger and a threat (symbolised by the drought).

A war breaks out between Ngara and its neighbours, Changani, precisely because Changani blamed the drought that ensued years later on Jikinya, whom they describe as a stranger in spite of the fact that she had lived all her life among them. When John Brown visits Ngara, he sees Jikinya and immediately concludes that she was stranded among hostile savages, in spite of the hospitality he enjoyed in the village. A war breaks out between the colonial soldiers and the villagers (who unite against the settlers and abandon their own war over Jikinya, as did the Ndebele and the Shona in 1896-7, and 1966-1979, in the face of one common enemy, the white colonial settler). So either way, the Ngara people were caught like 'mice in a cleft-stick', to recall Zimunya's (1985:9) poem of the same title. The same fate that awaited other African societies was to happen to them, and as Chedu acknowledged to Tsitsi when he brought Jikinya from beyond the mountains: 'The gods must have willed it'(18-19). The path of war could not be avoided, whether Chedu had not strayed beyond the mountains, or Jikinya had not lived among them.

The adoption of Jikinya is deployed as a fantasy that could stay the encroaching hand of colonialism while the African people trod water, so to speak. While treading water, the African could argue his case against the colonizer; justify his existence to himself and the world; identify and define the enemy; and select and define the principal means of fighting

the enemy before his deadly combat with the colonizer. Before the decisive battle, in which the African is keen to be viewed as the victim, adoption of Jikinya by Ngara is meant to show that 'in disregarding and destroying African culture, notwithstanding its limitations, the White man is trampling on something invaluable and creating a racist and exploitative society which not only deforms the Black man but also impoverishes the human spirit' (Zhuwarara 1987: 132).

The novel is to some extent nothing more than an experiment in reverse assimilationist rhetoric: can a white child, reared among the Shona, not also pass as Shona? In other words, Ndhlala subverts colonial prejudices and vision by adopting Africa's own "civilizing mission", in order to stand colonialism on its head. He wants to reverse the direction of "colonization" and "modernisation" by initiating the same strategies that the West uses to subjugate Africans, but this time, as a way of showing how facile and ill-conceived the "Whiteman's burden" in Africa is, and how incompatible colonial vision is with African societies and cultures. The white child is therefore being set up as an experiment to refute colonialist views and programmes of modernisation, while the very rejection of colonial culture is represented by the enclosure between mountains.

The Enclosure

The enclosure represents what the "unspoiled" African space looked like before and at the beginning of colonization. Jikinya herself is brought in to symbolise two beginnings: that of colonization (marked by her orphanhood and abandonment in a war) and the beginning of its end (marked by her death, and the fight to defend her as an inchoate symbol of an

idealized new Zimbabwe). In both cases, as a child she is linked to the idea of a golden age located at the beginning of each lifetime or epoch, what Leslie Fiedler (1971: 471) considered 'a latter-day Pastoralism, which finds a Golden age not in history but at the beginning of each lifetime.'

In *Jikinya*, the 'edenic harmony between man and the cosmos' that Okolie (1998) discusses is a symbolic figuration of an imaginary childhood and exclusionary space and time, which points to Ndhlala's desire to recreate in childhood a space for a resting place of the race. This space is both a construction and an animation of ancient realities and archives in which childhood is figured not as a 'mere reproduction of a fact of existence; [but as] a cultural invention, a product of the imagination' (Fiedler 1971: 471). In *Jikinya*, it is not the child's 'unfallen freshness of insight, [her] unexpended vigor, [her] incorruptible naïveté' (Fiedler, *ibid.*) that "speaks". This white childhood is not a "speaking childhood", but an allegory of a world soon to pass. It is an artefact from previous strifes of a recognizable historical past. The fate of the child is viewed and represented symbolically as the 'touchstone, the judge of our world – and a reproach to it' (Fiedler 1971: 471).

The very setting of the novel, in an enclosure between mountains, is a symbolic lost world, re-entered via a time-warp fantasy, and rediscovered and ultimately preserved through either adoption of the external threat (the white child) or the exclusion/expulsion of the white man from the land. *Jikinya* is based on a contested history of the Shona people, the 1896-7 uprising. But it does not dwell on it. It in fact excludes it, to

concentrate on a village that had no knowledge of the uprising. This is done for two reasons: to recreate a pre-uprising Shona community which had not yet been poisoned by the coming of the white settler, and to remind the Zimbabwean nation that the war was necessitated by the likes of John Brown. The novel allows a pre-settler ritual of self-affirmation and truth-telling tailored to urge a military struggle, on the basis of moral superiority. Also, it is meant to be a redemptive reading of race where colour is irrelevant, and whiteness is not viewed as inherently racist. Through the death of Jikinya, and the war brought onto Ngara by John Brown, the opportunity to exit race, provided by Jikinya, was lost.

The figure of a white Jikinya suggests a theorisation of race based on an experiment of “going native”. The fact that John Brown, the explorer-settler, wants to force modernity on a people he despises and fixes in discrete spaces of primitivity underlines the hypocrisy of the colonial enterprise. Equally, it can be argued that the desire to make the white child “go native” finds resonances in the desire by the white settler/explorer John Brown to colonize those who do not belong to his culture. Both processes, as represented in *Jikinya*, deprive the “victim” of any real choice in terms of what identity, and what autonomy to champion. It cannot be said that Jikinya had any choice at all in becoming “Shona”, however benign the process of her adoption into the culture. Nor is the choice to follow John into white culture a choice at all, because she is as foreign to it as John is to Ngara. If, as Scott Momaday argues elsewhere, ‘an Indian is an idea which a given man has of himself’ (in Allen 1987: 563), ultimately what Jikinya the white child raises is the very conundrum of choice as an adoptee. In her case, to be a Shona or white girl in an

existential sense, is an idea that her given childhood cannot choose.

Jikinya as national subject

How does Jikinya become a national subject, being freighted with such contradictory histories? The question of the national subject is tied to an autochthonous imaginary enclosure, such as Ngara, in which the indigenous people are at peace with each other, and can handle their own differences in a much more intelligent way than the settler does. It is a fundamentally exclusionary space, in spite of its fiction of openness. It is a symbol of the 'recovery of geographical territory' (Said 1994: 252) whose metaphors attaches to the re-imagining of 'an Africa stripped of its imperial past' (ibid: 253). Exclusivity and singularity as projected in *Jikinya* allow the nation - as community history - to be recreated 'coherently, integrally' (Said, ibid.: 259). Thus the enclosure spawns complex, overlapping notions of family, community and nation, the latter being a definitive boundary 'founded in blood' and 'sealed only through violence' (see Kaul 2001: 6-7).

Jikinya's death entitles her space in the collective memory of Ngara as she is linked to the pain and loss of the community. She died fighting for the preservation of Ngara, and as one of Ngara's daughters, albeit white. Loss in this sense is projected as the most essential link to the nation (see Werbner 1998: 98-99). It is a sacred bond to the land especially in a country where 'wartime suffering and sacrifice dominate the notion of national origin' (Werbner, ibid). This bond, according to Werbner, allows for the construction of a centred, indivisible nation, welded together by what Suvir Kaul understood as 'sacrificial blood-letting' 'necessary for the making of strong nations'

(2001: 7).

It is also interesting to note that the growth into boyhood and girlhood of Tendai and Jikinya respectively climaxes at the point of contact with settler violence. Death, or blood-letting, is central to the vision of this new nation. Jikinya comes into Ngara in the hands of the warrior Chedu, having been rescued from the deathscapes of an anti-settler war; the same deathscapes are revisioned at the end of the novel when Jikinya's remains are recovered and carried from the battlefield by the son of Chedu, Tendai, heir-apparent to the struggle. There is a sense in which Jikinya's remains represents the burden of nation-building, for both the remnants of white settlers and the black nationalists in the context of the postcolony. If Jikinya is an image of the predicament of anti-colonial struggle, she is even more so in the postcolonial situation in Zimbabwe where the question of the authentic national subject continues to be a vexed and emotive one. Werbner (1998: 73) discusses how in Zimbabwe 'the post-colonial memorialism, foregrounding the triumph over the white settler state, makes the question all the more politicised: who belongs to the nation, with what place in it, and with what acknowledgement in collective memory?'

Jikinya as a white child has no roots, no genealogy, in Ngara. She enters Ngara as a genealogical isolate, so to speak, her present cut off at both ends, protected from her history, shorn of its memories and internal markings, and is planted into the myths and rhythms of Ngara life. She symbolises the innocence of Ngara before the encounter with John Brown the settler-explorer, and prior to that, the unsettling anti-colonial struggles raging outside, and unknown to the people of the valley until Chedu strays beyond the

mountains. Her death symbolises the impossibility of preserving such 'primitive' peace and exclusive cultural territories. It says something about how settler modernity failed to sustain itself without violence, and how the Ngara people, as the dispossessed and oppressed, could never hope to preserve their peace without resorting to violence as well. This colonial dialectic engenders a Manichean politics (see JanMohamed 1983), ultimately a marker of the instability of the colonial condition, in which a haunting sense of mutual siege is replayed in both settler and nationalistic politics. Jikinya is imaged as a third space, transcending the extremes of colonial binaries. Inhabiting a third space, she sees with what Brenda Cooper (1998) theorised as a third eye, that is, an ability to embody and transcend these dichotomies. This helps Jikinya, easily a citizen of two starkly different worlds (one white, one black; one the oppressor, the other the oppressed), to overcome the dilemma and possibility of belonging to neither world.

The insertion of Jikinya into the founding imaginaries of Ngara, and her ability to grow within them, is linked to the projection of the environment as a complex symbolic construct in which cultural and racial difference is viewed as a 'result of the complexities of nature which were best left to themselves'(39). That way the unsettling racial discourses associated with colonialism are forestalled. The following incident between Jikinya and Tendai, her black brother, is illuminating:

"What are you looking at?" asked Jikinya.

"Your hair."

"What about it?"

"It looks funny."

.....
...The realisation had not changed his feelings towards Jikinya for he regarded it simply as a result of the complexities of nature which were best left to themselves. Jikinya was his sister and he wished for no other explanation. (39).

Childhood as an artefactual reality is linked to the inarticulate presences of the environment, the myths and traditions of the Ngara. The growth of the child, its identity and sexuality is an affirmation of the cycles of Ngara life, its history, its landscape and its seasons. There is no rupture between individual identity and communal ethos. This is precisely because Ngara is fixed in time and space as an utopian society from which ideals of cultural regeneration can be located. It therefore serves as a stabilizing myth and cosmos for a political and cultural programme of national emergence.

However, the trope of national emergence as suggested by the image of Jikinya is a myth that thrives on a cultural homeostasis which eliminates or silences tension of any kind as we saw in the quoted incident above. When these silences about difference threaten to acquire vocal speech, they are immediately submerged in the name of 'nature' or 'peace'. For instance, women's roles are restricted to the domestic space. Men are trained to be warriors, and the signifier 'woman' refers to a weaker species. Being described as a woman when you are a man is viewed as an insult. Difference in this case is evoked for the purposes of maintaining intra-cultural balance, especially when it reinforces men's positions in society. The following incident is only one among many. Tendai, now a grown up boy, is trained to fight with other boys as part of being 'a man'. One day he is

hurt and his father, Chedu, rebukes him when he hears him cry:

“This must stop, Tendai! You can’t let other boys beat you like this.

You are a man, do you hear? A man, and not a woman. Come with me.”

They would go to Chedu’s hut and Chedu would teach Tendai the art of fighting.

“You will soon be a man,” he would say proudly... (52-3)

The projection of this masculinity is often challenged by the women folk:

“What’s wrong with women?” Tsitsi would ask sometimes when the word had been repeated too often. “They have better sense than men anyway. What’s the point of almost killing each other for nothing as you men do?” Everyone would try to smile and laugh but it would take a little longer for them to relax again. (53)

Jikinya and her sister Maidei would also challenge Tendai to a wrestling match but they would both be thrown easily:

“You see,” Tendai would explain in an authoritative voice, “men are made stronger than women.”

“Yes,” the girls would agree, “but why is that?”

“It’s the order of things,” Tendai would proceed importantly. “Even the animals are the same. You can see it even in the fowls. Mwari made the female weaker than the male.”

“I wish I were as strong as a man,” each of the girls would say. (53)

Ngara has its discrete spaces, in spite of the semblance of coherence and harmony. This coherence is sustained by avoiding unsettling ‘the order of things’ which is seen as reflected in nature. While Jikinya’s race/colour is viewed as part of the complexity of

nature, that is, the order of things, she is not allowed to assume any superiority or privileges as she would normally have in a colonial situation. The 'order of things' is insisted upon as natural where it guarantees privileges to the men, that is, to patriarchy. It is this version of masculinity and order which is impressed upon the women, to the extent that they also begin to wish they were men, in itself a form of oppression.

Barbara Harlow (1987: 29) notes how in romanticising the oppressed, there is a glossing over how the oppressed can also oppress. The desire by the girls in *Jikinya* to question the version of masculinity that Tendai and Chedu project is indicative of the internal instabilities and eruptions of the enclosure that is Ngara (the cocoon of preserved peace). This muted dynamic is a resisting narrative that will be explored later by writers such as Tsitsi Dangarembga in *Nervous Conditions* and Yvonne Vera in all her novels. In attempting to recover the voice of oppressed women, Urvashi Butalia (2000: 280) encourages us to 'listen in stereo' when women speak, 'receiving both the dominant and muted channels clearly and tuning into them carefully to understand the relationship between them.' In this case, there is a muted dissonance between the dominant meanings authorised by patriarchy, and the alternative, but tentatively voiced feelings of the women and girls in *Jikinya*. When childhood begins to speak, we begin to see cracks in the polished artefact that Ngara society is. Ngara, as a public narrative, is capable of muffling within its folds the voices that point to the existence of critical embryonic micropolitics, such as *Jikinya*, Maidei and their mother Tsitsi begin to animate. However, in *Jikinya*, these micropolitics remain at best palimpsestual, having been sacrificed to the all-important struggle of propping up an oppositional and mono-vocal masculinity against the

white settler, and the creation of an undifferentiated resting place and space of memory hostile to settler presence. Yet we must not forget that the quest for an expanded sense of the world is not limited to the voices of Jikinya, Maidei and their mother Tsitsi. The very fact that Chedu strays beyond the mountains, against the taboos of his community, is an indication of his desire to widen his sphere of consciousness. Thus Ngara as a masculine enclosure is as restrictive on men as it is on women, but doubly so on women and girls because they do not have the luxury of trespassing anywhere else: be it their gender, or the boundaries of the village. Their desire for expanded horizons is warehoused by the men, who enact the desire on their behalf.

By way of concluding this section, it is important to note that *Jikinya* is at times Senghorian in the sense that it strives to recapture what Nespoulous-Neuvill (1999: xv) called the 'primeval unity, the state of harmony and plenitude, which Senghor calls the Kingdom of Childhood.' This 'kingdom', the enclosure in *Jikinya*, is a space for cultural retrieval and validation. Like Lawrence Vambe's *An Ill-Fated People* (1972), Geoffrey Ndhlala is conjuring a past glory and quiescence (very much like Camara Laye's *The African Child*), the evocation of which is a telling indictment of colonial modernity, and a projection of a desired, culturally unified resting place. By being named Jikinya, the white child is being initiated into the rituals and lore of African society. In considerable ways she tenaciously hugs within her name the qualities of her legendary namesake, and indeed is absorbed into Shona culture, and behaves like a Shona child. In this sense, she has integrated and internalised in her worldview, the one worldview she has grown up with, and all the Shona mythology, history and culture. But while the childhood represented by

the white Jikinya sought to create the conditions for encounters with cultural difference, and theorise that difference, the novel ironically posits cultural exclusiveness as the basis for constructing space for self-regeneration and national emergence. Hinted at in this childhood are the instabilities that ultimately rupture the enclosure, historically through the intimations of war, and in indigenous folklore through the representation of childhoods in the Jikinya legends as fraught with dangers. Jikinya's childhood affords an insight into a 'nation' at war, with itself, and against an invading force. Her childhood is an allegory of the birth of a 'nation', and an insight into its processes of self-construction. The child in *Jikinya* is an artefactual reality, 'a symbolic token with refracting signifieds' (Mordecai 2001: 21) which cannot be disengaged from the literary and historical context 'which simultaneously emprisons and reveals [her]' (Kuhn 1982: 3). She represents the exploration of the "golden age" of a race, and the spaces of its memory, while as an allegory her childhood is structured as a teleology that inevitably leads to the involution of the resting places of the race.

Dew in the Morning

Shimmer Chinodya's novel *Dew in the Morning* is a counter-pastoral to *Jikinya*. The novel's recession into history is not meant to animate and authenticate an exclusive cultural and historical space, but to subvert a stable timelessness and nostalgia associated with the rural past. It brings into question the images that structure the topoi of the rural, the artefactual authenticity of pre-colonial and anti-colonial values in nationalist rhetoric in Zimbabwe. Shimmer Chinodya questions the basis of the perceptual unity of a pastoral romance such as *Jikinya*. He suggests, through the evolving consciousness of a child

called Godi, a picture of the past and the present in which landscapes are held in the individual's psyche in tension and space is multiply layered. The child in the novel embodies these complex tensions subsumed in the evolving rural world. Childhood becomes a nodal site on which the 'retrospective radicalism' (Williams 1973: 36) of pastoral narrative is balanced with an introspective critique of processes of a lived space. Childhood in *Dew in the Morning* is shorn of the trappings of a prelapsarian 'golden age'. Yet it remains a defence of some kind of emerging order in which childhood as retrospect assumes the capacity of aspiration.

Dew in the Morning is an evocation of a richly detailed, rural childhood, which captures aspects of life and change in rural Zimbabwe during the 1960s and 1970s. The story is told from the point of view of a young boy called Godi (Godfrey), from the time when he is eight to about the time when he turns seventeen. His family relocates from the city to a rural area under the headmanship of Jairosi, a corrupt, and bribe-seeking ne'er-do-well. The father remains in the city, working as a clothes salesman, while the mother settles and builds a home in the rural area. Many other families are also moving into Headman Jairosi's area, but the reasons for this mass migration are not explored. As Rino Zhuwarara (1987:134) notes:

But if one expects Chinodya to explore the forces which have brought about a situation which separates members of the same family, or the reasons why families keep on moving to new areas to settle, one is bound to be disappointed. Chinodya's passion as an artist lies in the rhythms of rural life as they change in line with the tropical seasons.

In Zhuwarara's view, the child narrator is only too keen to explore his involvement with this new place, and to record the resilience, shortcomings, superstitions and myths of his people. 'The conflict between the country and the White man's city and between the cultural and economic forces which these places represent is implied rather than explored' (Zhuwarara 1987: 134). It is possible, however, to view *Dew in the Morning* as a reconstruction of what was lost - the land - since the pre-colonial African society of *Jikinya* was 'dissolved' by the power of the colonial bullet. The novel is an implied call for the retrieval and re-visioning of what Nyenyedzi, the self-styled patriot in Yvonne Vera's *Without a Name* (1994) called the land's unities and harmonies without which 'there is no day or night, there is no dream'(33). Godi is insisting on conjuring and rendering these 'harmonies'; on being *here*, and on making the forced home his home, rather than abandoning it like Mungoshi's Lucifer in *Waiting for the Rain* (1975) or Marechera's rebel narrator in *The House of Hunger* (1978). *Dew in the Morning* is a narrative of tactical remembrance and appropriation of place. Godi's childhood is presented as a test site for such a re-entry into place and history after the rupture of the protective and mythical exclusivity of pre-colonial black spaces in *Jikinya*. Childhood is a quest for existential balance in a cosmos profoundly shaken by colonialism.

Chinodya's narrative begins in *medias res*, when colonial forces are at full play, and resists the nationalist temptation to start at the mythical signpost of pre-colonial innocence or 'original beauty' which Zimunya (1982c: xi) insists is submerged in the confrontation with the subhuman conditions of colonialism. Instead, Chinodya engages with an

archetypal and timeless human preoccupation with the search for home and individual accommodation with existence in conditions that are fissile and repressive.

If the story lacks 'a profound philosophical framework', as Zhuwarara (1987:136) alleges, which results in its seemingly attenuated historical vision, it is because of a combination of styles. The assumed naivety of a child narrator is the controlling consciousness of the novel. It is combined with what Northrop Frye (Keith 1974: 21) considered 'the encyclopaedic and episodic' style of the rural writer which attempts to 'contain the vastness of nature yet reflect the response of the individual', hence the diffuseness of focus which Zhuwarara (1987: 135) thinks is 'disastrous in form'.

However, it is possible to read Rino Zhuwarara's disenchantment with the novel as wrought by his anticipatory, if not pre-emptive, agenda-setting reading strategy. In his review of Zimbabwean fiction in English, Zhuwarara positions the reading of *Dew in the Morning* immediately after commenting on the perceived 'dialectical relationship between a dying Rhodesia and an emerging Zimbabwe' in Stanley Nyamfukudza's novel, *The Non-Believer's Journey* (1980). He approves the scepticism and cynicism of earlier literary works about the nationalist struggle, since he is convinced that, 'It is fair to conclude that both Marechera and Nyamfukudza write their works with the sombre recognition that the masses in post-Independence Africa have often been betrayed by their leaders'(134). He writes therefore with unconcealed displeasure:

Interesting to observe is that the first novel to be published after 1980

does not express the pessimism and despair of the earlier novels. Shimmer Chinodya's *Dew in the Morning* (1982) eschews the overtly political and historical in favour of *simply* the depiction of the kind of rural life which millions of Zimbabweans experienced during the colonial era. (134). (*emphasis mine*)

Zhuwarara limits the scope and articulatory potential of *Dew in the Morning* because he reads the novel with the protocols of a Zimbabwean nationalist narrative in mind. He expects the story to inevitably work itself towards an unambiguous indictment of colonial white settlers and smite what Zimunya (1982c: xi) called 'an ugly cyclopean monster' of colonial politics. Alternatively, he expects *Dew in the Morning* to feed on the fodder of post-independence 'pessimism and despair', which ironically is a form of fatal enchantment with national(ist) politics. He attempts to shunt the novel onto the well-worn rut traversed by writers on African post-independence anomie, such as Ayi Kwei Armah (*Fragments*) and Dambudzo Marechera (*The House of Hunger*; *Mindblast*). In a way, Zhuwarara expects the Zimbabwean novel to speak in the same dialect of nationalism, or at least to speak to nationalism in tones that are inflected by it.

Dew in the Morning is a profound story of human effort, endurance, vulnerability, resilience and aspiration. The 'edenic' pretensions of the narrative are possible in so far as Godi, the child, paints a picture of uneasy innocence, but with the visible "serpent" of colonial encroachment and brutality (forced land relocations, for example); the "curse" of labour ('Our backs ached and the hot sand burnt our feet, and the hoe-handles cut blisters

on our hands'(11)); and the “apple” of co-optation and acquiescence played down (the way in which colonial capitalism makes the Derukas commercial farmers, and Godi’s father sap his life in the city saving for his children’s education so they could become ‘graduates’). This way, *Dew in the Morning* modulates its political tone to give the impression of all being quiet on the front, resisting the obvious causal links that would corral the novel into the idealised nationalist narrative of ‘pessimism and despair’, or, as sketched by Dambudzo Marechera’s White Baboon in ‘Baboons of the Rainbow’, turn it into ‘songs of heroes, songs of bravery, songs of seed and deed’ (Marechera 1994: 238).

The novel’s broader historical framework enables its meaning to resonate within the context of the national liberation struggle of the 1960s and 1970s and the oppressive colonial land policies of the time which account for the forced migration of African families from country to city, city to city, and country home to country home. Zhuwarara acknowledges the implied ‘cultural and economic forces’ at play in this novel, but what he calls lack of a ‘causal process’ in *Dew in the Morning* is a result of his own inability to detect the seething feelings of social bitterness within an artful pastoral narrative which “unintentionally” reminds the African of loss of lands, space and political authority to colonial white settlers.

A careful reading of the novel will show that the tensions created by a nostalgia for order, peace and prosperity in characters such as the hardworking Derukas, and the desire to aspire within and beyond the colonial restrictions demonstrated by Godi’s family, are

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both enabled and constrained by the political map of the present of the novel. Mugova, a Deruka man, one of the newcomers, is said to be 'a very rich man. He owned two ploughs, two harrows and a tractor. He grew groundnuts and cotton and sunflowers in two huge fields'(115). Mugova represents a new class of landed black entrepreneurs whose vision of wealth and style of management is a rough concoction of colonial meanness and feudal prodigality. He is one of the 'illustrious agricultural demonstrators' (115) who benefited from a close association with colonial land officers, and when most of the peasants cultivated small pieces of exhausted land, his 'soil was black and crumbly, so damp that worms burrowed it all year round'(115-6). His immersion in visions of modernity and success are reflected in his obsession with building a 'white brick and zinc house' and fencing off his 'huge fields'. He fulfils his aspiration to live on the terms made available to him by colonial patronage and capitalist market forces, combined with business shrewdness, technical know-how and know-why, and a slave-driving habit:

He kept his soil drugged with manure and fertilizers, so that even in bad years his mealies grew tall, and his acres went white with cotton balls. He was one of those Derukas who enslaved the soil, overworked and underpaid their servants, and sent out huge herds of cattle to tax the humble meadows. In such homesteads milk, eggs, meat, vegetables, rice and green mealies were available at most times of the year but human sweat oozed all year round. (116)

In spite of the rough edges of his character, Mugova inspires an insatiable and memorable

‘capacity to aspire’ (Appadurai 2002) among his peasant neighbours. He demonstrates the fruition of what Gerald MacLean et.al. (1999: 6) termed ‘forms of self-construction’ that are ‘frequently at odds with geography’ and, I would add, colonial politics. Mugova’s remarkable adaptability symbolises and mobilises for Godi the child the possibility of a narrative that resists the trope of colonial experience as perdition for African societies.

Godi’s mother builds single-handedly a rural homestead, ‘growing groundnuts, selling home-made clothes to the villagers and buying two cattle’(158). But, unlike Mugova, she could not afford to fence off her field, so ‘She was the human fence of our field’ (157). Godi recalls the touching figure of his mother, ‘weeding and pacing the fields in her tattered gumboots all day, defending her precious crops from the cattle and the goats, in blazing sunshine or in drenching rain’(157). In the city, Godi’s father, a lonely but energetic figure, spends ‘the day on his two feet, his workshirts slightly torn under the armpits, selling clothes all day’(157), consumed by ‘his burning obsession’(157), which is shared and subsidised by his wife, to get his children an education. Godi recalls with deep sympathy: ‘we spurred him on because we were brilliant scholars and potential graduates’(ibid.). Godi’s vision of life draws breadth and impetus from these figures of resistance, people who refuse to succumb to the colonial stereotype of lazy, sun-basking black people who needed a whip on their backs to improve their status. While Mugova and Godi’s family fight the stereotype, and indeed upturn it, they build an implied case against the untenability of colonial oppression and categories.

The Derukas’ productive physical and spiritual involvement with the land and their desire

to surpass the fixities of colonial grids stamp their personality and claim on it. Their struggle for visibility on the national horizon recalls discernible echoes in the nationalist struggle for land and self-determination in the 1960s and 1970s. Godi's vivid portraits of rural characters and the vicissitudes and thrills of rural life record the indelible presence of these alienated, uprooted and oppressed people seeking accommodation and meaning in their colonially allotted spaces. His childhood and growing awareness of landscape, from the age of eight to his late teens, traces a path of resistance which begins with his ebullient enchantment with the rhythms of rural life and ends with his quiet disillusionment with the 'decay' (156) of the social fabric towards the end of the story.

A keen observer of minutiae of change and human life, Godi is both a chronicler and a carrier of memories of a lived space. His recollections of his childhood capture his embeddedness in the rhythms of rural life, constructing for himself a sense of what David Seamon (1981: 85) called 'at-homeness' with the tropical seasons, gathering the world around him for his use or enjoyment. Godi's childhood and perceptual space are akin to what Edward Relph (1976:10) considers 'the realm of direct emotional encounters with the spaces of the earth, sea, sky or with built and created spaces.' Living in this rural space is for Godi what Wallace Stegner imagined as 'an intimate act, an act like love' (in Relph, *ibid.*).

One of the celebrated poetic passages in *Dew in the Morning* immortalises the memory of transformative existential space and creative labour.

As soon as Jairosi got us a small plot of land we started planting our crops. Matudu, the man who built our huts, came to plough our field with his fine pair of oxen. We followed behind the plough, dropping the seeds into neat brown furrows and savouring the smell of the oxen and newly turned earth. The seeds soon germinated, small and tender in the dew. We rose early in the blue-grey dawn to the shouts of the ploughboys and the bustle of yoking the oxen. We walked across the glistening green, dew-laden grass to the fields. While the sun steadily ascended the sky, getting hotter, we sweated in the fields. Our backs ached and the hot sand burnt our feet, and the hoe-handles cut blisters on our hands. We drank maheu, worked again, then went home for a late breakfast. As we went home tiredly at noon we usually met herdboys bringing home cows to be milked.

We usually returned to the field late in the afternoon, when it became cool, to put in a few more hours of work....just when we were settling into the comfortable sleep of the early hours, dawn sent mother, hoe in hand, rapping on our door.(11-12)

Existential space is 'not merely a passive space waiting to be experienced, but is constantly being created and remade by human activities'(Relph 1976: 12). Godi's childhood is immersed in and replicates the rhythms of his enlivened existential space. Both the toil and the soil are life-style forming and the basis of the formation of repertoires of social practice and ritual. In spite of the painful but creative ritual of inscribing human intention in the rind of the earth (see Relph: 10-12) by making the soil yield to human labour and needs, Godi's absorption of place and the culture's work ethic is central to his willingness to speak for and from the culture. His authority to narrate the

culture is buoyed by his active and unstinting immersion in the creation of what Edward Relph (ibid.: 12) described as 'patterns and structures of significance' in the invention of landscapes. If in the city, where Godi attends school, culture is created and remade in the messiness of the street, in the rural home it sluices and forms in the 'structures' and 'patterns' of ritual and seasons and daily contact with the soil.

Godi's childhood possesses the versatility of an amphibian. He embodies the pressures and styles of both terrains, the city and the country, assuming the multiple and complementary literacies required for a rooted 'cultural citizenship' (see Mercer 2002) in the two worlds. His daily contact with the streets and his parents' aspiration to make their children university graduates prepares him for the world of work and positions him as a vector of his people's desire for social mobility. His intimacy with and spiritual possession of the 'newly turned earth' and the rhythms of the seasons, commits him to the founding imaginary of the nation itself, the land, making him 'a son of the soil', rooting him in the history of his people. Godi's childhood mirrors, merges and reconciles the tensile and fissile social forces of colonial change and landscapes. His childhood is both a fantastic and a desirable vision of a new breed of cultural citizen and national subject, one whose childhood and personality register parallel vibrations with the aspirations and historical destiny of his people.

The country home, the subject of Godi's narrative, is often viewed as the cradle of the soul of the nation in Zimbabwean nationalistic politics. To paraphrase Raymond Williams (1973), the country is often viewed as 'the life of the past, of the writer's childhood, or of

man's childhood, in Eden and the Golden Age' (in Keith 1974: 13). H.J. Massingham in his *The English Countryman*, writes: 'In our depths we are a country, not an urban, people' (epigram to Keith, 1974). The country is therefore viewed as mankind's original home, and the city as a form of banishment from the rural Eden (Keith, *ibid.*). Black Zimbabwean literature in general⁶ has continued with this 'unfinished conflict' (Williams 1973: 247) between city and country, an archetypal political un/conscious embedded in Zimbabwean nationalism. Rukmin Bhaya Nair (2002: 56) is struck by how the Zimbabwean national anthem, for instance, teems with images of paradise 'summoned up by a vision of a "wondrously adorned" landscape'. There is no mention of the urban, but 'mountains and rivers' and 'fertile fields'. In general the urban is viewed simplistically as a space of economic necessity, an exilic condition, a haven of lost souls, a temporary shelter for the sojourners who must seasonally return to their rural home to renew contact with their spiritual roots. While the rural and the urban are 'dialectically related', Gerald MacLean et.al. (1999: 4-5) observe how they are often represented as dichotomous spaces in function, one being the desirable end of the other.

Godi's childhood appears to be a shunting yard in which the 'rural' and the 'urban' are marshalled into a usable, articulated 'home'. The difference between the city and the country, for Godi, is spatial and structural. The city is where his father is and the country is where his mother is, making one a fatherland and another a motherland. This understanding of the two landscapes as representing the complementary dualities of

⁶ This generalization excludes works of fiction such as *The House of Hunger* (Marechera 1978) and *Butterfly Burning* (Vera 1998). But poetry such as Musaemura Zimunya's *Country Dawns and City Lights* (1985) captures the unmitigated conflict between the city and the rural, a staple theme for much of the literature by black Zimbabweans.

Godi's childhood moderates Rino Zhuwarara's inflexible categorisation of the colonial space in terms of 'the conflict between the country and the Whiteman's city' (1987: 134). What is common to both worlds is that they are produced by what John Barrell (1999: 231) theorised as seemingly divergent discourses of landscape 'in which the priorities of commerce [are] barely, if at all, disguised'. In *Dew in the Morning* Godi shows that the proliferation of market forces and capital in the rural landscape and the forced migration and land displacement confirm the rural home as a creation of the white settler, in the same way the city is a creation of colonial modernity. It becomes difficult to talk of a rural home and cultural tradition without origins, because the exclusivity of cultural and historical spaces of *Jikinya* is both smashed and mediated by colonial forces in *Dew in the Morning*.

The psychic processes which take place in Godi in the endless seasonal migrations between city and country do not create an anomic confusion, as they are informed and modulated by the intensity of his awareness of the uses of social space in each world. The city is for Godi's education and preparation for future career; the rural home is for holiday, planting and harvesting. The money raised by his mother in the rural home subsidises his education in the city; his father's job in the city provides money for both Godi's education and the requirements of the rural home.

By embodying the mutual interests of his two 'homes', while hugging intimately in his psyche the multi-layered tensions of two counterpointing worlds, Godi forestalls a radical break with either world. In that moment of assumed existential poise, his childhood

conjures a 'golden age' into the present, what Raymond Williams (1973) called a 'resting place', a kind of desired order, which in the flux of a profoundly shaken social structure, is either an irrecoverable ideal, or always in the making, or both. Godi's version of a 'golden age' is a myth which he uses as an aspiration, 'an impulse to change rather than to ratify'(Williams: 43) hostile colonial social structures, that is the country and the city. The myth of a 'resting place', a golden moment of desired or imagined stability, is a technology that the child deploys to defy his disenchantment with the rapidly altering social structure. It is a technology that works very well in defending a desired social order when combined with Godi's absorption of place as an existential insider. Disruptive and disconcerting social facts evident in the environment are then contrasted with an ideal order, achieved in the present or immediate or distant past. Raymond Williams (ibid.:17) suggests how this contrast 'can begin to be built into a wider system of ideas: a scheme of the past or of the future.' Godi's childhood is being used by Shimmer Chinodya as a conduit of this 'scheme', and a site upon which we may begin to think about the social features of the emerging versions of the black nation, and the conditions of its emergence.

The idea of 'apparent resting places' (Williams 1973:12), 'golden ages' in the successive shifts in history, are as national as they are individual. Edward Thomas writes: 'As mankind has looked back to a golden age, so the individual, repeating the history of the race, looks back and finds one in his own past' (in Keith 1974: 14). To George Sturt, they are 'less an outward environment, than a state of inward being' (in Keith, ibid.), a nostalgia, a construction, an invention which can be willed to yield private meaning. For Godi, the changes brought about by colonial modernity may reach a certain threshold

beyond which they may be considered undesirable. This is so because, generally, 'each individual accepts the existing practice in his own childhood as standard. Changes – particularly those for the worse – are recorded with regret. But for the next generation they will no longer be new; indeed they will have become part of the standard' (Keith, *ibid.*: 15). These personal 'golden ages', which may not be shared widely in the community or nation, offer the individual the basis of a personal myth, that is, 'the ability of the resolute individual to put down new roots' (Keith, *ibid.*: 238).

Godi creates a personal myth of a golden age. It involves creating resting places which tend to exclude those not already part of his desirable community and inserting himself in space against the current of undesired change. For example, Godi is now accustomed to a huge field - 'a young land with lots of wide-open spaces and good soil', as his father calls it (16). He does not take kindly to the news that another family, which has already felled great trunks of trees on one side of his family's compound, was coming to settle in the area: 'I wanted the forest all to ourselves. Perhaps I was selfish'(20). Later, land pressure, partly intensified by the gin-loving, reckless headman, causes a free-for-all land-grab. Godi's father, ever mindful of the future of his children, earmarks and clears an additional thirty acres of land for himself because there is going to be 'a shortage of farming land in this village and ...the snails will get nothing'(160). Godi is opposed to this land-grab, in spite of the fact that his father is doing it on his behalf. His father harangues him for blaming the now mentally disturbed headman Jairosi for causing the 'big scramble for land' (164).

There is a clash of principles between father and son. The father defends the present changes, because they enable him to reach and occupy a privileged land-space, an apparent resting place in the future. Godi, who has become conservative, is threatened by changes in the present – the same changes that his father believes are empowering in the near future. He would rather the situation remained as when they first settled in the village when he could have all the forest to himself. He cherished the forest as a mythic space of plenty and vigorous natural growth against which present changes are measured and judged. In Godi's logic, this mythic space of his childhood is not retrievable without keeping out other land-hungry people from the village. Thus Godi's vision of a 'resting place' consists of a selective production of space as well as a selective production of the people who inhabit that space.

His father's model and style of imagining the future, while it is meant to benefit Godi, dispossesses the child's own imaginaries of stability. The conflict between Godi and his father is therefore about how to model the future from the shape of the present.

Undesirable change, caused by an unselective production of space and the people who inhabit that space, causes what Godi considers the 'decay' (156) of the village and the threatening social disorder in the form of rampant witchcraft. The story of Madoo, a young married man who sleeps with an elderly 'portly' woman whose husband worked in the city 'and was therefore away for months' (151), causes a scandal in the village because the woman he sleeps with is also 'the mother of the man who had married his own sister' (151). The spiritual and moral aridity and decay of the social fabric, first

witnessed by Godi when he stumbled upon a drunken couple shamelessly making love at the back of his hut during a Christmas beer party (76), is linked to the relentless deforestation and overcrowding. With this change comes witchcraft, ghosts, mysterious deaths and illnesses in the village. Godi is finally convinced, like everyone else in the village:

How naïve I had been to believe that there were no ghosts or witches in the village! Perhaps at one time they had never been there, that was perhaps the time when we made trips to the bus-station in the middle of the night. Perhaps there had been less sightings because the village population was then still small. It took years before the true personalities of the villagers fully emerged. (222)

Chikanga, 'the famous witchfinder from the south' (218) has to be called to flush out the witches and restore order. Jairoso, now mentally ill, dies at the end of the novel, a victim of witchcraft, his own indiscriminate land policies ('I want this to be a big, happy village. There is plenty of land for everyone'(21)), and bribe-taking. His daughter, Lulu, who had to run away from home when her father got ill, mourned at the funeral, blaming the Derukas, the newcomers to the village: 'The Derukas have killed our father. He died giving them land. Now they can have his body as well' (236). The death of Jairoso ushers a new consciousness of place and time in Godi, which points to the instability and flux of a seemingly rooted space. Time made him lose Lulu, once a sweetheart, but now 'deeply caught in the web of sorrow' (236) entrenched in family history and betrayal. As they bury Jairoso, these relations and memories are rationalised and submerged in Godi's

consciousness:

One more shovel of wet sand, and Jairoso was gone. He had come and gone. Like Cheru and Boyce and Remoni and Lulu. No one, nothing, came and stayed. Each had promised a fresh start but the many callings of life had torn them away from us. All that remained were the memories, and now the anxiety and the fear. (236)

The rain that pours over Jairoso's grave impresses on Godi the resilience and cyclic nature of life. It helps him overcome the 'anxiety and the fear' and re-locate himself in his familiar space and rhythms of life. Together with everyone in the village, he accepts change, pain and death as part of life, and leaves Jairoso's grave as a monument to the passage of time: 'One by one they turned, in mute surprise, to go home to prepare for Christmas. And I too turned and went home in the rain'(237). Optimism and perennial human resilience in the face of adversity triumph over cynicism and despair. He will have to restore a new sense of existential balance through the cultivation of new pastoral motifs, which include rain as a force of renewal to temper his acquiescence to change and new relationship with place. The whole span of Godi's childhood captures a sense of an interminable, shifting, fluid and unstable space which eventually threatens to erode his 'existential insideness' (Relph 1976; Seamon 1981) and leaves him 'hurt and so confused'(165), and with the anxiety and the fear of undesired and disorderly change. His childhood, as emerges at the end of the novel, is a place that Sarah Philips Casteel (2003: 27) described as 'an ongoing, laborious, and always provisional process.'

So, while Godi wishes for a 'resting place' of his own, a stable identity and fixed relationship to place(s), he now understands 'the need to establish a sense of place in the face of the recognition that no absolute stability is possible' (Casteel, *ibid.*). Godi's childhood makes it possible to think of the constructedness of place and belonging, and the tactical selection of options and items that signify belonging to a place. For Chinodya, childhood is a site upon which the social repertoires of place and belonging are rehearsed, while childhood also maps the psychological, spiritual and physical journeys in what Gillian Tindall (1991) called 'countries of the mind'. Because childhood is a set of options and ideas subjected to a selection process in the memory of the writer, in *Dew in the Morning* it comes across as an 'eclectic country in the mind of an individual writer' (Tindall 1991:10) which is set up as an archetype in the 'transient, changeable real place' (*ibid.*). It is only a version of experience of place, space and time, a version of the existential insideness possible under a state of social siege.

'Existential insideness' is a concept which Edward Relph relates to how we know 'implicitly' that this place is where we belong 'without deliberate and self-conscious reflection':

It is the insideness that most people experience when they are at home and in their own town or region, when they know the place and its people and are known and accepted there. Existential insideness characterises belonging to a place and the deep and complete identity with a place that is the very foundation of the place concept. (1976: 55)

For Godi, an unself-conscious insideness requires stability and intimate identification with the social processes of a place. Towards the end of the novel, a sense of belonging, a sense of insideness, is revealed to be deliberate and socially constructed, and can be individually willed and exited. The social attachment to place in a fissured society forms what Benedict Anderson (2002: 24) calls 'an irreplaceable social glue' in nation-building. Godi's childhood accrues what David Seamon (1981: 89) describes as a necessary survival kit for the insider who wants to reduce his isolation from place: 'a constellation of experiential ties: a knowledge of how to orient, a feeling for the hidden dimensions of particular places, an understanding of people and events, a sense of personal and interpersonal history in relation to place.' In this sense, childhood in *Dew in the Morning* is a rehearsal for a version of kinship with place, which often contradicts the ways in which Zimbabwean nationalism has sought to construct concepts of place and belonging. Childhood in *Dew in the Morning* is a cache of complex metaphors of memory, history, change and resistance. It suggests the varied capacities for dissent and aspiration that childhood as retrospect and process represent in the narrative, without always being tied to the anti-colonial project in overt ways.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we explored the nature of childhood as places of memories. We also developed the concept of memory as a resting place. In particular, we noted how childhoods in *Jikinya* and *Dew in the Morning* can be understood both in the sense of what is no longer and as an embodiment of a permanent evolution of place and memory in a

colonial setting. Childhood in these two novels is not just a backward movement to the place of origin, as Geta LeSeur's (1995: 19) study of childhoods in the black bildungsroman suggests, but a quest for new ways of describing belonging. In both novels, childhood is conceived as a tool by which the colonial subject revisits the past. The passing of the past is described in *Jikinya* in these terms: 'Great was the misery as the people cast a last loving look at the village that was the cradle of themselves and their ancestors before them to the oblivion of memory, and that would be ash tomorrow' (2), while in *Dew in the Morning*, childhood is associated with 'the anxiety and fear' (236) of rapid, chaotic change in the apparent resting place.

Through contrasting the treatment of spaces of memory and resting places in the two novels, it becomes clear that in *Jikinya*, the seemingly prelapsarian African space, symbolized by the enclosure, is fraught with instabilities that threaten to rupture its protective myth of exclusivity and peaceful coexistence. There are only physical enclosures in *Jikinya*, but no closure to history is suggested as it continues to be infiltrated by change agents, whether internal or external. The fostering of the white childhood in the indigenous but by no means cohesive folklore of the Shona points to the capacity of the tradition to open up to wider social possibilities that include the scripting of a narrative that recognizes the space for polyethnic identities in the nation. In *Dew in the Morning*, apparent resting places are as national as they are individual. They are individually willed and exited, and the space of childhood is the workshop in which they are constructed. They remain a nostalgia, a construction, an invention which can be willed to yield private meaning. They are provisional, and always in process. These personal golden ages, which

may not be shared widely in the community or nation, offer the individual the basis of a personal myth. Childhood in *Dew in the Morning* makes it possible to think of the constructedness of place and belonging, and the tactical selection of options and items that signify belonging to a place, where no absolute stability and identity is possible.

It is, however, in the portrayal of Jikinya the child that we are shown the constructed nature of a space that could be imagined as a nation, or at least we see the processes that lead to the construction of the narratives that constitute the new nation of Zimbabwe. Jikinya's childhood, conversely, hints at the internal instabilities of the folklore itself, as well as the enclosure that is meant to keep the nation intact and protected. Jikinya's childhood affords us an insight into a nation at war, with itself, and against an invading force. Her childhood is an allegory of the birth of a nation, and an insight into its processes of self-construction. The depiction of her childhood represents an exploration of the golden age of a race, and the spaces of its memory, while as an allegory her childhood is structured in such a way that it suggests the inevitable involution of the resting places of an ill-fated race.

However, unlike in *Jikinya*, the depiction of childhood in *Dew in the Morning* betrays moments when an author manages to break out of the master-narrative, while still being able to tap its staple resources such as the imaginary of land and the remembrance of its loss, in ways that make it possible to sense different ways of inhabiting space, and describing the social attachment to place in a fissured society. It is in the next chapter that we are presented with a pattern of childhoods whose social attachment to place and

identity is couched largely in political tropes relating to the land (the soil) and its reclamation through the space of war.

CHAPTER 3: CHILDREN OF RESISTANCE

Introduction

Children played a central and active role in the liberation struggle in Zimbabwe and elsewhere in Africa. In Zimbabwe, 'Guerrillas actively recruited schoolchildren by making them more conscious of the poverty and misery of their situation and telling them that there was a way out and that they could fight for better conditions' (Zimfep 1992: 22). The brutality of the Rhodesian forces 'created more resistance among the people and greater determination to fight and change things forever. And so they went to join the guerrillas' (Zimfep, *ibid.*). Similarly, Victoria Brittain and Abdul Minty (1988) link the repression and activism of children in South Africa to the policies of apartheid, which induced in children the feeling that a war had been declared on them by the state, and they had to fight for their own future. In *Ngunga's Adventures*, set in war-torn Angola, the Angolan writer Pepetela depicts conditions of war that transform the thirteen-year-old hero, the orphan Ngunga, into a combatant. Ngunga experiences a nightmarish loss when his parents are shot dead by the colonizers while working in their fields. He becomes an active participant in the war, killing one or two colonizers. What is significant is that Pepetela's novel transforms Ngunga into an amalgam of Pan-African childhood experiences in the colonial world. He is at once 'the child of Africa' who 'goes to school in Soweto' and 'studies his people's oppression in the townships of Namibia' and 'shares his people's struggle and emergent organisations in the liberated villages of Zimbabwe' (*ibid.*: preface).

However, researchers have not always looked for the transformations in creative agency that children in war represent. What has caught the attention of some critics is the spectre of 'plundered childhoods' (Maxted 2003), and an unrelieved fatalism which sees children as having 'been the pawns of the mighty ever since Herod slaughtered the Innocents' (Acker 1986: 11), hence the enormity of the suffering of children in war (Machel 2001). Writers such as Alison Acker (1986) and Roger Rosenblatt (1984) have, on the other hand, attempted to study the varied nature of children's agency in war situations, and find that each situation produces its own version of agency. While for Rosenblatt the 'ardent, monotonous nationalism' of Palestinian children 'offered them a purpose for living, where much else in their lives had tried to take all purposes away' (1984: 94), the children in Alison Acker's book 'are not just victims; many of them are actively trying to change their own lives and those of others, in societies where this attempt is dangerous' (1986: 15).

In this chapter I look at how the space of war converts the symbolism of childhood into a social structure. In this structure is rehearsed the imaginings of the foundational moments of the Zimbabwean nation. I look specifically at two narratives replete with the metaphors of war, Wilson Katiyo's *A Son of the Soil* (1976) and Ben Chirasha's⁷ *Child of War* (1985). In these two novels, childhood as an invented 'social structure' and 'social artefact' (Postman 1994: xii) convenes the 'in-tales' (Donald 2000: 26) of a predetermined national history. I argue that the mediated childhoods in both novels are a

⁷ Ben Chirasha is another family name for Shimmer Chinodya, author of *Harvest of Thorns* (1989).

set of archetypes that are erected to shore up a vision of an emerging nationhood constructed around the tropes of 'son of the soil' and 'child of war' which assumes a unified identity of 'children of resistance'. The twin tropes, which link childhood inextricably to an identity with the 'soil' and 'war', point to what Gaston Bachelard theorised as a distinct 'new found childhood' (1971: 126), a 'distinctness of a beginning' (ibid.: 124), and a specific 'cosmicity of childhood' (ibid.: 126) associated with the birth, struggle and emergence of the Zimbabwe nation. It is important to explore what spaces and identities the 'children of resistance' claim. This is because, as Claudia Castaneda (2002: 2) puts it, 'Asking how and why the child as a figure has been made a resource for wider cultural projects brings the child into the foreground of analysis regarding its uses and value for adult discourses, and provides the groundwork for imagining an alternative order of things.'

A Son of the Soil

Wilson Katiyo's novel tells a story of the stresses and struggles of growing up in colonial Zimbabwe. Alexio, the novel's hero, is the only child of a couple plagued with miscarriages. His father dies in mysterious circumstances. His mother refuses to be taken as a wife by Gomo, her husband's brother, and is chased away from the village. Gomo, keen to deprive the mother of any contact with her son, and also unable to take care of the boy, sends the three-year-old Alexio away from Makosa village. He is taken care of by Gomo's daughter Rudo, a domestic worker in Salisbury (now Harare), the capital city. Alexio is forced out of the city at age five by Rudo's employer, a white settler, for having fought with the white woman's two children. Rudo takes Alexio to a farm school in

farm school in Macheke to live with Chipu, her young sister. Here at age six, he is nearly murdered by Chipu's father-in-law, for having witnessed the latter killing his wife. He is returned to Gomo in Makosa village. Gomo, unable to take care of his brother's child, arranges to have the boy taken care of by a brutal childless couple, the Murimis. After five years of slavery in Murimi's fields, Alexio is again sent back to his village by Murimi. Gomo receives the boy, but immediately hatches a plan to get rid of him. Alexio's ultimate confrontation with the abusive Gomo helps to break the cycle of violence, and he leaves for Salisbury, the capital city, in search of Rudo, education and work. Lost in Salisbury, he meets a young boy called Sam, who not only helps him to find Rudo's house, but initiates him into political consciousness. Sam is killed in cold blood at Rudo's house by a black policeman. Later, Alexio is harassed by the colonial police, tortured and detained without trial. A black policeman, George, helps him escape from prison, and a white expatriate couple, Paul and Sarah Davies, his former teachers, drive him back to his village where he immediately joins the first group of guerrilla recruits. The story ends with the first gun fight between colonial soldiers and the African guerrillas, which coincides with the first cries of Alexio's baby by a girl in the village.

Wilson Katiyo's *A Son of the Soil* depicts a childhood that is not only a condition but a history. Recollections of the condition of Alexio's childhood come 'structured by ideology and discourses' (Middleton 1992: 21) that seek to mark out the child as an instance of historical continuity and therefore a structure of perception. Musaemura Zimunya (1982a: 95) frames Alexio's childhood within the context of cataclysmic colonial experiences: 'Katiyo suggests, quite correctly, that the colonial invasion bore the shock which was of

equal symbolic significance as the biblical Great Flood.’ In *A Son of the Soil*, the colonial encounter is likened to continuous misfortunes as narrated by Sekuru, the Old Man. It is a life-threatening experience, but a stage for distinctly new beginnings. Alexio’s childhood is therefore depicted as an instance of resilience against obliteration by the ‘Great Flood’ of suffering occasioned by colonial rule, and is pruned and honed towards the expression of a single purpose: revitalisation of the race. Musaemura Zimunya views Alexio as ‘a heroic seeker of freedom’ (1982a: 95) and believes that his childhood is ‘[f]rom the start [...] marked out by fate for a heroic quest for truth and freedom’ (ibid.: 94).

The recollection of Alexio’s childhood is structured into a history and ideology that establishes cyclic links with a broken heroic ancestry. Sekuru, the Old Man, narrates the disastrous encounters with colonial agents at the end of the nineteenth century by fictionalising the names of the participants. Chief Chuma, who was killed by the first white settlers, turns out to be the grandfather of Chief Makosa, the ruling chief in the present of the novel who in turn was killed by the Rhodesian forces for organising guerrilla resistance in his village of Makosa. The man called Shonga, who was once abducted into a forced labour gang by a mineral hunter called Hill, and at some point became a Christian, was killed in the same war that killed Chief Chuma, but he died ‘with his fingers still clawed around the neck of a white man’ (21). Shonga turns out to be the elder brother of Sekuru’s father. Sekuru himself, a reputed medicine-man, raconteur and conduit of the warrior spirit of the clan, is Alexio’s grandfather. Sekuru dies after having foretold and mediated the birth of Alexio. What is significant in his illness and death is that they coincide with the cultural confusion in the country as represented by the

influence of the mission school and church, as well as the miscarriages and pregnancy of his daughter-in-law:

There was nothing particularly unusual about the fact that at the same time Sekuru was so ill, one of his daughters-in-law, Tendayi, the wife of Rugare, the old man's only son with his late third wife, was pregnant. This was her fourth pregnancy. Unfortunately, the other three pregnancies had all ended as miscarriages. Everyone in the village was hoping this time she would have the baby. (26)

Rugare, like Shonga his ancestor, had deserted his traditional culture and became a Christian. The miscarriages that his wife Tendayi suffer are viewed as punishment for turning his back on his culture. It is only when Rugare became 'disillusioned with Christianity' (29) and went to make peace with his father Sekuru, that he is rewarded with a boy child, Sekuru's last conditional gift to the erring couple. Sekuru admonishes the couple:

"You want to live like white people. You can try as long as you like, but you will never succeed..."(29)

"Need I tell you about the bad words on the tongues of many people in the village about you both? The spirits of the ancestors are already aware of this. They are not pleased, Rugare... You can't go on defying their will any longer. You have to mend your ways. Take this as a warning. If you persist, my child, they are going to take you ... I saw it quite clearly... They will take you without any hesitation." (31)

In spite of Sekuru's warning, Rugare and his wife reconvert to Christianity soon after Alexio is born. They change his name from Chikomborero ('a blessing') – 'As far as they were concerned, any child they would have was a blessing from the spirits of the ancestors' (32) - to Alexio – 'the "pagan" name Chiko was dropped for the new and "civilized" name Alexio' (32). Rugare is stricken by a bolt of lightning while trying to rescue Alexio from an ancestral black snake that was licking the face of the baby in the fields. He dies on the spot.

Alexio's cyclic links with history and spirituality are constituted in the portentous metaphors of birth and death, war and renewal. His birth portends the death of his grandfather Sekuru, and the birth of a new warrior spirit whose key trope is 'son of the soil'. Alexio's birth is equated to the resurrection and animation of subterranean life forces of his society. In this sense he has a Christ-like significance to his community, in whom he is reborn, and in whose symbolic system his childhood is constituted. Wilson Katiyo writes:

Most of those who were present say the baby [Alexio] was born soon after the old man, his grandfather, died. Yes, on the very same day. In fact, a few people go so far as to swear the shadow of the body had just disappeared when the first cry of the new baby was heard. [...] they all tend to agree about one thing: there had to be something more than a mere coincidence between Sekuru's death and the birth of the child on that same day. (*A Son of the Soil*, 32)

It is as Michel Foucault suggested in his analysis of the relationship between the individual and a symbolic system: 'It is not just in the play of symbols that the subject is constituted. It is constituted in real practices – historically analyzable practices. There is a technology of the constitution of the self which cuts across symbolic systems while using them' (cited by Reynolds 1996: 26). Alexio's childhood is in a symbolic way, a form of spirit possession, a reconstitution of a dialogue with the heroic past, carried through the spaces of war in which the subject reconfigures and launches the race. It is a childhood in which the ego of the race remains indissoluble (see Walcott 1995: 371) and seeks to authenticate itself, and a new capacity to aspire for a renewed quest for autonomy, unity and identity resonates with the cultural nationalism of the epoch.

It is significant that when Alexio escapes from police custody, he goes back to his village from where he joins the armed struggle. It is both a spiritual and physical journey to reconnect with roots and to seek new routes for the national struggle. It is Chief Maposa, the symbol of religion and authority of tradition who calls Alexio 'A real son of the soil'(103) when he discovered that 'Alexio had not been changed much by living in the city'(103). It is also Chief Makosa who leads Alexio to the mountains to join the guerrillas, offering him as the village's contribution to the liberation effort. An unnamed visitor approaches Alexio in the mountains, and has special words 'to say to Chikomborero Shonga'(147) – note how he reverts to his ancestor's name Shonga as well as the first name that links him to his ancestral spirits and the circumstances of his birth, Chikomborero. The name Alexio is dead as soon as he reconnects with the stream of

revolutionary history. The unnamed visitor proceeds to isolate the significance attached to Alexio in the armed struggle:

“The rest of the warriors will be fighting for our country. But you, Chiko, grandson of Sekuru, a descendant of Shonga, will be fighting not only for our land but for your village as well. Fight well! ... Here, wear this”, said the visitor placing a necklace made out of small wooden pieces around the young man’s neck. (147)

The circle closes when there is a repeat of the circumstances of Alexio’s birth, only this time, in place of the ailing and dying Sekuru, it is the country that is symbolically under the extreme strain occasioned by colonial rule and is in need of relief. Yet a more remote incident in the past is recalled into being. Before his death, Sekuru told a story about how the mineral hunter force-marched twenty warriors from Chief Chuma’s village and turned them into a work-gang. At that time, the village chief and other elders decided not to rescue the young men from Hill the mineral hunter because

Even if the warriors caught up with the white men, the white men could always threaten to kill all the young men who had been taken. [...] The only hope was that the captured men, since they were all young and strong, would escape from the white men when a chance presented itself. So it was left to the young men to liberate themselves. (11)

The ‘four hundred other young men’ (146) that Alexio joins in the mountains are a reincarnation of the twenty young warriors who were turned into slaves in the past. So,

when soon after Alexio joins the young guerrillas in the mountains, ‘a fierce gun battle was raging just outside Makosa’s village when the first cries of a baby were heard’ (147), there is a sense of *déjà vu*, of history repeating itself. The war is a metaphor of birth, in the same way Sekuru’s death on the day Alexio is born is a sign of continuity in the cycles of life. The war is therefore a symbol of the cycle of self-renewal, and the cries of the new baby an assertion of life in adversity. The liberation war is central to an understanding of how the Zimbabwe nation is forged and imagined. The throes of birth and death amalgamating in the sounds of gun fire and Alexio’s baby institute imaginaries of pain and pleasure, birth and death, blood and soil, childhood and age at the core of the values of the embryonic nation which is sired by the war. The cries of the baby symbolise the purity and pleasures and hopes of the new nation which the guerrillas’ guns seek to realise in the space of war.

The space of war allows, on the one hand, an expanded sense of childhood and its agentive role in the stimulation of memory and history, and the imagining of the driving forces and scope of the nation in suffering and at birth, and on the other hand, a narrowing of the possibilities of childhood as I will explain later in this chapter.

Childhood as history is structured into a deterministic tale of resistance against colonial brutality. Alexio’s childhood is situated in the ‘complex, network of in-tales’ (Donald 2000: 26) of history which ‘represent a nesting of origins’ (ibid.: 26). The ‘in-tales’ are interconnected histories which build a sense of common fate and destiny. These stories, as narrated in folktale form by Sekuru, prefigure the form of the nation. This form is

adumbrated in a structure that encapsulates a complex mix of linearity and circularity.

The novel itself has a tripartite structure: 'In the Beginning'; 'Discovering the Time'; 'Closing a Circle'. It is a structure that lends itself to a linear model of narrating the nation and its origins. Musaemura Zimunya (1982a) understands the linearity of the story to relate to three significant phases. 'In the Beginning' is the story of Sekuru, 'a source of family and national history and fountain of cultural consciousness' (Zimunya 1982a:95) and an archetypal figure in Zimbabwean literature. In Sekuru's story are the seeds of national consciousness. Sekuru explains how black people came to be enslaved by the white settlers, and how the first attempts at armed resistance failed. In 'Discovering the Time' Alexio is portrayed as a 'representative of a large group of people who are outraged by their fate' (ibid.: 95) in a colonial setting. He decides to skip the country to seek education in Britain, but is detained by the colonial police who suspect that he might be going for guerrilla training in communist countries. In 'Closing a Circle' Alexio not only discovers institutionalised racism, gaol, and police brutality, but decides to shatter the circularity of the story of oppression by engaging the oppressors on the battlefield as a guerrilla. He becomes a 'son of the soil' when he decides to close the circle through armed combat. In becoming a guerrilla, he embodies the narratives of Shonga, his warlike ancestor who is said to have killed Hill the mineral hunter who had enslaved him and abused the community; the heroic story of Chief Chuma who led an armed confrontation with Hill; and the prophetic story of Sekuru, a man who was possessed by the fighting lion spirit of his clan.

These in-tales do not only speak of the nexus between childhood, history and resistance, but provide a complex texture and webbing to the nation-space as articulated by the metaphor of Alexio's childhood. The narrative structure of the novel alludes to 'an immense potential for cultural regeneration and national resurgence' (Donald 2000: 27), while the scenes of childhood it stages renew visions of nationalist unity and ancient heroism. The structure of Alexio's childhood is meant to embody the lineal consciousness of what Carli Coetzee (1997: 118) called the 'familial nation'. His childhood suffering replays 'the fiction of cyclical built into the family name that is passed on from fathers to sons' (Coetzee, *ibid.*: 116), and is meant to secure the unities of ancient heroism in the colonial present. The recollection of Alexio's childhood is an occasion to bring to life all those who have gone before him, and thus, in this novel, 'we find the ancestors hagiographised as men [...] of heroic strength, fortitude, and faith, and instituted as the originators of lineages' (J.M. Coetzee qtd. in C. Coetzee 1997: 115). If, as is often thought, the 'identification between the child and mutability' is an auspicious sign of its 'capacity for transformation', and renders it 'open to re-formation', in the teleological model of the child across 'biological, social, and cultural domains' (Castaneda 2002: 2-4), and particularly in *A Son of the Soil*, 'the form that the child's potentiality takes is consistently framed as a normative one' (Castaneda 2002: 4). Here, 'the child's ever-changing body is slowly transformed into the comparatively stable, physically mature, and culturally inscribed adult form' (Castaneda, 4). There is little chance of the child, then, to transform its accrued suffering into the text of a bildungsroman with the potential to signpost 'a continuous and evolutionary differentiation from the forefathers' (Coetzee 1997: 114), and the inscribed adult form. No mutability of childhood, and not even what

Castaneda (2002) called its 'incompleteness and its accompanying instability that makes the child so apparently available' (2-3) in other cultural texts, can subvert the conservative narrative of nation-building in *A Son of the Soil*.

The structure of the novel is given force by the 'pattern of eternal return and guarantee of heroic triumph' (Donald 2000: 25) that a circular model of history projects. Drawing from the folkloric tradition that informs the novel's structure, it is not difficult to make links between the circular story with its tripartite settings and motif of eternal return to origins. The story's structure confers what Bridget Donald (2000: 26) called 'a sense of inevitability – and therefore "naturalness" – on the prospect of the hero's success.' Donald believes that the use of the folktale genre 'in itself implies a cultural continuity, a seamless link between the past and present' (ibid.: 26), making the novel a tempting model to the 'nationalist visionary' (ibid.).

It is in this sense that Alexio's childhood becomes a prototype of heroic triumph in the established nationalist historical model. His childhood represents the nesting of received notions of identity and belonging, which Chief Makosa celebrates and authorises when he calls him a real son of the soil, tying the trope of 'son of the soil' to a masculine gender. Alexio's childhood is both a site and set of ideas which suggest shifts in the social biography of the individual and the emerging nation. These ideas are rooted in the trope of 'the soil', which Nyenyedzi, the patriot in Yvonne Vera's *Without a Name* (1994) believes is inescapable. He speaks to Mazvita, his girlfriend, who has decided to abandon the struggle for land:

“It is like that with the land. It holds and claims you. The land is inescapable. It is everything. Without the land there is no day or night, there is no dream. The land defines our unities. There is no prayer that reaches our ancestors without blessing from the land. Land is birth and death. If we agree that the land has forgotten us, then we agree to be dead.” (*Without a Name*, 33)

The ‘soil’, the land, is birth and death. It is the nation itself. Belonging to it is viewed as predetermined. Ndabaningi Sithole, a founding leader of Zimbabwean nationalism theorised and articulated the war cry ‘son of the soil’ as a mode of belonging. He writes about this sense of attachment to the soil, the nation: ‘It was not a question of either/or. It was both. The black man belonged to the Soil. It claimed him’ (Sithole 1977: 18). The sense of autochthony and belonging which ‘defines our unities’ emerges out of the relationship between location, identity, belonging and political participation. Ndabaningi Sithole describes ‘son of the soil’ as ‘a rallying-point’ for the struggle for freedom.

It was a political doctrine of self-realization, of self-assertion, of determination, of hope, of resolve to be free of the heavy yoke of white supremacy which the white man fastened on the necks of all the blacks of Zimbabwe nearly a hundred years ago. Hence “*Vana Vevu*” [sons of the soil] carried with it the militant message: “Sons of the Soil! Arise and Fight!” To divorce it from its militancy, or its militancy from it, would be to miss its true meaning and relevance.

would be to miss its true meaning and relevance.

But “Vana Vevu” [sons of the soil] was more than a political reality. It was philosophical as well. Was it “*Vana Vevu*” or also “*Vu reVana*” [the soil of the children]? Was it “Children of the Soil” or also “The Soil of the Children”? (Sithole 1977: 18)

The modes of belonging which define the native-subject relate exclusively to ‘those who were possessed by the Soil, and those who possessed it’ (Sithole 1977: 19). It must be clear that ‘those who possessed the Soil’ are sons of the soil only when they seek to ‘retrieve this lost possession’ (Sithole, *ibid.*) from the stranger-other, the white man. The stranger-other is defined as a misfit in the social and symbolic conditions that the practices of “‘real” belongingness of the belongers’ (Hammar 2002: 214) create. The ‘outsiderhood’ of the stranger-other arises out of a lack of what Amanda Hammar called ‘intangible intimacies of history’ (228) from which self-defined ‘original’ settlers derive their ‘authenticity and authority’ (*ibid.*: 214). This ‘insiderhood’ is what Alexio’s childhood is made a symbol of when he decides to join the armed struggle as a son of the soil. The ‘us’ and ‘them’ dichotomy that arises creates what Margery Hourihan (1997: 3) considers an ‘adversarial way of perceiving the world [which] means that conflict is seen as natural and inevitable.’ Yet, from his many experiences with the brutality of indigenous authority, it is not always clear what direction the sense of inevitability of conflict would have taken. It will be useful to discuss further the suppressed possibilities of childhood in *A Son of the Soil*.

Suppressed Possibilities of Childhood

The structure of the story is such that it makes confrontation with colonial authority inevitably its *raison d'être* while glossing over intra-cultural violence. The failure of tradition, represented by Gomo, the patriarch *manqué*, unleashes mindless violence on the child Alexio. It will be useful to consider a few passages that are central to our understanding of the trauma that characterises Alexio's childhood while in the hands of his own people.

Gomo sends six-year-old Alexio to a slave-breaking neighbour Murimi so that the latter could foster the boy and send him to school, responsibilities Gomo had divested himself of. On the very first day of meeting Murimi, Alexio is inducted into a work ethic which involved working from dawn to midnight: and then going to school in between. On one occasion Murimi asks the little boy to drive cattle:

At about sunrise, both Alexio and the oxen were very tired.

"Give me the whip!" shouted Murimi.

Alexio thought Murimi was going to give him a short rest. He handed the whip over. Murimi gave the boy a couple of lashes around the legs.

"That should wake you up a bit!" he said and threw the whip back at Alexio.

Finally the oxen could barely walk. (61)

Another passage worth quoting at length is about the routine that had become Alexio's life. Soon after grazing the tired cattle referred to in the passage above,

[...], they started sowing again. When the afternoon became a little cooler, Murimi and Alexio yoked a different pair of oxen and started ploughing again. Shortly before sunset, they unyoked the oxen and Alexio was told to take the cattle to graze near Murimi's huts. He was also told to begin watering the vegetables in the garden surrounding the huts as soon as he got home. Murimi's vegetable garden was by far the largest in the village. With a bucket, Alexio fetched water from the well which was in the centre of the garden and watered the vegetables. When he finished that, he took the cattle to the pen. The young man had been told to bring logs for the fire at the *dare* [men's fireplace/court] on his way from the pen every evening. [...]. After supper, Alexio, now exhausted, bade Murimi and Ruwa [his wife] goodnight.

"You can't go to sleep yet, my friend. I told you we are not soft here. We are going to crack some nuts and select seeds for tomorrow's sowing." (61-62)

Alexio rationalises this suffering and views it as important for his future: 'Although he hated being over-worked, he realized that he was gaining a capacity for work which would prove useful in the future. And anyway, he had no choice. Gomo had clearly told him that if he left Murimi, that was the end of his schooling' (63).

Denied contact with his mother, he runs away from Murimi to go and see his mother who lived in Mutoko, another village. Gomo follows him and takes him back home where he proceeds to beat him with a thick stick: 'After a while, Ma Rudo [his wife] came to plead with Gomo to stop beating the child but Gomo stopped only to tell her to go away. Finally,

when Gomo came out of the hut, his clothes and sweat-covered face were spurted with blood' (67-68).

Alexio leaves Gomo's huts by night and goes back to Murimi,

Murimi, who did not know that Alexio had already been beaten by Gomo, started hitting the boy. Murimi did not hit Alexio for very long before his wounds started bleeding again. Murimi stopped because his hands were wet with blood. He was very surprised.

[....]

"Well, I hardly hit you that hard."

[....]

"Look, I am sorry I hit you. [...] But you know Alexio, you deserve it.

You should never do things without permission." (68)

It is amazing how critics such as Musaemura Zimunya (1982) and George Kahari (1980) minimise the impact of such insensitive and dehumanizing practices, which prepare the child for the life of a victim, *a la* Ferdinand Oyono's Toundi in *Houseboy*. It is a society whose brutality on its own children is likely to force them to seek asylum in a stranger-other community. It is comparable to what Lillian Corti (2003) called the 'institutional atrocity' of the colonial order. Lillian Corti makes an insightful comment on Toundi's father and the tradition that he stands for, which helps us to appreciate the dynamics of oppression in a colonial setting:

[...] the treatment Toundi receives at his father's hands is morally

offensive whether or not it is sanctioned by tradition. As the citizen of a country in which the custom of keeping slaves in leg chains was justified as a customary and traditional practice not so very long ago, I am inclined to insist that a practice may be both traditional and abusive. (Corti 2003: 55)

Musaemura Zimunya is silent on these indigenous abuses of children, and is inclined to privilege the narrative of liberation which is attached to the anti-colonial war. He praises Alexio for being '[q]uite the opposite of Lucifer' in Charles Mungoshi's *Waiting for the Rain* (1975), whom he deeply loathes for his 'misanthropic selfish intellect' (Zimunya 1982a: 93) because he decides to rebel against the desolate misery of his community. In Alexio's childhood Zimunya sees a 'more socially and historically fulfilling vision of the educated elite' (ibid.: 93) as they relate to the nationalist struggle for independence. On the other hand, George Kahari seeks to mythologise Alexio's childhood by linking his difficult childhood to that of the "wonder boy" of magic tales, who would emerge out of his tormented life to free his family and society. Understood within this mythology, Alexio's childhood represents redemptive suffering, his traditional society being the site for preparatory suffering, which is consummated in a higher order suffering (the war for national independence). Kahari compares Alexio's progress in his journey to national liberation with the dream journey of Christian of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, and notes similarities in the 'snares, pitfalls and stumbling blocks' (ibid.: 129) that both characters encounter. The story of Alexio's childhood calls to mind ancient Joseph, who according to the Bible, was 'exposed to die as an infant [but] manage[d] to survive and lead his people out of Egypt' (Corti 2003: 56). The gloom of Alexio's narrative is dispelled by the

suggestion that it could be socially and historically fulfilling both in the context of the national liberation struggle (Zimunya) and folklore (Kahari). In both contexts, Alexio is viewed as the hero.

What seems to justify the silence of Zimunya and Kahari on traditional abuses of authority, is not only the contexts alluded to above, but Wilson Katiyo's attitude to the experience of child-battering, which he tends to view as a lesser evil than colonial brutality. He seems to suggest that brutality committed by people of the same culture on each other is constructive, while that unleashed by the stranger-other must be negatively valorised. Alexio, in this sense, seems to be an accomplice in his own dehumanisation. He turns around the devastating experience of traumatic abuse both into a private and communal asset. Gomo seems to suggest that the ill-treatment that Alexio suffered was a necessary crash-course in human experience. Even as he plans to chase Alexio away from his house, he seems to feel confident about the social résumé the eleven-year-old Alexio now possesses, through Gomo's agency. Wilson Katiyo's thoughts seem to ring out of Gomo's voice:

"I am very proud of you. Maybe you don't know that. You have done very well throughout your schooling here at Makosa. [...] You know that many people in the village like you. They know you are a hard worker. They know you are competent. They know you are obedient. You know that they like you for many reasons. You are respectful and polite to them ... You may think I have been very hard with you. But I wanted you, my brother's son, to grow into the man you are now.

Nobody can take away what you have. Not even me. I don't want you to leave home with bitterness. Think about it. Are you not proud of coming top of your class? [...]

"All I am saying to you is if all that has happened to you had not happened – if I and your uncle Murimi had been soft with you – would you be the boy you are now?"

[...]

"[...] Of course, you can now think what you like, but everything I have done was meant to help you. If when you go, you want to forget us here, you can. But the spirits of the ancestors will watch you ..."(75)

In concluding this discussion on Wilson Katiyo's *A Son of the Soil*, it may be useful to ask questions about whose interests are being served by sacrificing and silencing the possibilities of Alexio's childhood. The narrative 'refigures the past, broadening the visions of national identity that history is so often called upon to authorise' (Donald 2000: 32), but there is a sense in which, as it expands the space upon which to lay claim on a broader, homogeneous national identity, through the trope of 'son of the soil' and 'war', it seems to contract the reach of diverse childhoods and identities. The desire to convert childhoods into a philosophy, a social idea and social structure which serves the determinism of the brand of nationalism espoused by Ndabaningi Sithole (1977) and Musaemura Zimunya (1982a) limits the questions those childhoods could ask about the very society that makes them such a social idea. We may ask, with Lillian Corti (2003: 56), whether the mythologizing and silencing of abused childhoods in *A Son of the Soil* 'constitutes a contribution to the project of creating a world in which the privileges of seniority and gender are no more acceptable than the fiction of racial superiority as a

license for domination.’ In this sense, what may be questioned is a nationalist vision which translocates one boyhood trauma (of tradition) and transmutes it into an all-consuming higher kind of trauma (of colonialism). The ‘Martian landscapes’ (Middleton 1992) of the liberation war, and the tropes of ‘son of the soil’ and ‘child of war’ upon which the war revolves, are essentially spaces for a particular gendered childhood. They limit the participation of women - such as Joy, Alexio’s childhood sweetheart and bearer of his child at the end of the novel – as invented symbolisms of fertility/virility and continuity of the male combatants.

Child of War

Alexio Shonga’s circular journeying in *A Son of the Soil*, first when he is a toddler, and then when he is in his teens, is central to the realisation of the rootedness of the self in a seemingly omnipotent national history. His journeying, as already suggested by the structure of the discourse that constitutes his childhood, fits within the key points of a nationalist journey motif. He leaves home, albeit less of a sanctuary, to expand his sense of the world and accrue the wisdom to return and ‘reorganize or rebuild the world according to his own set of specifications’ (Kunene 1985: 191), rejecting not necessarily the tradition that abused him, but, to recall Dambudzo Marechera, to pledge his soul to ‘rout all [his] enemies and bind the wicked husbandmen’ (Marechera 1978: 20), the colonizers, who have taken over the homestead. Daniel P. Kunene, in discussing the journey motif in African literature, notes the importance of ‘the African’s attitude to home, family and communal cohesion’ (ibid.: 189) which Alexio’s experiences illustrate.

Hondo Tapera, in Ben Chirasha's *Child of War*, does other kinds of journeying quite dissimilar in form to the one Alexio embarks on, but shares the symbolic infrastructure in which Alexio's childhood is produced. *A Son of the Soil* ends with Alexio entering the war as a guerrilla: *Child of War* begins with Hondo Tapera entering the same war as a collaborator, runner and spy for the guerrillas, and ends with the end of the war in 1980. Hondo, like Alexio, is an orphan, and only child in his family. The conditions and causes of Hondo Tapera's orphanage are dissimilar to Alexio's – Hondo's father is killed by a white farmer, while looking for his stray ancestral bull. Hondo's mother is a loving and responsible mother who ensures that he is well-fed while he makes it his responsibility to help his mother.

What is comparable is the situatedness of Hondo's childhood within a symbolic resistance whose tropes are 'son of the soil' and 'child of war', with the inclusion of a dream-story which marks a kind of cyclic journeying and enmeshment within the emerging nation-space. The dream-story is a conduit of ancestral memory and network of dialogic intercourses with a deep-rooted genealogy of anti-colonial resistance. The knot of symbols of childhood, history and resistance that the dream-story becomes is given expression by the all-powerful metaphor of land as history and nation. The dream-story is a confluence and expression of the same forces and symbols that knit the destinies of 'sons of the soil' with the soil, the land, and ascribes to them the monolithic identity of 'children of resistance'. Ndabaningi Sithole explains the ways in which the 'Soil', the Zimbabwe nation becomes the end and the beginning of the black man's struggle. The modes of

belonging to the soil, the land, the nation, are defined by the intricate intimacies and boundless vertical and horizontal stretches of history and spirituality that define autochthonous belongingness and insiderhood. These deep-running spiritualities and histories are what differentiate 'native-subjects and settler-citizens' (Hammar 2002: 215). Sithole writes:

The black man belonged to the Soil. It claimed him. He and millions of others to come belonged to the Soil which had given birth to millions of his kind stretching back well beyond the human memory and lost in antiquity. The Soil had given birth to thousands of thousands of generations and it had received them back into its bosom after their sojourn on earth. The black man belonged to the Soil by right of birth. He belonged to it by right of death as well. To deprive him of it was to rob him of his birth-right and his death-right! The Soil possessed him by right of his many ancestors who had lived on it and who had been buried in it. The Soil gave him life, and when that life left him, it claimed him back. He came from it and therefore he belonged to it. No one comes from where he does not belong. At death he returned to it. No one returns where he does not belong. He is of the Soil in life and death –
'*Mwana we Vu*', 'Child of the Soil'. (Sithole 1977: 18)

Hondo Tapera, whose Shona name means 'Watch out, war is upon us', or literally, 'We are finished by war', resides within the symbolic conditions set out by Ndabaningi Sithole and animated both by the arrival of the guerrillas in his village, and the dream-lore linked to the ancestors. The story begins with Hondo's encounter with the guerrillas in the 1970s

when he is herding his father's cattle. He expresses familiarity and kinship with the guerrillas, although he is seeing them for the first time: 'But I was not afraid, somehow. I had heard too much about the war to be afraid. Everyone in our village knew that the fierce war of liberation raging throughout the country would one day spill over the borders of our village'(1). His recognition of the guerrillas, and immediate acceptance of them factors into his relationship with them what James Garbarino et. al. (1992: xi), in their discussion of children's coping strategies in community violence, called a 'them' is 'us' identification, as opposed to the adversarial 'them' and 'us' which constitutes the relationship between the colonial agents and Hondo Tapera's people. It is an identification which is strengthened by the maturation of a political consciousness which results from children's feeling their 'historical and deeply-rooted identities threatened' (Cairns 1996: 108). In this situation, children support 'doctrines offering a total immersion in a synthetic identity' (Erikson cited in Cairns 1996: 108). Hondo Tapera, thirteen years old, and in grade seven, is already politically decided when he meets the guerrillas. When they ask him: 'Do you know why we are here, Hondo?' (2), he answers 'To free the country' (3).

Two things frame Hondo to immerse himself in the exigencies and scope of the war: his name, which the guerrilla commander interprets to mean 'a child of war' – '(Did [your father] know you would be a child of war?' (2)) – and the death of his father at the hands of 'the cruel farmer' (3). Before the arrival of the guerrillas, his anger and hurt are submerged within his consciousness. They are shaped into notions of victimhood, political purpose and predestination when probed and prodded into ideological commitment by the guerrilla commander. When asked 'Are you happy, Hondo?' (3) by the guerrilla

commander, Hondo scans the horizons of his experiences and day-to-day routines before he could define a sadness or bitterness helpful to the cause of the struggle.

My father was dead. I lived with Mother in our small homestead. I went to the village school three kilometres away. When I came back from school I helped Mother, fetching firewood and water and washing up after supper. And during the holidays, like this, I spent the days looking after our small herd of cattle. My mother was good to me; we had a few relatives; I had my friends. We were poor, but happy. I was not sure *that* was what the commander wanted to hear. Then I remembered Farmer Taylor – yes, the cruel farmer whose farm bordered our village... (3)

However, it should be clear from Hondo's immediate attachment to the guerrillas that 'political feelings form well before the child begins to understand anything about the political issues involved' (Greenstein in Cairns 1996: 126). The recruitment of Hondo into the war project, as I have suggested, is at first on two levels. His name suggests a narrative of war, and 'this way of naming the child is a politically symbolic act and may well be instrumental in constructing the child's political views from birth.' (Cairns 1996: 126). The murder of his father by Farmer Taylor provides a *prima facie* experience of violation and victimization. Ed Cairns (1996: 130), however, argues that, 'Victimization does not have to be personally experienced in order for it to lead to politicization. Vicariously experienced victimization may also have this effect', and may result in the subject carrying out a private war of revenge and succeeding in 'releasing an enormous personal pressure' (ibid.: 130) by shouldering the burden of altering the hostile circumstances that

led into the victimhood of others. In the case of Hondo Tapera, it is not only the fact that his role in the struggle is already decided by his politically symbolic name, or his father's death, but the inherited folk-memory of heroism of his ancestors and dispossession by the stranger-other, which is linked to the emergence of the guerrillas. It is not accidental that the guerrillas' arrival in the village detonates the primed folk-memory which Hondo's name stands for. It is through him, as a child, that the symbolic system of his society is activated, armed and deployed.

Immediately after Hondo agrees to be a '*mujibha*' (collaborator/spy) for the guerrillas, he has 'a strange dream' (5) in which he hears 'the noise of drums and singing in [his] ears. The noise was distant, rising and falling with the wind'(5). The drums are articulate inanimate presences of the culture that link Hondo horizontally and vertically with the past and present. They are part of the raft of symbolic manifestations of a repertoire for the constitution of an archetypal childhood. Hondo is imaged as the connection between the present and the past in two ways. As a child, he is a medium of his ancestors dreams, and therefore mediates between the living and the dead. His great grandfather, the man he sees in the dream soon after the sound of the drums, is a veteran of the first Chimurenga of the 1890s, and Hondo inherits the war from him. The second connection is that Hondo's slain father continues the war against Farmer Taylor through the son. There is therefore an instance of double possession when Hondo is shown a vision of both his father and his great grandfather, both victims of settler occupation, in the dream.

The war against white settlers becomes part of the family myths, of which Hondo is an

expression. Family myths, according to Maureen Slonim (1991: 11),

stress that the family can always be counted on for comfort and support, no matter what the circumstances. Through family myths, ancestral figures, especially grandparents of the same sex, often become a major part of a child's imaginative life and may even serve as role models. [...] This family identity then becomes incorporated into the child's personal sense of identity.

It is interesting how Hondo, the child, calls into being an antecedent symbolic system of dreams and ancestry, while simultaneously embodying the eternal childhood of the race, which is mediated and renewed at multiple levels in the story.

The dream-story in *Child of War* is a version of the time-slip device, 'that is, the protagonist slips back in time, characters from the past reappear in the present, or both' (Cosslett 2002: 243). Again, as in *A Son of the Soil*, it is not difficult to establish 'whether the past that is discovered is a purely family past, or whether it is "other" to the child protagonist' (Cosslett, *ibid.*: 245), because where Alexio fights for his village in a national struggle, Hondo Tapera exhibits the same 'lineal consciousness' (Coetzee 1997) that excluded Ndhlala's Jikinya from the Ngara political community. The version of the national past that Hondo's dream-story affords us is potentially radical, because it 'destabilizes the notion of unproblematic access to history' (Cosslett *op.cit.*: 249), and opens the narrative to other mediums of history such as dreams and spirit possession. But it is a regression because it does not offer 'ways out of some of the dilemmas and negative

features of “heritage” as a concept and a practice’ (Cosslett, *ibid.*: 244). The dream-story as a time-slip device provides the ‘potentially nationalistic search for roots’ (*ibid.*: 244). Contrary to what Tess Cosslett’s study of time-slip narratives demonstrates, the dream-story in *Child of War* does not problematize the simple access to the past, it is reproduced in Hondo as dreamt; it does not critique empty reconstructions of the past; and because of the way it constructs the past, it does not evade the dangers of nostalgia⁸. It creates a boyhood too dutiful to save its own life (Abbott 1993: 4), and too blind to the exclusion of other genders in the nationalistic narrative which links its own growth and destiny to the male roots.

In the dream-story, Hondo stalks a man who wore nothing but a sheepskin round his loins: ‘He carried a spear in his hand and a bow and quiver of arrows on his back’ (5). This man, who ‘was not very old’, is a warrior of the 1890s. He resembles the guerrilla commander that Hondo meets in the village, ‘fairly tall, slim and athletic’(1). The man Hondo encounters in his dream is ‘lean and strongly built’ (5). He, like the guerrilla commander, recruits Hondo into the raging war. First, he anoints Hondo as heir to the war: ‘[...] slowly, he took out his snuff box and tipped some snuff into his palm and mine. I sneezed several times when I took up the snuff, and hot tears squeezed out of the corners of my eyes. He laughed gently at me and rubbed more snuff into my hair’ (5). The man is shot and killed by the white settlers. Before he dies he gives Hondo ‘an arrow from his quiver

⁸ Tess Cosslett (2002: 244) writes: ‘I am concerned here to pinpoint the special features of the time-slip genre, and to argue that this genre provides ways out of some of the dilemmas and negative features of “heritage” as a concept and a practice. In many of its variants, the time-slip narrative offers an openness to “other” histories, rather than the potentially nationalistic search for roots; it problematizes the simple access to the past promised by the heritage site; it critiques empty reconstructions of the past; and because of the way it constructs childhood, it evades the dangers of nostalgia.’

to make me go away. Still I sat there, watching him. He gave me two more arrows and placed his spear at my feet. [...] At last he lifted his snuff box from his side and placed it in my hand' (8). This ritual of ancestral passage over, Hondo 'was the only living soul in this valley of death but [he] was reluctant to leave him [the dead ancestor]' (8). Immediately, the settlers' wagons roll back towards him, to continue the war with the heir of black resistance, the child.

However, while this gesture may appear only symbolic, it is true that the second Chimurenga War of the 1970s was fought largely by young people, many of them as young as Hondo. By accepting the arrows and snuff from his dying ancestor, Hondo is immortalizing a vision and inheritance of war, and extending a genealogy of black resistance against colonialism. It is also important to note that when the guerrillas enter the village, the first person they meet is Hondo, the child, who in the dream-story is stranded in the valley of death, but stands by his warrior ancestor. The guerrilla commander explains the revenge plot against Farmer Taylor, using the trope of the orphaned child, Hondo, as the rallying call for the war.

Recreated in *Child of War* are the founding imaginaries of Zimbabwean nationalism, which are played out in the space of a new-found childhood – children of resistance. They include the invoking of the 'native-subject' of the land through spirit possession, dreams and myths, and define the dispossessed victim as exclusively a black person. These imaginaries are more than inventions of the Zimbabwe nation, but are at the very core of the post-war nation's politics.

It is the status of the 'child of war' which is not sufficiently debated in post-war Zimbabwe. *Child of War* makes interesting reading in the sense that, on the one hand it celebrates the deployment of a deeply historically and spiritually embedded social structure of childhood in the war, and on the other hand, it suggests a critique of the ambiguities of the spaces of war. There is at the end of the narrative a slight sense of altered continuity in the social institution of childhood.

What is interesting to me, therefore, is not that 'the charm, malleability, innocence and curiosity of children are degraded and then transmogrified into the lesser features of pseudo-adulthood' (Postman 1994: xiii), but that childhood 'is constituted at a particular moment in time and point in space' (Prout & James 1990: 29). Various discourses constitute various childhoods (Prout & James 1990: 27), 'each and all of which are "real" within their own regime of truth.' As we have argued in *Child of War* and *A Son of the Soil*, childhood is a social structure, constituted in symbols that reveal the nature of the community that makes use of such childhoods. It is in the ways that children, 'as a social institution that exists beyond the activity of any particular child or adult' (Prout & James *ibid.*: 28), alter the social institution which constitutes their identities while reproducing it that *Child of War* differs from *A Son of the Soil*. In *Child of War*, there is a sense in which, 'War and violence have set in motion processes of social change' (Maxted 2003: 68), not only in terms of the altering of the social structure when independence is attained and small pieces of land are redistributed to the peasants, but in terms of the 'the political voice' (Maxted, 69) that childhood represents.

Having been tortured and bombed, and witnessed brutal murder at the hands of Rhodesian forces, Hondo begins to question the post-war scenario:

When I could walk, Rindai [his friend] took me to the mountain to show me the guerrillas's graves.

[...]

They had put large, flat rocks round the guerrillas grave and planted a wooden cross in the middle. It was a mass grave, they were buried together in six square metres of earth. The air was so still, the leaves so green that I gasped at the cruelty of war and the heartlessness of those who caused wars to be fought. (96)

The seeming neglect of the war heroes by those who led the struggle remains a critical issue in Zimbabwe, but Hondo is suggesting a redefinition of hero when he says, 'The whole exercise of identifying them exhausted me. [...] All that mattered now was that whoever they were, they were buried in the soil they had fought to free' (96-97).

Specifically, Hondo wants to know whether the guerrilla commander, now presumed dead, acknowledged him as a 'child of war': 'Maybe I will meet him one day and he will recognise me. And maybe he will shout my name, sling his gun over my shoulder and call me a child of war...' (100)

It is easy to appreciate Hondo's desire to be factored in the national memory, having been central to the redefinition of colonial space both as a social actor and a rallying key trope

of the national struggle itself. Terence Ranger (1985: 292) writes about how the former 'mujibhas' were told that 'politics is a business of the grown-ups' and how the election of village committees 'was an opportunity to put youth in its place' after the war. This was because post-war society was eager to neutralise 'the power exercised by the mujibhas during the war' (ibid.). Pamela Reynolds (1996: 53) notes a similar trend in post-war Zimbabwe: 'As communities began realigning power structures after the war, children were firmly placed back into the niche of childhood.' In *Child of War*, Hondo says: 'I am repeating the class I was in last year, at the same school' (99), where of course he is stripped of his war-time powers. Again, the child's role in the post-war space is to reactivate memory, and insist on being central to the new forms of political participation because, as Julia Maxted puts it, 'debates about those forms are debates about the nature of citizenship, responsibility and the morality of social action' (2003: 68). The cycle of folk-memory, which carried the symbols of a long genealogy of war, is continued in Hondo, this time mildly subversive of the emerging social order.

The sense of an unending war is suggested by Hondo's dream at the end of the novel, which repeats the dream sequence after his first encounter with the guerrillas in the village: 'I dream of the guerrilla commander sometimes. I dream of him coming to me in the valley with his mate, among my dead father's cattle' (99). But his conflict with the new social order is not sharp enough to lift Hondo from the liminal spaces allotted him by the post-war society, nor is the enemy as looming and clear to him as Farmer Taylor was in the war. It appears the intra-cultural and inter-generational conflicts which writers such as Benedict Carton (2000) and Norma Kriger (1992) noted as critical concurrent struggles

within the struggle are muffled by the nationalist narrative, and would require a different narrative point of view than is available to *Child of War* and *A Son of the Soil*.

Conclusion

A Son of the Soil and *Child of War* help us to reflect on the nexus between childhood, history and resistance in ways that bring to light the versions of childhoods that are central to the construction of notions of belongingness in a nation-space. The character of the symbols of childhood prove that childhood, like adulthood, is in a state of 'continual becoming' (Archard 1993: 36), susceptible to the exigencies and contingencies of a social order. As a condition and a history, childhood in *A Son of the Soil* and *Child of War* can be invented, deployed and redeployed to serve as the rallying call for the war. As post-war communities begin to realign power structures, the institution of childhood is also altered, making the social idea of childhood elastic and malleable.

The war is just one of the many spaces that define a specific, usable version of childhood. The space of childhood in war teems with symbolic instances of rootedness and belongingness. It is a shunting yard of tropes that work as a template in the production of unified national identities, which are woven into a powerful imagined 'family' of 'children of resistance'.

The staged fiction of 'family' is conjured by the cycles of inherited folk-memory, replete with what Stephen Daniels (1993: 5) theorised as the constituent elements of national identities: "'legends and landscapes", [...] stories of golden ages, enduring traditions,

heroic deeds and dramatic destinies located in ancient or promised home-lands with hallowed sites and scenery.' In both novels, the 'symbolic activation of time and space [...] gives shape to the "imagined community" of the nation' (Daniels, *ibid.*). Each childhood carries with it a predominantly 'genealogical "ethnic" national identity' (Daniels, 4), traced from a heroic male ancestry. Alexio traces his heroism to his ancestor Shonga and to Sekuru, while Hondo Tapera locates himself within the sacred landscape and genealogy begun by his great grandfather, and continued through his father. In both narratives, the 'lineal consciousness' of the 'familial nation' (Coetzee 1997: 118) reproduced by the two boyhoods backgrounds women as 'birth givers to the next generation of sons, who carry the name of the father' (*ibid.*: 118), and 'carriers of the values and "blood" of the nation' (*ibid.*: 120). The cries of Alexio's baby in the village while he is making history in the mountains is a telling indictment of the severe exclusions that the female gender endures in these two, conservative narratives of boyhoods in nation-building.

The idea of 'children of resistance' traces its genesis to a patriarchal lineage, making childhood stand for instances of founding moments in a long history of decolonisation, from which the new nation descends. For Richard Werbner (1998: 75), 'the ideological effectiveness of the origin myth is in the semblance it gives of singularity in the actual presence of plurality.' While the founding past is 'the subject of contradictory appropriations' (Werbner, *ibid.*), it is the space in which 'the imagined singularity of national formations is constructed daily' (Balibar in Werbner 1998: 75). Childhood in both *A Son of the Soil* and *Child of War* is therefore defined by a unified mode of political

participation and agency, instigated by the war of resistance which shapes a particular past into an ideology, which in turn quickens boyhood into manhood.

Roger Rosenblatt (1984: 101) explains how in Palestine ‘a war allows boys to look like men. This seems a shallow benefit, but it is no small thing for a teenage boy to have something that yanks him out of his social floundering and places him, unlaughed at, in the company of heroes.’ The war is, by implication, a masculine landscape, while the rallying trope of ‘children of resistance’ suggests inclusiveness. It is not unusual for nationalist histories to suggest affinity as in ‘son of the soil’ and ‘children of resistance’ while the desired ‘child of war’ may estrange other genders and ethnicities. Stephen Daniels (1993: 5) confirms that, ‘The very process of exclusion is integral to the nationalist enterprise’.

The childhoods depicted in *A Son of the Soil* and *Child of War* are near perfect models of a politically convenient social structure from which the imagined singularity of national formations can be projected. They are instances of new found childhoods and boyhoods that could serve as pliant templates of a stable nationalist memory and narrative. These boyhoods will not be Alice Miller’s (1990) reformed Biblical Isaac, who would question his sacrificial role in the service of patriarchy and its wars. For Alice Miller, the new Isaac, ‘with his questions, with his awareness, with his refusal to let himself be killed – not only saves his own life but also saves his father from the fate of becoming the unthinking murderer of his child’ (Miller, 145). But these ‘sons of the soil’ are not the new Isaacs: they are, as Franklin Abbott (1993: 4) puts it, ‘too dutiful to save their own lives.’ The

murmurs of despair that Hondo Tapera expresses about the destructiveness of the war are not accompanied by a revalorisation of, or evacuation from, the ascription of ‘child of war’, a label which he cherishes as an elevated identity. Alexio is too happy to be among the four hundred young men in the mountains, and participating in a mythical circle which connects the birth of babies (the *métier* of women left behind the war) with the founding of the nation in an armed revolution (the forte of men). It will be left to other writers and characters, who, excluded from the dominant national symbols and culture, seek to explode the myths of ‘children of resistance’ and explore altering childhoods. Chapter 4 of this thesis looks at fiction by Yvonne Vera (*Under the Tongue*), Tsitsi Dangarembga (*Nervous Conditions*) and Chenjerai Hove (*Ancestors*) for changing versions and subversions of kinds of girlhoods and childhoods.

CHAPTER 4: GIRLHOODS

Introduction

Chapter 3 of this thesis demonstrated how ‘children of resistance’ and ‘sons of the soil’ are tropes for a childhood which is essentially male, and is unified by a mode of agency which shapes the past into ‘patriotic history’ (Ranger 2005). ‘Patriotic history’ is a narrowed down, one-eyed version of history which Zimbabwean cultural nationalists insist is the only true history of the country. Lene Bull Christiansen (2004: 105) traces the emergence of this narrowed down version of Zimbabwean history to the ‘monopolisation of the discursive space of national history and identity’ by the nationalists. In particular, Christiansen argues that, ‘The violent “birth” of the Zimbabwean nation under colonialism has become a symbolic point of reference for representations of the nation’s history because the nation’s space and time has been defined by colonial occupation’ (ibid.). The national time and space is located within a mythical ‘eternal national spirit’, where the ‘inside-outside schema’, which defines the truly indigenous as opposed to the colonial settler (ibid.: 105), constructs the imagined community of the nation. It is, however, particularly in the gendered rewriting of this ‘patriotic’ narrative that a ‘[t]ime for memory and healing as well as an opening up of the discursive field of national history and identity are suggested as means of rearticulating a viable polyphonic narrative of the nation’ (Christiansen 2004: 108).

In this chapter I consider the portrayal of girl childhoods in *Under the Tongue* (Vera),

Nervous Conditions (Dangarembga) and *Ancestors* (Hove). In each novel, these childhoods appear to nest in a form of mythopoetic suffering. The source of the latter is a master-narrative that excludes girl childhoods from history-making. It is widely acknowledged that 'gender informs nationalism and nationalism in its turn consolidates and legitimates itself through a variety of gendered structures and shapes which, either as ideologies or as political movements, are clearly tagged: the idea of nationhood bears a masculine identity though national ideals may wear a feminine face' (Boehmer 1991: 6). *A Son of the Soil* and *Child of War*, are examples of texts in which 'masculine identity is normative' (Boehmer 1991: 8), in keeping with the habits of nationalist rhetoric to construct the male figure 'as the author and subject of the nation' (ibid.: 6). What is constructed in these two novels are boy childhoods that are near-perfect models of a convenient social structure from which the imagined singularity of founding moments of the nation are projected. In sharp contrast to *A Son of the Soil* and *Child of War*, what seems to be "passed on" in *Under the Tongue*, *Nervous Conditions* and *Ancestors* is the nightmare of female history which is built on a raft of the traumas of the past. These traumas nest in the double-bind in which nationalism and patriarchy trap the lives of women. Elleke Boehmer (1991) identifies the complicities of nationalism and patriarchy in creating 'specifically unitary or "one-eyed" forms of consciousness' (7) because they both 'authorise homogenising perceptions and social structures and [...] suppress plurality' (6).

Kizito Muchemwa (2004: 2) suggests that the nightmares of Zimbabwean history, especially for women, emanate from the grand narrative and staple imaginaries of what

he terms 'the nationalist aesthetic' which 'has traumatised the whole nation.' This nationalist aesthetic has had the deleterious effect of reducing historical experience to the triumphant moment of one group and one gender. In the nationalist aesthetic, as exemplified by *A Son of the Soil* and *Child of War*, the narrative of loss and suffering is appealed to so often in order to give force to Christiansen's (2004) inside-outside schema. Since 'the anti-colonial struggle defines the national community, the liberation war and the "liberators of the nation" have a privileged position within the discursive field of Zimbabwean national identity' (Christiansen 2004: 106).

It must be noted at the outset that, in particular reference to the portrayal of childhoods, there are some similarities in the way the narrative of suffering operates both in the male and female writing traditions in Zimbabwe. Both exclude the possibilities of other versions of childhoods, and create mythologies of childhoods that are rooted in gendered experiences of history. Texts such as *A Son of the Soil* and *Child of War* illustrate the ways in which 'nationhood is so bound up in textuality, in "definitive" histories' (Boehmer 1991: 10) which makes it possible to create mythologies of boy childhoods whose growth is located in what Kelly McDowell (2002: 214) calls 'a belief that establishes childhood as a pure point of origin in relation to ideological structures.' As will become clear in this study, 'this conception of a primary state of culture located in childhood' (McDowell, *ibid.*) is in itself an exclusionary mythology, because it is gendered. However, while it is true that the narrative of suffering is not a preserve of the masculinist nationalist aesthetic, it operates differently when placed in the space of women's fiction as well as the sensitively gendered fiction of a male writer such as

Chenjerai Hove. But to 'compose a substantially different kind of text', Boehmer argues, 'is already to challenge normative discourses of nationhood' (1991: 10).

What unites the three novels under study is their location outside of the nationalist aesthetic and its rhetoric of 'sons of the soil', in spite of some overt side glances to it and its emplacement in interstitial and strategically overlooked spaces of an insurgent female discourse. I will start the chapter with *Under the Tongue*, in which a girl is raped by her father during the war of liberation. I then discuss how a girl finds her voice when her brother dies in *Nervous Conditions*. I will conclude the discussion with an exploration of alternative representational politics in the telling of a disabled girlhood by a haunted boyhood in *Ancestors*. I argue that Hove's sensitivity to gender politics as a male writer enables him to incite boyhood itself against the foundational myths of patriarchy in order to expand the space of an inclusive aesthetic in which the fates of the girl child and boy child are inextricably linked.

In structuring the chapter the way I do, I am less concerned with considerations to do with publication dates of the novels than with the nature of the subversions that each novel represents. *Under the Tongue* foregrounds the narrative of suffering in the space of the liberation war in ways that are more overt than *Nervous Conditions* and *Ancestors*, but markedly different from *A Son of the Soil* and *Child of War*. While it invokes the war, it does not evoke the rhetoric of the liberators of the nation, the 'sons of the soil' or 'children of resistance', but rather focuses on the hollowness of male history in the war. It is therefore a good place to start a critique of the rallying tropes of the war, and by

extension, of the grand narrative itself. *Nervous Conditions* can be considered a response to the suppressed girlhood experiences in a patriarchal narrative as represented in *Under the Tongue*. In *Nervous Conditions* Tambu the girl child embarks on autobiographical writing which Sidonie Smith (1993: 159) considers 'always a gesture toward publicity, displaying before an impersonal public an individual's interpretation of experience.' I contrast the styles of reclaiming and entering narrative space as represented by the girl childhoods in these three novels. I tend to think that portraits of boyhood and girlhood in *Ancestors* offer sharp contrasts to the representational politics in both *Nervous Conditions* and *Under the Tongue*. Hove's novel is a path-breaker because, to adapt Sidonie Smith, it 'insists on new interpretations as a means of wresting power, resisting universalized repetitions that essentialize and naturalize' (Smith 1993: 163) the narrative of suffering. The focus of this chapter attempts to capture the 'universalized repetitions' of an essentialized girlhood experience in a narrative of suffering as represented in the three novels under discussion, while it simultaneously suggests a quest for alternative representational politics in the telling of girlhood and boyhood in Zimbabwean fiction.

The Nativism of Tears in *Under the Tongue*

A tongue which no longer lives, no longer weeps. It is buried beneath
rock. My tongue is a river. I touch my tongue in search of the places of
my growing. (*Under the Tongue*, p.1)

The story is about a girl child's struggle to give voice to a trauma integrated in her body and experience. The father, Muroyiwa, is killed in uncertain circumstances soon after

raping Zhizha his daughter. Grandfather, VaGomba, accuses Zhizha's mother Runyararo of killing Muroyiwa. Runyararo seems to be linked to the death of Muroyiwa and is imprisoned. She only gets released from prison in 1980 the year Zimbabwe attained independence, when there is a ceasefire and perhaps an amnesty. Zhizha is taken care of by her grandmother during the period that her mother is incarcerated. Much of the story is told from the point of view of Zhizha, with only a few details supplied by the third person narrator to give a background to events.

The novel inhabits the temporality of trauma which cannot be "plotted" through conventional realism. Its emplotment is meant to be homologous to the state of consciousness of a body in pain. Sets of discomforts emanating from one node of nerves or another, and proceeding on multiple and interconnected paths across and throughout the body, give the sense of simultaneity and ubiquity to the experience of pain and terror. Stylistically, the experience of trauma is represented in a series of disconnected, almost stand-alone flashes of memory in which narrative is often impeded in its monological pull towards linearity.

Thandeki Umlilo (2002), in recalling her own experience of violation, finds that, in such situations of telling the experience of trauma and incest, 'It is difficult to write in a chronological or even in a thematic way as death and resurrection are intrinsically intertwined. The story thus unfolds in a rhythm of darkness, foreboding, storm, death and new life' (xii-xiii).

Zhizha in *Under the Tongue* recalls:

Grandmother says that a woman cannot point to the source of her pain, saying, it is here and there. A woman finds her sorrow in her dream and everywhere. She is wounded even in her awakening. Sorrow is not like clay which is put beneath the sun to dry. It has no shape. It is only tears. Slowly she cries, slowly she weeps, sleeps and wakes. (40)

The plot is predicated on the desire to know and tell the pain suffered by these women, rather than on assuaging it with the promise of an ending. It is the endlessness of vulnerability and the evasive intangibility of an amorphous sorrow and pain that seem to paralyse any sense of positive agency in this narrative of loss⁹. The story of these women's pain is an instance of the invention of a mystical female essentialism whose master-text imprints victimhood as an indelible totemic mark. To some extent it can be suggested that in *Under the Tongue* Vera succumbs to essentializing women's experiences. This can be explained by the specific experience of incest and rape in which the women are of necessity the victims. In the following sections I explore the sites and symbolisms of girlhood suffering and the nature of the agency of the victim that leads to the recuperation of the traumatised self. In particular, I provide a detailed analysis of the construction of a genealogy of a narrative of loss which figures the girl child both as nature/utopia and as a symbol of the uncertain in society.

⁹ Vera's other novels, *Without a Name*, *Butterfly Burning* and *The Stone Virgins* are characterized by this unrelieved suffering. There is, however, a redeeming sense of unfulfilled vitality in her women characters who suffer more than they can bear, and dream beyond their capacity to act.

The Genealogy of Girlhood Suffering

Girl childhood in *Under the Tongue* is a regime of unspoken horror that is knotted into a genealogical experience of womanhood. It is a genealogy which reproduces itself within the cycles of birth/death/birth/burial. Grandmother is both an expression and conduit of this sense of being encircled by death and bowed to the ground by the dead weight of a history of pain and betrayal. It is this sense of enclosure and endless horror that Grandmother passes on to Zhizha, her grand daughter, and that Zhizha recalls:

I wait for Grandmother to find me, to find all my dreaming with her lament, with her tears. Her song tells me about birth. Her song rises from ancient rivers where the sun no longer rises or sets. A woman will find herself in such a place where memory lingers like the sun, she says. In such a place women stand without trees to surround their weeping. A woman's cry is naked like birth, there is nothing to hide it. It is a place with roots but without trees. Grandmother's song finds the world where women gather. It is a place watered with tears. It is a place of remembrance. When the tears have become a river, morning will arrive even in such a place. (41)

Zhizha's experience of incest and violation exists in a continuum which is as linear as it is cyclic. Her childhood is a place that recalls a complex recreation of a specific kind of female suffering. It is as if she is a medium of a deep exclusionary ancestral memory of female connectedness in tears.

Zhizha's childhood speaks to, and is possessed by, the spirits of this place of tears. Her

life and fate are previsioned in the denuded 'place with roots but without trees'. It is both a site of death and potential resurrection. The 'lament' and 'tears' give the impression that the history that is inherited by the girl child is one long and unbroken dirge.

It is interesting to look at the interwoven narratives signposted by 'song', 'river', 'tears', 'trees', and 'roots' as reproducing not only the interconnectedness of genealogies of female experience in history, but as constituting a post-lapsarian space of suffering and potential life-giving growth. This space incubates a complex of ideas that include song/lament as lyrical speech and memory; roots without trees as potential but denied vigorous growth; and river and remembrance as both the source of life and its regeneration. Central to this recreation of a denuded female Eden, in which nudity is equated to both vulnerability and birth, is the desire to imaginatively arrive at a utopian archetypal text invulnerable to appropriations by male history. It is a specific place and texture of suffering linked to a specific female childhood whose 'morning will arrive' 'when the tears have become a river'. As a place where women gather, 'a place watered with tears', it is constructed as a site of a resistant female nativism stretching into the beginnings of time and history and transported to the present across 'ancient rivers where the sun no longer rises or sets' through the symbolisms clustered around birth. Grandmother says to Zhizha's mother: 'Birth is the remembering of journeying, it is not to be forgotten. We are women. We belong together in an ancient caress of the earth' (11). Zhizha herself, separated from her mother, recalls her dreamed reconnection with her, 'We have begun our initiation into each other's worlds, our profuse illuminations. We belong and belong' (80). A family feeling stirred around the matriarchal Grandmother

merges the intertwined fates and identities of mothers and daughters.

Zhizha's childhood performs the entanglements and intimacies of womanly history and identities: 'Grandmother says a woman's name is the one she has given to her child. Mother's name is me. [...] Mother carries Grandmother's name for her. I am mother. Zhizha, I say. That is also my mother. I am mother. She is Grandmother' (14-15). The mythology of female intimacy mocks the founding imaginaries coalesced in the tropes of 'children of resistance' whose entry into history is inaugurated and demarcated by colonial experience. As in Katiyo's *A Son of the Soil*, and through dreamlore in Chirasha's *Child of War*, the tropes of 'son of the soil' and 'children of resistance' are narrated as history and family feeling by male raconteurs to young males as a way of rallying them specifically against colonizers.

Zhizha's childhood in *Under the Tongue* offers a substantially different kind of text and history which depict 'the necessity of child agency as a form of resistance for oppressed cultures' (McDowell 2002: 215). For Zhizha, history as taught to her by her grandmother, 'becomes a vital force' and 'an intimate and *lived experience*' (McDowell, *ibid.*). Grandmother helps Zhizha to appreciate the enabling power of a gendered history, in the same way that the boy childhoods in *Jikinya*, *A Son of the Soil*, and *Child of War* draw inspiration from their male elders and ancestors. By offering to Zhizha a contrastive perspective on history, she is 'engaged in the effort to supplement (and contradict)' (McDowell 2002: 222) male-scripted history. 'She unveils the power structure for her children, showing them exactly what power is capable of, who wields it, and who is

victimized by it' (ibid.: 218). When she weeps and says that 'women are children' (*Under the Tongue*, 52), she is placing Zhizha's childhood within a universalized essentialism in which the tropes of childhood and childlike stereotypes describe dominated cultures. McDowell (2002) argues that, 'By infantilizing the oppressed culture, the dominant culture is able to establish supreme and secure control. Just as we see in classical didactic children's literature, those who occupy the position of adults are able to firmly set children in place' (223).

In *Under the Tongue*, Grandmother as matriarch and historian is also responsible for the ordering of female social practice and the perception of experience through what Lois McNay (2000) has called 'the symbolical inculcation of obliged affections and of affective obligations of family feeling' (63). This involves 'a constant and intense maintenance work which turns the nominal bonds of the family group ("she's your sister...") into profoundly uniting affective bonds' (McNay 2000: 63). The grounding of female experience and family feeling, as oppositional to an infantilizing dominant culture, is performed through the bonding mechanisms of antiphonal rehearsals of communion in Grandmother's song/lament. Grandmother's 'whisper of lament' (11) is more than just a mystical and cultic projection of memory, but a way of constructing and transmitting a specific female folklore and different models of historical knowledge and subjective consciousness. Zhizha recalls Grandmother's rendition of these rituals of self-affirmation through song-singing as story-telling: 'She throws our voices to the moon. She gives us a song for healing, for a memory without sorrow. The song buries all our desperation and our loss' (11). Grandmother's narratives are not just placebos for the suffering girl

childhood, but a transmission of positively utopian possibilities that transcend the ennui and enervation induced by an implacable oppression. As suggested earlier, some of these possibilities are adumbrated in the conceptualisation of girl childhood as nature and utopia in a space that is imagined as invulnerable to male history.

Girlhood as Nature and Utopia

In *Under the Tongue* the location of girl childhood in an archetypal suffering seems to be transhistoric. Its 'metaphors and mantras'¹⁰ are largely elemental rather than inflected strictly by what is narrowly national. It is a girl childhood recreated around a powerful iconography hewn from a desolate but songful environment, as shown in Grandmother's renditions above, as well as a subterranean vitality in the form of water and roots.

Zhizha's childhood is a nexus of both ancient histories and new potentialities. It speaks of the potential for a transcendental vision of a unified and irrepressible female presence symbolised by the rain, river and water. Her name is closely connected to rain and planting. This momentarily reverses the metaphors of a fierce, depleted and uninviting landscape of 'tears' and treeless roots.

Key metaphors of tongue and river, water and roots, meld the experiences of this mythical girl childhood into both a search for beginnings and a connection with those beginnings and renewals. The river is the tongue ('My tongue is a river' – (1)). It is also a place of gathering, a source of speech, and the cradle (roots) of womankind. Zhizha is in this sense

¹⁰ I am grateful to Virginia A. Walter (1996) for the useful phrase from her essay, *Metaphor and Mantra: The Function of Stories in Number the Stars*. *Children's Literature in Education* 27(2): 123-130.

the continuation of the river of female experience. The life-giving forces of the river mitigate the sadness and deprivations of the place of tears and instigate new life from the roots 'without trees'.

'Zhizha' in Shona is the season of rain and harvest, 'the soft fall of rain after harvest, a peaceful rain' (15). It is not only a time of growth and ripening, ('Harvest is green like birth' (15)), but a period of expectations and replenishment.

Zhizha... Zhizha...[...] then I seem to belong to everyone's mouth for a whole season. I am harvest. I am rain. I am river and rock. I am sky and earth. I am Zhizha.

At this time, the air is a sweetness of newly ripened things and I grow so joyous that my spirit soars and spirals, settling into one ray of golden light. (97)

Her name and childhood are invested with visions of a new sunrise, 'one ray of golden light', which contrasts sharply with its life-threatening absence in the foreboding darkness of 'ancient rivers where the sun no longer rises or sets' (41). The cosmic wholeness and aliveness reanimated by the rain season suggest the optimistic possibilities that girl child-as-nature and child-as-utopian represent. As already pointed out, Zhizha is linked to nature by name and by birth. Grandmother says to her: 'We cry for birth and long to see ourselves in water. We seek our peace from the beginning of our being, from the mouth of rivers, from mothers. A daughter is the birth of dream, a daughter is daylight on growing leaves' (10-11).

Vera is however careful to caution against the pitfalls of interpolating girlhood as nature and as utopian in a dystopian, male-dominated society. As opposed to Grandmother's construction of spaces of nature as 'the active unity of opposites in tension' (Merchant 1980: 9) symbolized by the woman, the masculine perception of woman-as-nature is at best conservative, and at worst cannibalistic. Grandmother's 'dialectical image of nature' represents 'the impetus to move society forward toward a new ideal' (Merchant, *ibid.*: 7) where Muroyiwa's construction of girl childhood-as-nature is meant to subdue, dominate and 'cannibalise' his daughter. Carolyn Merchant advises that how we describe nature is 'ethic-laden' (1980: 3). 'The writer or culture may not be conscious of the ethical import yet may act in accordance with its dictates' (*ibid.*: 3).

Kay Sambell, in her essay 'Carnivalizing the Future', discusses how writers 'often seek to portray the "child-as-utopian" within their novel, in an attempt to signal hope for a better world' (2004: 252). However, Sambell points out that, 'In the bleakly ironic landscape of the dystopian form [...] child-utopians are predominantly imaginatively cast as innocent and vulnerable victims. [...] Their innocence means they are likely to be viewed as easy prey, tragically ill-equipped to survive in the aggressively masculine world of the imagined future' (2004: 252-253). Although Sambell's observations are based on her study of childhood in science fiction for young readers, they can be adapted to explain the fate that befalls Zhizha as child-as-nature and child-as-utopia.

Muroyiwa, Zhizha's butterfly-hunting father, by implication links Zhizha to his utopian

quest for nature's mystical potentialities. Muroyiwa, 'the bewitched one', is a Lazarus figure. He rises from the calabash of death in which, as a child, he had been folded for burial (7). 'Muroyiwa had gathered death from inside a calabash and reduced it to a shade of sleep' (7). Now a grown man, he pursues the 'tantalizing beauties' (7) of nature 'during a war' (6).

Muroyiwa is a carrier of and dealer in death, even as he is 'haunted by beauty and loving and the symmetry of mats' (7) and believes that 'beauty purified war' (7). His quest for symmetry is fulfilled when he marries Runyararo ('peace'), who is skilled in mat-weaving. But the beauty, fragility and the playing with/in life and death that butterflies do, something that resembles his own getting into and out of the calabash of death, is sought in the rupturing of taboos via incest and rape.

Zhizha, his own daughter, takes the shape of a reachable utopia of ultimate self-fulfilment 'separate from the war' (55), 'something benign, so harmless it would be impossible to miss; [...]. There was something unscathed, restorable, untouched. There was something mild as milk, mute, but not dead'(55). He seeks an innocence and purity, a frailty and vulnerability that is thought to be reflected in nature, and embodied by children. He rapes his daughter because he conflates her childhood innocence with an imagined state of nature. His rape of Zhizha, who is according to him 'mild as milk, mute, but not dead', reduces her to a passive and docile nature, 'allowing all manner of assault, violence, ill-treatment, rape by lust, and despoilment by greed' (Merchant 1980: 39). It is this 'hidden' norm, which views women as nature, and lives off their vitality, which is at the heart of

the exploitation of the girl body by men in this novel.

David Archard has warned against the preponderance of ideologies that portray children as innocent,

Most worryingly, innocence itself can be a sexualised notion as applied to children. It connotes a purity, virginity, freshness and immaculateness which excites by the possibilities of possession and defilement. The child as innocent is in danger of being the idealised woman of a certain male sexual desire – hairless, vulnerable, weak, dependent and uncorrupted. In sum the ideology of ‘innocence’ may not protect children from sex. It may only expose them to a sexuality in the face of which such innocence is debilitating. (Archard 1993: 40)

To Muroyiwa, Zhizha represents the immaculate freshness ‘which excites by the possibilities of possession and defilement’. In pursuing his ideals, he simultaneously sacralises and desecrates the girl child’s body. In Muroyiwa’s mind, girlhood, and the girl body, emblazon certain iconic investments that run parallel to the strivings associated with the liberation struggle. The war itself is constructed by the nationalist discourses as a space of historical and spiritual yearning. Muroyiwa seeks a different kind of yearning to that pursued by his brother Tachiveyi who joins the liberation struggle. ‘He imagined flowers blooming amid signs of death and silence’ (56). Critics (see Muponde & Taruvinga 2002) have been largely impatient and severe with Muroyiwa’s rape of Zhizha, detecting no direct motive in his rape of her, the horror of it occluding any other possible

reading of his tormented quest for an aesthetic distilled from a private engagement with the omnipresence of the narrative of war. There are multiple crisscrossing and conflicting walks for freedom in *Under the Tongue*, all in the space of war, and all perspectivised via the 'adult's imagination of the child's imagination'(Taussig 2003). Muroyiwa's striving for an idealism within the war, but outside its publicly-stated quests, is indeed an instance of a counter-walk to an all-consuming freedom. It is a striving in the private realm that would have been essentially invisible to the public history in the making. Critics have not tried to link his private enterprise to his rape of Zhizha, on whose girl body converges his multiple paths towards the quest for beauty, 'something unscathed, restorable, untouched'. He sings a lullaby to his daughter ('a lullaby about tiny fishes moving between reeds' (107)) while raping her, and reminds her that she 'must only think of them because they are lonely and afraid and so little' (107). His instruction to the child he is raping to take care of and exercise responsibility towards innocent and frail creatures so that they may grow protected is a mockery of his own situation as father and rapist. By raping her, he 'passes on' to her not a father's kindness and protection, but the death that he draws from the war. There is a close connection between rape and social death. Zhizha, frozen with horror during the rape, recalls: 'I am the opposite of life. I am the distortion of birth. I am silence' (104).

In view of Grandmother's image of nature, as well as Vera's presentation of Zhizha's girlhood as a symbol of the vitality and beneficence of nature, it becomes clear how the 'hidden norms may become conscious or explicit when an alternative or contradiction presents itself' (Merchant, 4). This contradiction, as I will shortly explain, is sharpened by

the bleakness of the state of patriarchy in a war situation. Considered in this context, the hollowness of Muroyiwa's fatherhood and idealism is horrifying. But, also, the institution of motherhood, and the idealism that surrounds it, is called into question through the presence of incest and rape in the text.

Girlhood and the Uncertain in Society

The rape incident speaks of the depth of horror that attends the meltdown of what Susan Bordo (in Francis 2004: 76) called the 'metaphysical commitments of a culture' inscribed on the girl body. Sarah Nuttall (2004: 30) places the phenomenon of girl-child rape in a broader context in which 'the girl child is a radical locus of the uncertain in society' that questions society's own founding imaginaries of continuity and security.

In a society that lives under constant threat to the sexed body, it is difficult to build a civil society, especially so when the threatened, sexed body is the body of the child, here the girl child – since the girl child is a radical locus of the uncertain in society. Affronts to this body, the body of the girl child, represent the maximum level of carelessness, both as an affective and as a political category. (Nuttall 2004: 30)

'The uncertain in society', which reveals the metaphysical investments of a culture on the girl body, is dramatically exposed by the 'death' and 'dying' of menfolk and womenfolk in *Under the Tongue*. Through the portrayal of a suffering and violated girl childhood, Vera enables us to understand some of the processes that lead to the shattering of the myths of motherhood and fatherhood as protective shelters. Through Zhizha's rape and

Muroyiwa's incest, we are able to gauge the impact of the disclosure of incest and rape on the institutions of motherhood and fatherhood, the two pillars of the nation-family.

The depiction of an abused girl childhood affords us a way of understanding the mythologized institution of motherhood, which in *Under the Tongue* is particularly damaged and exposed by the disclosure of incest and rape. But the collapse of the institution of motherhood pulls along in its wake that of fatherhood, and vice versa. The collapse of the institution of fatherhood, as mirrored in the incest and rape, has devastating effects on the imaginaries of motherhood and the idyll of childhood. This domino-like effect, which is one of the ways the uncertain in society impacts on the development of the girl child in *Under the Tongue*, gives rise to an anomic experience of girlhood as dystopia.

What I want to consider first is the institution of motherhood and the imaginaries invested in it. Muroyiwa's wife Runyararo, on discovering the rape, turns into 'a single horrid sound, her voice beaten and lost, her shouts cowering in the midst of her dying' (29).

More than the pain and despair, what we see in Runyararo's reaction to the disclosure of incest and rape is the crumbling of what Patricia Bell (2003: 132) called the 'fundamental aspects in the construction of motherhood'. These aspects are 'motherhood as protection; motherhood as selflessness; and motherhood as a source of power' (Bell, 132). Bell considers the contexts in which these 'very aspects of motherhood contribute to a child's vulnerability' (ibid.: 132).

In Bell's terms, motherhood as protection implies 'the sanctity of a mythical idyll of childhood' which is constructed as requiring 'a complementary construction of adult protectors' (ibid.: 132). Bell argues that because of women's 'greater involvement with children, mothers are seen as being more responsible for protecting their children than fathers' (ibid.: 132). However, what is important in Bell's argument is the demystification of the idea of motherhood as protection, especially in the context of incest and abuse. She contends that, in a situation where mothers present fathers as dominant and to be obeyed, mothers support 'patterns of male dominance' which ensures that they are 'not in a position to teach their children, by example or instruction, to resist an abuse of the father's power' (ibid.: 132). Runyararo is not able to offer protection to Zhizha, nor is she able to see her husband as a potential abuser, hence her daughter is raped right inside the house, the sphere of the mother where she is supposed to be watchful. She therefore cannot be a protector, when she cannot conceive of the possibility of 'danger', because she does not possess a well-developed 'mother's instinct'. Bell defines this instinct as something that operates 'as an alarm, alerting mothers to the needs of their children before these needs were expressed' (ibid.: 129). Runyararo only challenges and kills the father after the abuse has taken place.

Bell defines the second aspect, motherhood as selflessness, as an idea that mothers always put the children first. But Bell notes that this idea, viewed in the wider society, 'is contingent on self-abnegation' (ibid.: 133). Runyararo opts to keep her silence ('Did he not teach me silence, this husband, that a woman is not a man' – (31)) in order to survive the marriage, only breaking the silence after the disclosure of the rape, in order to 'speak

my silence against the husband who is not a man but a lizard' (31). Such self-denying behaviour is traditionally meant to be 'in the children's best interests' (Bell, 133). Bell discusses the ways in which such self-abnegation in the face of violation 'works against children, particularly girls, learning to relate to others in strong assertive ways' (ibid.: 133). It is perhaps the reason why Zhizha has no power to challenge her father more directly. Describing her own reaction to the rape, Zhizha says, 'My cry is silence and death' (104). Her mother, in her reaction to the rape, is 'a single horrid sound, her voice beaten and lost' (29). Bell would explain that Zhizha is 'partly mirroring' her own mother's acquiescence to an oppressive and abusive relationship (Bell, 133). In this case, Runyararo's selfless motherhood is potentially destructive to her daughter.

The last aspect that Bell discusses is 'motherhood as power', 'that is, a moral authority that they have in relation to their role as mothers' (ibid.: 134). First, Bell urges us to view motherhood as 'a social practice and the power of a mother as restricted by her social position' (ibid.: 134). For instance, 'the conditions of poverty and shortage will affect the power of the mother and the position of the child' (ibid.: 134). The failure of Runyararo to uphold the ideal of motherhood as protection and motherhood as selflessness in relation to Zhizha can be explained by her lack of power and the conditions of patriarchal oppression. This is because in a patriarchal set-up, as obtains in the novel, Runyararo has 'no autonomous right to this power' (Bell, 135) of the mother to have moral authority in the family. The power of the mother is a power 'invested in them as protectors of children and is conditional on their putting their children's interests first before their own. The power of mothers does not challenge traditional female roles. It does not challenge women's

oppression in the family, rather it is firmly embedded within this oppression' (Bell, 135).

Her characterisation of her husband as a 'lizard with a rotting stomach', a dog, and again as a 'dead lizard' (31), is nothing more than a confirmation of her position within patriarchal power where fathers and husbands are expected to hold up the image of a protector and provider to their families.

Very much unlike the protector and provider, Muroyiwa, like his name, is portrayed as a bewitched witch, an amoral, taboo-shattering ne'er-do-well. Runyararo describes him not only as decayed, but as a death-monger, 'He has filled my mouth with decay, turning the morrow of my child into death, burying her, in the middle of the night.' (31). Muroyiwa is an infantilised man, who in fact waits for his brother Tachiveyi to return from the war because 'Tachiveyi was at the beginning of things, and Muroyiwa existed somehow at their end. [...]. This was something he believed. Muroyiwa waited for Tachiveyi' (94). He is a man of empty gestures, devoid of autonomy, and is incapable of growth. He is an adjunct to both his brother and the public histories he mediates via the war, hence his childlike dependence and amorality. Muroyiwa represents one of the ghostly presences in the paths of women's struggle for freedom: a patriarch in crisis and imploding from his own deepening hollowness and erosion of status and purpose. VaGomba ('pit/grave'), his father, is blinded by a root ('One morning a root had sprung from the earth and torn the sight from his eyes' (17)). Ironically, and perhaps instructively, the same root that is a metaphor of the resilience and suffering of women, and the traditional language for home, history, lineage, belonging, is the quintessence of an oppressive and silencing tradition

that Grandmother struggles against.

Tachiveyi ('lust/envy') who through the 'war' narrative represents the anticipated closure, 'the wonderful rhapsody' (102), to freedom, is both a lizard-mutilating artist manqué ('He carved a stool [...]. It held a lizard. Tachiveyi had removed the tail from the lizard and thrown it into the fire' (48)), and a treacherous dead man walking ('He had the eyes of one who is about to die or about to reveal a secret' (48)). He goes to war almost in order to die, perhaps because like Muroyiwa (placed in a calabash for burial), he is already a figure of/from death: 'Then without solace he left for the war and walked into its blinding black cloud, bleak and harsh. It was a bitter loneliness, with no illusions of return [...]. An early death, this merging with the future, with the harmonies of war' (48). The male line is represented as possessing a strong streak of death, whether as 'war' hero (Tachiveyi), father-rapist (Muroyiwa), or grand-father (VaGomba). The African family, with its pillars of motherhood and fatherhood crumbling, is a dystopic space from which Zhizha the girl child seeks an escape route through the recuperation of her silenced voice.

Girlhood and the Recuperation of Voice

Zhizha's childhood is an instance of the carriage of female experience through a dying, violent men's history as invoked by Grandmother, as well as an inhibiting and oppressed female history. Although Zhizha is caught up in such a dystopic situation, her childhood represents the prospect of self-reclamation through the act of unveiling 'that most unheard of things, silence' (Butalia 2000: 278). Her silence can be 'viewed as a presence, and as a text, waiting to be read' (Laurence 1994: 157), as well as 'the space in narration where

culture and feminine consciousness do sometimes reveal themselves, if only we can learn to decipher the psychological and cultural meanings' (ibid.: 166).

Zhizha, unlike her mother who had been taught silence ('that a woman is not a man' (31)) by her butterfly-hunting child-raping husband, acquires speech in ways that allows her to 'own her own experiences and desires in such a way that she can rewrite them as she needs to, rather than always simply being the victim of someone else's narrative' (Coats 2003: 209). While the 'irresistible, monolithic pull of the dominant culture' (ibid.: 208) is detectable in the ways in which she absorbs the language of loss and victimhood that her mother and grandmother use to describe the world to her, there is room for what Karen Coats called 'reciprocal agency'. 'Instead of a one-way passage of desire from a fully-formed adult subject to an empty child recipient, it is the relationship, the interaction between two distinct subjects, that creates the conditions for growth in whatever direction' (ibid.: 208). She finds her own voice, even as she calls upon the spiritual connections that Grandmother elaborates, and taps into the cosmic wholeness and circular motions that her own name suggests.

I must call out the name of the sky till it returns, banishing the darkness.
This is how the sun rises from under the land where it is buried. The
departed call the name of the sky and their voices send the sky from
beneath the earth, towards us. When their voices die, the sky departs
from the earth. It is night. A stone waits in my mouth. (52)

In a context in which the “unsayable” has happened to her, Zhizha recalls into being the ancient river where the sun no longer sets or rises. This is because, according to Wolfgang Iser and Sanford Budick (1989), ‘Once we have encountered the limits of the sayable, we must acknowledge the existence of “unsayable things” and, by means of a language somehow formed on being silent, articulate that which cannot be grasped’ (qtd. in Laurence 1994: 157). Zhizha’s voice is reanimated by her connection with a deep ancestral force, land and sky. This is consistent with Grandmother’s invocation of a depthless history of women’s presence and experience on the face of the earth. In this case, Zhizha is a medium of a possessing ancestral memory. She is a link in the great chain of long-remembered mothers who, ‘When their voices die, the sky departs from the earth’ (52). She has the responsibility of dispelling the deathful silence imposed on the womenfolk by a brutal patriarchal history. ‘A stone waits in my mouth’ is more than a metaphor for suppressed speech, but conjures the weight of the grave stone that weighs over women’s narratives. She looks for ways of breaking the cycles of historical and familial silence, and transforms the ‘silence of protest’ (Butalia 2000: 284) that her mothers tended to represent, by seeking a language that departs from the Sisyphean style of bearing burdens. Through the girl child’s narrative, we understand how ‘silences are narrated and marked in the text to represent the presence of women and are not a simple indexing of women’s social positions’ (Laurence 1994: 159).

We have tongues. We are not trees. Our tongues carry all the memory of our pain. [...]. The path to the river is buried on the soles of our feet. This path has many thorns, but it is our path. [...] Even the rain falls on this path which is why the grass grows on it. (52)

Her understanding of the metaphor of the path and feet introduce a radical difference in the styles of struggle between her and Grandmother. There is more locomotion in creating a path of resistance, as contrasted with trees, and more articulatory potential and discursive possibilities in the tongue than in her past. The 'path to the river [which] is buried on the soles of our feet' is no longer the vicious cycle of her victimhood, but a symbolic emergence out of subjection. The sites and symbols of subjection include tears, trees and rivers and even the tongue itself. They also include the site of death and burial, the anthill ('My life began in an anthill where Grandmother buried one word and found another' – (53)), which has religious significance.

The anthill is where Grandmother buried her son Tonderayi ('remember'), a miserable boy whom no-one in her family loved. 'His head is too heavy. Do not embrace him. Do not give him a name he cannot hear his head is filled with water his head is filled with water...' (62-63). Zhizha is haunted by the history of her Grandmother's misfortunes.

I see an anthill. Grandmother is inside the anthill. Under her tongue is a word. I wait under the tongue. I wait for Grandmother. If I do not remember the word I received from my own mother then Grandmother will remain hidden. I do not remember my mother. I must remember the word. I must remove it from under my tongue where Grandmother has placed it and return it to her. (53)

But just as there is need to maintain the connection between sky, land and ancestral spirits,

Zhizha realises that if she breaks the spiritual and experiential connection between her and Grandmother, she would never find the 'word'. The 'word' is like a secret baton that has to be passed from one woman to another. 'A word does not rot, she says. It is not a fruit that rots on the ground. A word does not rot unless it is buried in the mouth for too long. A word buried in the ground only grows roots' (54). The 'word' is more than memory. It is the means of reproducing the gender and should therefore be retrieved from under Grandmother's tongue where it is kept 'hidden' and dormant. Grandmother's is a kind of speaking silence in the sense that it is a form of resistance.

However, for Zhizha, in addition to the invaluable inheritance of the 'word' from her grandmother, it is ultimately the snail and the tortoise that appear in her vision as she is being raped by her father that decide when she should "speak". Both snail and tortoise, silent avatars of her degraded and disintegrated body stumbling towards recovery, mark 'the inadequacy of language to express [the] life' (Laurence 1994: 157) experiences of degradation. The snail seems fragile, although it has a hard shell. Its 'wet path over dying veins' (105) and the 'trail of saliva, of dew' (106) remind her of her own helplessness and debasement beneath her father's weight. 'He enters. I cry into the night but my cry returns to me and spreads down into my stomach like water, water, at the bottom of leaves, water, water beneath rock, water, water between my legs, water' (106). But the tortoise 'moves slowly forward, carrying a broken shell. It pulls its head inside, and hides. It pulls its legs in and hides. [...]. It hides, survives, moves slowly forward' (109). The tortoise can survive the ravages of its environment by utilising its innate coping strategies. She too can rely on her own experience and memory to survive the rape. In motions that recall the

tortoise, 'I crawl forward, move in water. I crawl forward. I creep, I sleep, slowly wake. I sleep. [....]. It is morning. My voice grows from inside me, broken and dry, lies still, waits to be remembered, rises soft like smoke, creeps out of the room, calls for mother, wakes' (110). The tortoise, and not mother or Grandmother, offers her motions that lead to her slow but painful break with her vitae of abuse, invasion and silence. Its legendary longevity and ability to outlive adversity gives a primordial quality to Zhizha's narrative of suffering. The vision of the tortoise empowers her when she integrates it into her consciousness of the tenuousness of her own narrative over the long years that it has been hosted in hostile patriarchal histories.

The intensity of agony and disorientation suffered by Zhizha during and after the brutal rape by her father gives the narrative a viscid quality. The narrative is the inexorable cumulative tale of unrelieved pain and the steady slide into the morass of victimhood. What transforms the narrative of absolute loss into a sublime aesthetic experience is the imbrication of finely honed metaphors of both subjection and recuperation, stasis and motion, trauma and resilience. It is finally the tongue, upon which balances the fate of girl childhood, that gives vent to embodied atrocities that childhood inscribes in *Under the Tongue*. The novel simultaneously provides a hermeneutic of the unspeakableness of the trauma of girlhood, while it constitutes itself as the spoken instance of that trauma and an indictment of the patriarchal system which makes such violations possible.

It is important to look at the idea of the rape of the girl child as one tale of the struggle for independence. Vera places it on the same scale as the struggle for national freedoms. She

does this in order to point to the importance of Zhizha's struggle from under the weight of the rock of silence placed on women's narratives both by centuries of patriarchy and the machinations of a narrow 'patriotic' history. There are parallel vibrations between Zhizha's struggle and the struggles that inaugurate the public narrative of the nation. These counter-pointing narratives of suffering and loss, which are about the beginnings and growth of orders of knowledge and subjective consciousness, help to check the claims of each narrative on the other.

Nervous Conditions: Girl Childhood as a Gift from Death

If Zhizha's childhood in Vera's *Under the Tongue* speaks to, and within, the spirit of the 'tears' and the unspeakable suffering that possesses it, and that it possesses, Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* delineates the ways in which Tambu recovers speech and relocates to the centre of the social and political narrative when her brother Nhamo dies. Through the dialectic of opposition and appropriation, which she personifies, Tambudzai suggests a break with the narrative of laments and tears in *Under the Tongue*. The narrative of suffering as represented in Under the Tongue, tends to give the impression that the history inherited and embodied by the girl child is one long unbroken dirge. It is, however, the close connection between death and girlhood, the idea that girlhood can only fully emerge if boyhood is "killed", and the trapping tropes that it suggests, that I would like to explore in order to explain the complex ways in which the tropes of 'son of the soil' and 'children of resistance' are subverted and reconfigured in *Nervous Conditions*. If in *A Son of the Soil* and *Child of War*, the oppressed could only find peace and fulfilment when the colonizer was killed or defeated, in *Nervous*

Conditions it can be proposed that oppressed female life can only find full expression in the absence or death of certain kinds of male figures. This idea is foregrounded in the opening sentence of *Nervous Conditions*: ‘I was not sorry when my brother died’.

The opening paragraph of Tsitsi Dangarembga’s novel has drawn emotive and speculative remarks from critics, because it is doubtful that a story like that is expected. The narrator Tambu, a girl aged 13 in the year 1968, subverts the expected narrative ethics by declaring: ‘I was not sorry when my brother[Nhamo] died. Nor am I apologising for my callousness, as you may define it, my lack of feeling’ (1). But as the story of Tambu’s girlhood successfully demonstrates, it is one of those instances in narrative experience when ‘the story surpasses the thought measured to think it’ (Newton 1995: 3) by critics.

Elizabeth Willey (2002) finds the statement callous. She summarises the reactions of most critics to Tambu’s attitude towards her brother’s death, and to the narrative that she goes on to construct about her quest for education as a result of the death. ‘How are we supposed to trust a narrator who does not regret her brother’s death? Why should we read the story of such a callous young girl?’ (2002: 61). These rhetorical questions from critics reveal not only society’s “hidden” narrative ethics, but a lot about society’s understanding of what a girl child should be, and what a good girl child’s story should read like. But of course, critics generally overlook the questions implied in Tambu’s opening sentence, which can be summarised as ‘what “kind” of life, what “kind” of story’ (Newton 1995: 4) girlhood represents in her narrative.

Pauline Ada Uwakweh (1998: 15) discusses what is considered to constitute female socialization 'into the ethics of ultimate female attainment' in Africa. She notes how 'the expressions of emotion are particularly encouraged in girl children' (15). For Tambu not to exhibit tearful expressions of emotion over her brother's death, and not to cry longer, says something about the distance she had put between her and the norm. It also says something about the spiritual and emotional connections she is prepared to sublimate especially in a situation where not mourning the child of and from her own mother's womb amounts to social death. In Shona they say someone like that '*haazi munhu*' (she is not a person/a human), or '*hapana zvemunhu*' (she is not a proper human/person or there is no human you can see in her). In other words, it is not only her socialization that is brought into question, but her membership in the human race. By beginning her story the way she does, Tambu is prepared to be regarded as a non-person, and a non-woman.

Despite the catchiness of her opening sentence, Tambu the narrator is fighting a credibility battle with readers. She is expected to recuse herself from narrating the story because her moral judgement is in question. But the authority and sincerity of her particular experience as a girl can only be vindicated and underwritten by her narrative, which she proceeds to relate without apologising for her callousness.

Tambu's admission of her 'lack of feeling' as a child, and as an adult retrospectively, is not meant to be read off as a lack of sophistication and culture, nor is it meant to suit imaginaries of what Leslie Fiedler (1971: 471) called the 'incorruptible naivete' and

‘unfallen freshness of insight’ that the child’s ‘eye of innocence’ is assumed to project. It is a way of signalling a departure from the norm of particular discursive matrices that prescribe or predict the nature and content of African girlhood narratives in a colonial setting. Tambu as a child and an adult narrator rejects presumptions that subjects can be known in advance. As Claudia Castaneda (2002: 170) suggests, ‘Instead, knowing requires coming to apprehend the singularity of all subjects, the complexity of their histories, and the modes of their subjection as these change over time and place.’¹¹

Tambu the narrator is now an adult, and according to Julia Brannen (2004: 410), ‘people reflect upon past childhoods while also being cognisant of the changes that they witness subsequently. How adults recall childhood relates to their own experiences in childhood, the ideas and conditions that shaped these at the time, their cultural location in time and place, their linkages to others’ lives and their own agency at the time.’ Tambu explains the singularity of the conditions and the cultural location in time and place that led her to position herself as an adversary to her ‘brother-enemy’, as Rooney (1995) calls Nhamo. There are mitigating circumstances, as she explains, and interlinked narratives that make Nhamo’s death ultimately beside the point. The presentation is dispassionate, and is in the style of a petition before a jury. But it could easily be the testimony of a condemned person awaiting hanging:

¹¹ *Nervous Conditions* has been unfortunate because its author attached a quote from Frantz Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth*, which goes, ‘The condition of native is a nervous condition’. Since the novel’s publication, it has not been possible to read critical essays that do not foreclose interpretations of *Nervous Conditions* as a response to or elaboration of Fanon’s work. A case in point is Ann Elizabeth Willey and Jeanette Treiber’s edited book, *Emerging Perspectives on Tsitsi Dangarembga: Negotiating the Postcolony* (2002). Reacting to such damaging presumptuous narrow readings, Dan Wylie (2002:67) wrote that *Nervous Conditions* was ‘now done-to-desiccation’.

For it is not that at all. I feel many things these days, much more than I was able to feel in the days when I was young and my brother died, and there are reasons for this more than the mere consequent of age. Therefore I shall not apologise but begin by recalling the facts as I remember them that led up to my brother's death, the events that put me in a position to write this account. For though the event of my brother's passing and the events of my story cannot be separated, my story is not after all about death, but about my escape and Lucia's; about my mother's and Maiguru's entrapment; and about Nyasha's rebellion – Nyasha, far-minded and isolated, my uncle's daughter, whose rebellion may not in the end have been successful. (1)

The “hanging” that awaits Tambu's narrative is suggested by the grave doubts expressed by Willey (2002). It is the status and integrity of the narrative at stake, especially because it is doubly disadvantaged by being the story of a dead “man” told by a remorseless woman/sister. What should be underlined from the outset is that Tambu is not Nhamo's killer, nor is Nhamo murdered, although there are strong elements of the whodunit genre in the way she presents her summation of the narrative. What is on trial, and what her deposition ironically exposes, is the moral taint of not mourning, and not ‘burying’, a dead brother. In the Shona culture, of which she is a member, she could be guilty of a serious moral infraction. Caroline Rooney correctly identifies Tambu's moral and cultural incompetence which threatens to cripple her spiritually when Nhamo's memory comes back to haunt her later in the story: ‘it is the Nhamo she has buried within herself, without mourning him (which is to say, not burying him) that she fears will take her over’(1995: 132). Not to mourn, not to grieve, is not to bury: it means disrespecting, harming and

abusing the dead. In Shona culture, it is a taboo to abuse the dead, because '*wafa wanaka*' (every person is good when dead), and should be "missed". Avenging spirits, *ngozi*, or *munyama*, ill-luck, haunt those who do not pay their last respects to their dead. In this sense, Tambu is in danger of being a social misfit, just like her cousin Nyasha who later in the story suffers a nervous breakdown and is in a state of near-death in a psychiatric unit when Tambu concludes her story. She starts her narrative on a limp, so to speak. On the one hand she must explain why her narrative enterprise should not be "shut down" because of her lack of "culture", and on the other, she must prove that she can tell a story, and she has a story to tell, because she is a 'woman' in a patriarchal society. She explains her attitude towards her brother's death as something that was brought about by her desire to get an education, and escape the drudgery of domestic labour and the chilling prospect of living the life of an unfulfilled woman as mother and wife. She saw Nhamo and her father, who actively thwarted her ambition, as standing between her and her dream.

But it is important to ask precisely what kind of relationship this childhood has with death. The story begins with death, and ends with near-death. The first death is Nhamo's. The second is Nyasha's near-death which is a long process. The third, which does not materialise, is suspended throughout the story. It is the death that critics threaten Tambu's narrative with because it starts on the wrong note or foot. She has to justify why else it should be told, so she convenes a community of the hurt women to build a majority against Nhamo's case. But that, as it turns out, is not even the first attempt on Tambu's life story.

The events that led to her brother's death, 'events that put me in a position to write this account' (1), meant that as a girl she could not be certain of going to school, and therefore developing her own potential, while Nhamo the boy lived. It is a girl childhood that existed in suspended animation for as long as there was a boy in the family. When she says, 'My story is not after all about death', it does not for a moment take our attention away from thoughts and metaphors of death and dying as part of the story cycle. The pivot of the story is Nhamo, and his death. What animates her story, and her becoming, is Nhamo and the death of the boyhood he represents. What enables her story is death and her disavowal of the cultures and politics of grief, loss and mourning attached to it. The story is not about death only in the sense that it does not end at the precise moment that Nhamo enters non-existence. Its existence, and the existence of its narrator, is an unexpected gift from death.

If her girlhood and life is a gift from a brother's death, in what ways does Tambu harm or benefit her benefactor? Understanding the way in which she relates to the dead, and the ethical dimension implicated in the relationship between the living and the dead, helps us to appreciate the directions of her social development as a girl child in a Shona society. It helps us particularly to make claims about her place, and how she subverts that place, in the social imaginaries created in the public histories of which she is a part, and with which she has a complex relationship.

Fisher (2001: 558) believes that 'Posthumous harm and benefit are possible because people who are now dead possessed interests prior to death that continue to exert a claim

after death.’ To follow Fisher, Tambu benefits the now dead Nhamo by completing his project, that is acquiring a prestigious education, that Nhamo had been chosen to enjoy specially because Babamukuru believed, ‘These children who can go to school today are the ones whose families will prosper tomorrow’(45). When Nhamo dies, Babamukuru considers Tambudzai as a replacement since ‘there is no male child to take this duty, to take this job of raising the family from hunger and need’ (56). When Tambu finally enters her uncle’s house at the mission where her education would begin, she writes: ‘I could not wait to enjoy these comforts that Nhamo had described to me in patient, important detail. I could not wait to enjoy these consequences of having acquired an education on Babamukuru’s part, of being in the process of acquiring one in my case’(61).

She harms the now dead Nhamo by undermining his memory. For Fisher, ‘the ongoing relationship between the living and the dead has an ethical dimension. When the interests of the dead are promoted, not only is the ongoing connection between the living and the dead respected, but also the dead are benefited’(2001: 568). Tambu is keen to make the memory of the deceased Nhamo stink, and she very much wishes to have no relationship with him. But her life continues to be determined by the memory of Nhamo. Ironically, much as she would like him dead and forgotten, she raises his spectre at every turn of her narrative, making the story as much about Nhamo as it is about her. Nhamo, buried with all his sins on his head, is as Caroline Rooney (1995: 133) puts it, ‘thought-to-death’ by her sister. It is unethical in Shona to speak ill of the dead, but Tambu invokes damning memorials of him wherever his name crops up. She makes a mockery of the time-honoured R.I.P. in death and dying, and causes the spirit of the dead Nhamo much unrest.

She reverses and subverts the imaginaries of death as a life-affirming phenomenon, which in Chirasha's *Child of War* and Wilson Katiyo's *A Son of the Soil* inspires the 'son of the soil's dynamic relationship with the dead ancestors and guerrillas.

In the mythologies of anti-colonial nationalism, a relationship to the dead heroes performs the same functions as that identified by Cilas Kemedjio (2004) in his study of messianic figures in postcolonial history. It 'crystalliz[es ...] charismatic figures of political liberation as catalysts of new existential, historic, and symbolic legitimacies' (2004: 91). However, Tambu declares: 'I became confident that I would not go the same way as my brother' (71). By refusing to see anything life-affirming in dying like her brother, or continuing a relationship with a dead brother, Tambu is questioning not only these symbolic legitimacies, but her own unstressed connections with the 'political palimpsests' (Andrade 2002: 34) of her time. It is a time of the war of liberation¹² in which death is presented 'as a collectively social experience' (Frankenberg 1987: 127) 'in which resurrection, or at least continuity, has been assured by the example to surviving revolutionaries of dying for the cause' (ibid.: 124). But suffering is resolved in her quest for private meaning, as Rooney (1995) explains, instead of resolving it in public histories as in the case of Chirasha's *Child of War* and Katiyo's *A Son of the Soil*.

Caroline Rooney (1995) notes that, although *Nervous Conditions* is set in the years of the

¹² Suzan Z. Andrade (2002:48) writes 'that a historical narrative undergirds the more literary tale of Tambu and Nyasha. [But] [t]he reader has to labour to discover and then trace a relationship between them, so elliptical are the illusions.' Charles Sugnet (1997: 34) argues that 'the reader is in the hands of a politically conscious novelist who understands the reach of colonialism into the texture of daily life.' He however correctly notes that, 'The national liberation struggle is conspicuous by its absence in this novel, and yet I think there may be a complex, partly subterranean relationship between it and the struggles of the young Tambudzai against the immediate manifestations of patriarchy in her life' (ibid.: 34).

war of liberation, 'The war areas in the novel are within the patriarchal family' (135). She acknowledges that the novel 'deflects attention from national appeals' (135), perhaps just as *Under the Tongue*, 'to the question of the inequalities between families' (ibid.). For Rooney, this is a strategic project, because 'If charity begins at home (and *Nervous Conditions* is about familial charity), then so, perhaps, does war' (ibid.). In asking about Tambu's relationship to death, as represented by the war of liberation and Nhamo's struggle for self-emancipation, we are ultimately asking about her mode of interaction with the metaphysics and materiality of her world. First, she creates what Sarah Nuttall (2004: 30) conceptualises as the 'uncertain in society' which questions society's own founding imaginaries of continuity and security. Second, she questions the viability of the cathexes that are invested in death and kinship, and liberates herself from the uncritical lore and uses of death in her society.

Tambu observes that Nhamo's remains are buried 'in the family burial ground beside my grandmother and other ancestors' (56), in spite of the fact that as a "son of the homestead", and by extension, of the soil, 'He had forgotten how to speak Shona' (52). He had denounced both biological and spiritual links with his father in order for him to 'be given a good chance in life' at the mission. "I shall no longer be Jeremiah's son," he boasted" (48). The girl child is forced to defend the father who does not think much of her anyway, and does a lot to frustrate her progress as a child and a girl. The father believes that 'Tambudzai's sharpness with her books is no use because in the end it will benefit strangers' (56). The same sentiments are reproduced by Nhamo. (49).

Nhamo consistently works to frustrate Tambu's aspirations by destroying her maize field which she had hoped to use to get money for her fees and by destroying her self-esteem (21-34). In spite of her desire to cultivate daughterly love and respect for her father and sisterly concern for her brother, she finds herself trapped in what Nhamo succinctly and ominously prescribes for her: "'It's the same everywhere. Because you are a girl'". It was out. "That's what Baba said, remember?" (21). Tambu writes: from this point, 'My concern for my brother died an unobtrusive death' (21).

She always saw both Nhamo and her father as half-made men, who could not 'stand up straight like Babamukuru' (49-50) and 'always looked as though they were cringing' (50). This characterisation of her father and brother recalls Muroyiwa's waiting on his brother Tachiveyi in *Under the Tongue*. Tambu developed an adversarial relationship to her brother, and always delighted in his absence first from the homestead, when 'she would be free to talk to whomever I wished' (51) because he was now at the mission, and second when he dies, so he could not interfere with her aspirations. By wishing he were absent from her life, Tambu wishes Nhamo dead. And there are instances when she wished she could have killed him: 'I charged again, intending this time to kill, and instead found myself struggling in mid-air at the end of an adult arm' (23). It is not entirely correct therefore to argue as Caroline Rooney does, that the death of Nhamo is willed retrospectively, 'that is: because he died, I could then want his death; I could recreate his death, despatch him, in order to begin re-creating myself, re-presenting myself, writing' (1995: 133). Rooney denies Tambu a sense of metaphysical agency. She is unable to accept that her desire for her brother's death is both fantasised and realised by the same

person, even though the death is effected by a mysterious agent. His death flows from the logic of her fantasising 'the advantage of my brother's absence' (51) even when he was alive.

In discussing Tambu's childhood and her relationship to deaths - metaphorical and physical - critics have overlooked the work of grief especially where the deceased once abused or betrayed the mourner. For Tambu, the experience of grieving in such a situation, and with such memories, changes the iconography of death and suffering. As Wing-Shan Cheung and Samuel M.Y. Ho (2004: 59) observed, 'the conceptualization of death is affected by cultural and socio-personal experiences.' After Nhamo's death Tambu struggles into a new role and identity that is free of the tyranny of violence and victimization.¹³ Tambu does not grieve because she has not suffered a loss. She treats Nhamo's death as the death of an "abuser". She turns around Thomas Attig's (2004: 348) idealistic formulation of the nature of the self as revealed in bereavement where 'Our relationships can and do mean a great deal to most of us. But few appreciate how the connectedness that such relationships afford is integral to the persons we are.' Tambu experiences the relationship with Nhamo her brother as unfulfilling. It only meant a great deal to her in terms of the potential for destruction that it posed. But she demonstrates Attig's (2004) understanding of grief work as 'choice-filled' (344). This is because grief work is 'inherently active, the specific course of grieving response is unpredictable to the

¹³ Kathleen Monahan (2003:646) in her article titled 'Death of an Abuser: Does the Memory Linger on?' discusses the work of grief in a situation where the bereaved was not able to challenge the deceased abuser, and explores the postmortem coping strategies adopted by the victims/survivors. In Tambu's case, she was able to confront Nhamo when he was alive, so does not necessarily have to say 'Now that he's dead let's tell everyone what he did' (Monahan, *ibid.*), because the telling begins with her confrontation with him in life.

extent that it is shaped and coloured by the individual griever's character and exercise of freedom and choice' (345). For Tambu, the girl child, Nhamo's death is a glorious opportunity to express choice over and above what Attig called the 'choicelessness of bereavement' (ibid.: 344). It is a moment to defy societal norms that coerce the bereaved to grieve even when they do not experience the death of another as a loss. It is also a moment to mark her independence from social practices and habits of thought that constrict and repress critical questioning because they inhabit the space of 'tradition' and acquire the force of taboo.

Tambu's actions in childhood should be considered intelligent dissent. Where her brother Nhamo is both inept as victim and agent of patriarchal and colonial education; Nyasha her idealistic and doomed cousin is more severely entangled in the bird-lime of the forces of the worlds she neither can inhabit nor conquer. Tambu is neither overwhelmed by the forces of tradition, nor that of colonialism, because she insists on constructing strategic doubt as a life-enhancing "survival critique" in any discursive-material practices. At the Mission, both Nyasha and Nhamo are examples of ill-fated visitors to the Shona equivalent of a mythical place called '*kuMazivandadzoka*' – a perilous place of uncertainty where misguided quests are quashed. In this place of temptations and uncertainties, the two cousins are the quintessence of 'victimage' (Parry 2004: 38)¹⁴. Both Nhamo's sheepish and at times enthusiastic pliancy in the face of colonial forces, and Nyasha's anarchic and at times nihilistic energies in her struggle against patriarchy and colonial culture, result in their doom. The fate of these two characters points to a

¹⁴ Note how white missionaries continue to be called 'wizards' in the novel.

lacuna in the struggle methodologies and options that both childhoods rehearse. It is in Tambu's experiences as a girl child that a 'new corpus of sensibility' is developed to construct 'a new architecture of cultures' (Harris qtd. in Parry 2004: 38) which is rooted in the strict and tactical application of the rational and the knowledge of 'what could or couldn't be done' (*Nervous Conditions*, 203).

The demolition work for the new architecture of cultures to begin is initiated by Tambu's lack of grief for her brother, and her valorisation of a new ethic of death and dying. Her attitude towards her brother's death structures her appreciation of death or near-death, and the social investments made in death and dying, throughout the story. For example, at the end of her story, Tambu does not think that the self-starving Nyasha's struggles and near-death experience have much to contribute to society at large, except 'creeping feelings of doom' (203). This is because Nyasha, Chido and Nhamo 'had all succumbed' (203) to what Tambu's mother called the 'Englishness' of the mission school which would 'kill them all' (202). When Nyasha is left in the psychiatric unit, her life hanging on 'doses of Largactil' (202), there is a sense in which Tambu views her as an inauspicious interregnum in her development as a girl. Nyasha represents the withering of an uprooted girlhood, and a nightmare caused by visionary failure which Tambu regards as a threat to her 'rational life'. She is thus happy to escape the thoughts of a dying Nyasha, 'who had everything' (202), but could not survive. 'I could not bear to think about it, because at that time we were not sure whether she would survive. All I knew was that the doctor would not commit himself. Nyasha's progress was still in the balance, and so, as a result, was mine' (202).

Nyasha represents a version of Nhamo who was offered 'everything' by Babamukuru, but could not survive. She represents a kind of atrophy and wastefulness which is contrasted with the resourcefulness and tenacity of the more rooted and more inspired 'peasant girl' Tambu who 'triumphed' and 'was not seduced' (70) by the possible consequences of a colonial modernity. Tambu, keen to define a sense of her own balance in the world, writes: 'I became confident that I would not go the same way as my brother' (71) and was always 'wary' (75) of her cousin Nyasha who possessed something 'so intangible that I could not decide whether it was intangibly good or intangibly bad' (75-76). Towards the end of the novel Tambu leaves for an elitist girls high school where the 'Englishness' that destroyed Nhamo and Nyasha were most concentrated. As a way of saying goodbye to each other, Tambu and Nyasha 'giggled foolishly' (192) because 'we needed to laugh to forget that this was the end of our closeness and to that extent our friendship' (192). It does not surprise then that Tambu does not find time to grieve over Nyasha's state of near-death, because she had always considered her someone who 'would have too many surprises; she would distract me' (75).

What is worth noting is that in the traditional bildungsroman, a young man would normally be distracted by a woman, but in Tambu's story, a girl could consider another girl, and even a mother, as a threat to her progress and survival. When Tambu's mother sulks and threatens Tambu with her emaciated, 'haggard and gaunt' (57) body in order to prevent her from taking the place of Nhamo in Babamukuru's house, Tambu writes: 'I, I was triumphant' (57). In Tambu's strategy, the female folk are to be fought as hard as the

male folk, if not harder. This is because, as Maxine Rodinson suggests, in romanticising the oppressed, 'it becomes quite inconceivable that the oppressed might themselves be oppressing others' (qtd. in Harlow 1987: 29). In other words, Tambu uses her girlhood experiences to point up complexities and possibilities in the struggle against both colonial and patriarchal oppression. Hence the triumphant, 'I told myself I was a much more sensible person than Nyasha, because I knew what could or couldn't be done' (203). While it makes her sound terribly self-righteous, it in fact suggests the fragility of her project of actually surviving the complexity of being an educated black woman.

Her fear of Nhamo's aphasia and bullish disposition is as strong as her distrust of Nyasha's mercurial and rather erratic style of struggle. It enables her to deny Nhamo's boyhood and death the centrality of its own narrative, which she veers around from the motif of the prodigal son and repossesses as a narrative of the child – the girl child – of resistance. This time, the child of resistance is a girl child who mounts a war against not only types of patriarchal and colonised boyhoods represented by Nhamo and Chido, but a particular self-destroying and resisting girl childhood represented by Nyasha. The trauma caused by her encounter with Nhamo and his death, and Nyasha and her flesh-wasting anorexia, structures her behaviour throughout her childhood. But unlike Zhizha's experience of a shattering and unspeakable trauma, Tambu's experience of trauma is paradoxically uplifting, enriching and empowering. It is perhaps comparable to Alexio's in *A Son of the Soil* and Hondo's in *Child of War* in the sense that the suffering is brought to bear on the cultivation of deeper social consciousness, but it is different to Hondo's and Alexio's because Tambu's childhood is not meant to be projected into and through public

narratives and struggles such as the liberation war. Tambu engages with struggles that are both old and new. On the one hand, they are the seemingly opposed but complementary oppressive regimes of colonial and African patriarchy the African girl has to struggle under and against; and on the other, there is the struggle on a general level to do with colonial institutions and legacies such as the schools. Tambu's narrative, though set in the early years of the war of liberation, is already pointing up the oversights committed by a war obsessed with 'repossessing the soil' as portrayed in *Child of War* and *A Son of the Soil*. It inscribes into the 'soil' narrative concerns that the postcolonial African world is yet to surpass: questions such as what to make of our experience of colonial modernity and its legacies.

Tambu's Childhood as Story of the Nation?

In spite of its seemingly obsessive 'family' and gender focus, the novel is trapped in the discursive-material matrices of the "soil". It is a trope which undergirds its plot as an indelible palimpsest perhaps in the same way it supplies the ideological and structural meshing in *Child of War*, *A Son of the Soil*, *Harvest of Thorns*, *Bones*, and *Waiting for the Rain*. The idea of an identity and citizenship, an authenticity and autochthony that could be underwritten by a return to the "soil" is not only Ndabaningi Sithole's (1977) or Katiyo's (1976). Tsitsi Dangarembga wrote an unpublished play titled 'Lost of the Soil', which according to Zhuwarara (2001: 243), explored the alienated lives of Zimbabwean exiles in Britain. The title of the unpublished play resonates with the potent symbols of the nationalist struggle. While one may not necessarily agree, it is not difficult at all to appreciate why Anthony Chennells (1996) and Rino Zhuwarara (2001) insist on a reading

framework which recalls Tambudzai's childhood to that of a new Zimbabwe. Zhuwarara writes approvingly of Tambu's intelligent grasp of history,

Tambudzai grows up having a sense of where her people are coming from as well as their traumatic encounter with colonial agents and their subsequent displacement and enslavement. This understanding partly accounts for her implacable refusal to be alienated from her roots, however imperfect they might appear to others'. (2001: 252)

It is clear that Zhuwarara glosses over the discomforts that Tambu expresses about her life and possible fate in her rural home. Instead, he moulds his eulogy after the fashion of the obituaries of patriots of the Zimbabwean nationalist struggle.¹⁵

Further, she also learns early in life from her grandmother how a conquered people can accommodate themselves to oppression only to live long enough to strengthen their position from within as her grandmother does by sending her son Babamukuru to a mission school – an insight which Tambudzai has as she confronts patriarchy in Babamukuru's home while on the surface appearing to be compliant. (Zhuwarara 2001: 252)

Grandmother is important in terms of the politics of passing on what is to be learnt from heroic exploits. If in *A Son of the Soil* and *Child of War* the family myth, and therefore the founding myth, of the nation is the figure of the heroic grandfather, in *Nervous Conditions* it is the grandmother who initiates and structures the girl child's sense of historical beginnings and destiny. But it is a destiny that dovetails with the way the story of the

¹⁵ Obituaries of Zimbabwe's 1970s liberation heroes are constructed on a template that reproduces a ritualized beginning in suffering/prison/exile; a middle fraught with strife/temptations/determination; and a triumphant ending which delivers the new baby called Zimbabwe.

nation is imagined as a singular, one-eyed version of history. According to Boehmer (1991), because 'men have monopolised the field of nationalist identity and self-image, women may thus have to evolve other strategies of selving – perhaps less unitary; perhaps more dispersed and multifarious' (9). What we see in grandmother, though, which is passed on to Tambu, is the desire to strengthen her position 'from within' the given social structures in order to 'live long enough', as Zhuwarara suggests.

Anthony Chennells enthuses over the symbolic possibilities of Tambu's childhood in the new nation's imagination.

Unlike Nyasha, the West has never possessed Tambudzai. As author her perspectives are those of modern Zimbabwe which at its most assured can cast sceptical glances at the metropole from Africa and glance again without disabling sentimentality at Africa from what is no longer the metropole but one available space among the multiple and different spaces of the contemporary world. (1996: 74)

As judged by the two critics, Tambu's is perhaps the most successful and approved childhood to enter the pantheon of the Shona, by extension Zimbabwean, cultural gods. If Nhamo the boy, in spite of his sins, was buried in the family cemetery among his immediate ancestors, Tambu's childhood is extended to claim a space in the imaginaries of the nationalist struggle at least beyond the time-mark of independence. Zhuwarara and Chennells present her as the new Zimbabwe, even though the country continues to be called a fatherland. In the view of the two critics, the future of the new nation resides in the secure belief that she is not only the material from which the new nation is

constructed, but that she is a sentinel of the new nation, casting ‘sceptical glances at the metropole from Africa’. This is an idea that conjures surveillance and would please both Ranka Primorac (2005) and Terence Ranger (2005) in their exploration of the constellation of social and political practices that constitute patriotic history in Zimbabwe. Ranka Primorac (2005) detects the uses of the glance, or the art of “looking”, by detectives entrusted with ferreting out spies and strangers in contemporary Zimbabwe. Tambu’s girlhood is therefore linked by Zhuwarara and Chennells to teleologies whose omega is the story of the nation. It becomes much easier to appropriate Tambu as an efficient sleuth of the new nation.

The Female Bildungsroman and Girl Childhood

It is interesting to explore the contradictions represented in viewing Tambu’s childhood as the prototype of Zimbabwean patriotic discourse, not least because of Chennells’s understanding of her centrality to the imaginings of the new nation. First, we must note how the established critiques of *Nervous Conditions* as a female bildungsroman with Fanonian undertones limit our understanding of the genre to two poles. The narrative is viewed as either a female bildungsroman, or an inversion of the male-centred nationalist discourse. In both cases, its central focus can be sketched as a movement from domesticity to independence, and from what Chennells (1996: 74) called Tambu’s displacement from the ‘constructed femaleness of the classic discourse’ to her emplacement within a modern discourse ‘which has transformed but not displaced the classical.’ The seeming conundrum of progress that Chennells sketches can best be illustrated by looking at *Nervous Conditions* as a female bildungsroman. I want to argue that the movement of

Tambu's childhood from/within the traditional to the modern, as constructed by the *bildungsroman*, may suggest only a series of inversions of dualisms, rather than a radical subversion of the classical discourse.

Uwakweh (1998) argues that in the African female *bildungsroman*, the central focus is 'the quest for education' (10). 'Childhood for girls is dotted with silent frustrations that sometimes translate to self-defining actions; actions that may be expressed in revolt and are intended to transcend social limitations' (1998: 10). Uwakweh triumphantly, and uncritically celebrates the arrival of the female *bildungsroman*: 'the social myths that perpetuate gender bias and inaccurate pictures of African womanhood have been largely debunked by the female perspective. [...] More attention is given to the female experience – thoughts, feelings, and actions' (1998: 11). Uwakweh does not take into account the fact that there are continuities registered in Tambu's childhood and development that can be traced to the set of "gifts" she receives from the menfolk. From Nhamo's gift of death, Tambu inherits some of the character traits of the giver: she becomes one of the most calculating, self-interested individuals with a heightened sense of self-preservation. From Babamukuru she inherits his inflexibility in pursuit of education and success; his severe rationality; and his concealment of internal weaknesses such as the "nerves" he suffers from. In spite of Zhuwarara's eulogy, Tambu's concealment of her inner feelings is also linked to her bodiless life. Her attacks on Babamukuru are withdrawn and revised as soon as they are made, because they are not meant to shake the house. They are only "survival critiques", for self-preservation, from someone who has learnt how to walk through and around structures, like grandmother and Babamukuru's narratives suggest, rather than

desire their immediate uprootment.

Uwakweh's celebration of the African female bildungsroman is therefore a misplacement of critical trust. The quest for education in the female novel, if not the first step to the nationalist struggle, parallels the quest for land in a male bildungsroman such as *Harvest of Thorns*, *A Son of the Soil*, *Child of War* and to some extent *Dew in the Morning*. Teleologically, the quest for education is usually frustrated by the colonial institutions, it breeds resentment, and leads to protest, which immediately is conflated with the struggle to free up the land. The war that ensues is interpreted to be about land, and nothing less. My point is that *Nervous Conditions* as a female bildungsroman is not sufficiently reconstituted to subvert the tending of a nationalist discourse. As will become clear, Tambu's childhood could easily be "masculinised" by nationalist critics such as Zhuwarara and Chennells and appropriated as an "honorary boyhood" that fits the description of a "true", idealized "son of the soil". This "masculinisation" of girlhood is quite in keeping with nationalism's aversion to difference, its predilection for singleness, 'one growth pattern, one birth and blood for all' (Boehmer 1991: 6) as well as its tendency to take examples from 'a heritage of fathers' (ibid.: 6).

Margery Hourihan (1997) warns against the premature celebration of '[s]tories in which a conventional heroic role is played by a woman' (206) because some of the narrative strategies may appear revolutionary by seeming to be inverting dualisms. 'The trouble with a dualism is that if you simply turn it on its head it is still a dualism. Inversion is not the same as subversion' (ibid.: 205). Inversions may fail to subvert the material they

deride. In *Nervous Conditions*, it is possible to infer that ‘if they wish their lives and deeds to be worthy of notice, women must strive to behave as much like men as possible’ (ibid.: 206). The ruthless self-interest of Babamukuru is all too clear to see in Tambu. ‘Nor does such stories pose any challenge to the heroic definition of ideal manhood, for the women display the same courage, prowess, arid rationalism and rigid sense of purpose’ (ibid.: 206). Tambu is the indisputable scion of Babamukuru in this regard. She shares with him his understanding of ‘identity as unity and stability’ (de Castro 2004: 471), a formulation which insists on ‘coherence and stability as a hallmark of the individual’s psychological well-being’ (471). By expecting coherence, or what Babamukuru calls “obedience” and “order”, which Tambu agrees with in her disapproval of Nyasha’s behaviour, ‘one would be able to predict, to a certain extent, a person’s behaviour. Therefore, prediction, and possibly, control of behaviour is at the root of assigning a paradigmatic value to stability and coherence in the process of subjective constitution’ (de Castro: 471). Tambu jettisons Nhamo from this paradigm of unity and coherence because he reneges on his promise ‘to take care of me’ (20) as part of his communal responsibilities *a la* Babamukuru. She excludes Nyasha from this imagined identity because she threatens her with unpredictability and disorder. Tambu is therefore hardly an auspicious vision of a ‘future exercise of democratic participation’ (de Castro: 470) because, according to de Castro, ‘Tolerance towards one’s own otherness may seem a prerequisite to tolerate and deal with the otherness of others’ (470). Tambu deals with her own otherness as severely as she deals with the different other. The politics of minoritizing difference, devaluing it or treating it as threat, as foreshadowed in Tambu’s character, is all too familiar in the practices of the nationalist discourse into which Chennells (1996) and Zhuwarara (2001)

corral Tambu. It is perhaps to Chenjerai Hove's *Ancestors* that we may now turn to explore the intricate potency of the different other in the form of the figure of the disabled girl child, and how this "extraordinary other" impinges on a boy childhood.

Ancestors: 'A Pestilence of Silence'

Tambu in *Nervous Conditions* manages to present an account of herself which has such experiential depth because the Tambu who "suffers" spiritually possesses the Tambu who narrates. In other words, as Neil ten Kortenaar (1997: 30) observes, 'The inside and outside of this account are absolutely dependent on each other.' The ability to narrate her story is an instance of self-possession, which stamps authority on her self-knowledge. She does not depend on the mediations of others to know and claim her self, and to claim the attentions of others. There are 'unwritten volumes' (Rooney 1995: 139) of her story, as Tambu herself indicates (204), but it is not entirely correct to suggest that there are 'volumes of silence' in the text as Rooney (*ibid.*) does. Tambu has written only the "volume" that constitutes 'my own story' (204). Like Sidonie Smith's 'autobiographical manifesto', it gives her enough room 'to perform publicly' 'the energetic display of a new kind of subject', and intervenes in 'oppressive identity performances, troubling culturally authorized fictions' (Smith 1993: 160). Contrary to what Rooney thinks, it is quite adequate for the purposes of unveiling 'the social structures which define her and others' (Kortenaar 1997: 37) in the story.

The burden of unwritten volumes of silence, and how to mediate the silence, is the subject of Chenjerai Hove's excellent novel *Ancestors* (1996). The silence in *Ancestors* has to do

with the dumbness and deafness of a girl child, an anomalous other; and the processes of her exclusion from the communal narrative of land and its folklore. In this story, there is a sense in which ‘silences are narrated and marked in the text’ (Laurence 1994: 159) in such a way that forces readers to learn to create ‘a cultural dialogue with a silent woman, part of the rhetoric of silence’ (ibid.). Yet, what is underlined in Hove’s novel is not only the ‘typology of literary silences’ (Hedges & Fishkin 1994: 4), but the ‘war against the tyrannies of silence’ (ibid.: 4) which are forced upon the girl child by patriarchy, symbolised here by Miriro’s deaf and dumb condition. In this discussion, I show the ways in which the silence surrounding the essence of girl childhood in *Ancestors* can be considered to be dynamic. It moves from being ‘the place of oppression, the mark of women’s exclusion from the public spheres of life’ to being ‘viewed as a difference of view, an alternative code of “truth”, or sometimes, an expression of anger – the only kind that can be tolerated’ (Laurence 1994: 156-157) via the medium of spirit possession and dreamlore. I also point out the contradictions that accrue to the breaking of girl child silence through dreamlore and spirit possession, and discuss what I consider to be the benefits and limitations of the alternative representational politics couched in the symbolisms of disability.

Tambu’s story contrasts sharply with the story of Mucha in Chenjerai Hove’s *Ancestors*. While Tambu elects to tell the story of ‘the four women whom I loved’ (204), who are in many senses ‘dumb’ because of colonial and patriarchal oppression, but do manage to speak to and against themselves and their oppressors, Mucha in *Ancestors* has the role of ‘hearer’ or story teller thrust upon him by Miriro, a female ancestor who haunts him

throughout the story. Deaf and dumb at birth, she was only ‘a pestilence of silence’ (6), and in life she remained a deaf and dumb girl child who, according to Mucha, ‘was one vast silence which speaks in its silence’(11). ‘Miro, the one the whole village is waiting to speak’ (144), they married off to a ‘drunk and worthless’(146) man. In protest, ‘Early one cold morning, they woke up and found Miro a mere ghost, dead. She had not said a word or sung a song of the sorrows of her heart the previous night’(144). Unlike Tambu whose story could only be set down as a result of the death of a particular boyhood, Miro has to kill herself first before her story could be foisted upon a particular boy, Mucha, a link in the distant chain, who mediates it because he is ‘the hearer of endless tales’ (12). He taps into the volumes of silence trapped in Miro’s bitter dumbness in order to trace both the taproot of his lineage and the sins of the fathers against the womenfolk. In *Ancestors* the girl has to die first in order to tell her story from an invulnerable position as a haunting and angry ancestor. In *Nervous Conditions* the boy has to die in order for the girl’s story to be told, and the boy remains in the shadowy background as a reminder of failure. Nhamo dies, but he is not resurrected as a spiritual force. Miro dies, but resurrects her memory through Mucha the boy, with the insistence and vengeance of something similar to *ngozi*, the avenging spirit.¹⁶ In other words, the reverse of what happens in *Nervous Conditions* occurs here: Miro’s death enables Mucha’s story. In that story is not only the birth of a new boyhood, and the unearthing of a repressed narrative of girlhood, but a sharpened awareness of the social structures that place girlhood in the realm of ‘disability’. It recalls the traumatizing and depersonalizing unspeakableness of the burden of silence in *Under the Tongue*. While in *Nervous Conditions* Tambu was

¹⁶ In Chenjerai Hove’s *Bones*, vengeful ancestral spirits, (which should not be confused with *ngozi*) shrilly goad the ‘sons of the soil’ to rise against the white settlers, thus effecting their agenda through their hosts.

never silent even before Nhamo's death, the silence is associated with women's lack of voice in social and political matters because of the oppressive machinations of colonialism and patriarchy. In *Ancestors*, Miriro's silence is associated with disease ('a pestilence'), and disability (dumbness and deafness).

Writing Girlhood as Possession

That Miriro chooses Mucha as her host and medium is because it gives urgency to her story, especially because of the ambiguity of her identity as a spirit, and her liminal presence as the silent girl in the family. Mucha recounts to his father the nature of the recurring dream he has of Miriro: 'Sometimes she comes to me in the middle of the night, claiming me, wanting to take me away with her. I talk to her and she begins to cry. She cries until early in the morning, wanting to take me with her' (47). Miriro threatens to take Mucha into death, while at the same time, haunting his nights with 'that horrible dream' (46) of his father's death. Mucha listens to Miriro's story in order to repair the damage caused by his male ancestors, and to save himself and his father's life. In a sense, Mucha has no choice but to "hear" and tell the story of Miriro. His relationship to Miriro as an ancestral spirit slips fluidly from host to hostage, and hostage to host. There is a way in which Miriro performs a heist on Mucha and commandeers him to tell her story. Viewed through the trope of spirit possession, where the distinction between host and hostage is slippery, Mucha's authorship is akin to that of Ngugi's Gichaandi player in *Devil on the Cross*, the teller and conveyor of communal memories who is compelled/coerced into his role by the community.

Spirit possession is characterised by Carolyn Cooper (1991: 64) as ‘that ecstatic moment of displacement central to religious practices of Africans’, and a carrier of bodies of ‘subterranean knowledge’ (ibid.). The modes of its transmission may be considered restrictive on the host in the sense that the spirit unilaterally possesses the host. Also, spirit possession ‘encourages amnesia since the possessed person is not supposed to have any memory of how she or he behaved or what was revealed during trance, which in fact [paradoxically] is the very process that enacts the remembering of history and retrieval of communal memory’ (Vambe 2004: 72). However, loss of memory does not happen to Mucha because, like the narrating Tambu who is possessed by the Tambu who suffers, the narrating Mucha is possessed as in a dream by Miriro. He remembers how he *remembers* what he hears and tells during the “trance” of writing. The major difference is that there is a considerable amount of violence used by Miriro to coerce him to tell ‘her’ story in order to reveal the subterranean knowledge of the family history which is suppressed by his fathers.

Where Tambu wrests the story from Nhamo and wrenches it around to suit herself when the chance presents itself, Mucha is wrenched around by an invasive ancestral spirit from his pursuit of missionary education, to make ‘her’ story his, ‘our story’.

She is now a voice that comes and goes as it wills, with no respect for any barrier. She is a dark voice full of joy and sadness, telling its story, my story, our story. I can only be a hearer shaken out of my sleep by the subdued voice of a woman of my blood, my ancestor whose tale is never told, since she was a woman. Only the story of the men, our fathers, were told. Now she sits here, in the nest of my memory, telling our story, as she lived it. (12)

Contrasted with Zhizha's absolute subjection in *Under the Tongue*, in Tambu and Miriro there is an element of violence in claiming and entering narrative space. Securing the space to recount a narrative is both literally and figuratively a deadly struggle, as it can only be enabled by death (of a brother in Tambu's case, and of the author/subject in Miriro's). The ventriloquy of Miriro's spirit, performed 'in the nest' of Mucha's memory speaks not only of Miriro's desire for ubiquity, but portrays her as an occupying force bivouacked at the heart of patriarchy. Not only do her words 'spread their mat in the ears and the heart of the hearer of a dream' (12), she even begins to speak on behalf of the host, collectivizing the destinies and experiences of disparate generations and genders.

So, what is the nature of Mucha's authorship? His life is as threatened as that of Miriro and Tambu, and can only be insured by telling 'her' story, 'our story'. Miriro makes it clear to him: "“You have a story within you, and I am the story. It is this story which has made you live. Not to tell it is death. A story untold is a story of death. One who has a story inside them and does not tell it means they are harbouring death in their hearts, in their souls,' Miriro, the silent one, says' (20-21).

Writing as possession ('Now she sits here, in the nest of my memory, telling our story, as she lived it' - (12)) may limit or expand ways of seeing. Maurice Vambe (2004: 72) is critical of the ways in which possession may be 'used as an ideology of authority and control' over the host, but notes the more liberating aspects of possession which imply 'spiritual displacement, a cultural process that in new contexts generates new meanings

due to “possession’s” impulse towards the metaphorical and the fantastic.’ The spiritual displacement which occurs simultaneously emplaces the subjectivity and vision of the ‘suffering’ spirit in the host, permitting a radical switching, expansion and merging of narrative positions in one location (the body of the possessed). According to Vambe ‘These inherent aspects of spirit-possession interrogate single or unitary ways of seeing which problematizes re-presentation of an empirically ‘real’ world and renders its narratives open, preferring to remain perpetually dissatisfied with stabilized meanings attached to resistance.’(ibid.: 72). It is therefore interesting to explore the ways in which a possessed boyhood may suggest alternative representational politics in the telling of girlhood. It is also important to keep in mind the potential value to representation of an appreciation of possession as instability, and disability as disorder.

Disability and Girlhood

In this part of the chapter, I would like to explore the ways in which silence as ‘disability’, and ‘disability’ as girlhood, is articulated through boyhood, in order to establish the nature of the boyhood that emerges in the story through the representation of the dumb and deaf girlhood. Conversely, it is equally interesting to ask, as in Tambu’s story in the context of Nhamo’s death, what kind of girlhood, seen through the trope of dumbness and deafness, emerges through this haunted boyhood.

In order to address the above question, it is necessary to complicate Ato Quayson’s investigation of the presence of disabled people in postcolonial writing. In his essay discussing ‘the various discursive ways in which the disabled are figured in postcolonial

writing', Quayson (2002: 218) asks a crucial, but un-gendered question: 'What, in other words, does it mean for the reconstruction of civil imagining when history itself has to be seen through a trope of disability?' He partly answers the question by referring to Ben Okri's novel *The Famished Road*, in which the entire universe of discourse is surrendered 'to a figure [Azaro, the *abiku* child] that is not only traditionally thought of as disabled, but, additionally, is believed to be liminal, existing between the interstices of this world and the next' (Quayson, 226). The figure of Azaro brings lunacy and the grotesque into the universe of Okri's text, something that Quayson sees as representing 'the fractious postcolonial history of [Okri's] native Nigeria' (ibid.: 227).

So, for Quayson, the presence of disabled people in postcolonial writing 'marks more than just the recognition of their obvious presence in the real world of postcolonial existence [....]. It also marks the sense of a major problematic, which is nothing less than the difficult encounter with history itself' (ibid.: 228). To illustrate this 'difficult encounter with history itself', Quayson points to what he calls the disabling nature of colonial history and 'the warped postcolonial national identities' (ibid.: 228). He does not ask what it may mean to the reconstruction of social imaginaries, and to writing against what he calls 'the nightmare of history' (ibid.: 228), if girlhood is seen through a trope of disability as in Hove's *Ancestors*.

Miro illustrates the disabling nature of patriarchal history for disabled girl children. Born in 1850, she predates by four decades the time-mark of effective colonial occupation of the country by Cecil John Rhodes in 1890. She is the equivalent of the "inseparable" in

Shona mythology, 'the-one-found-already-in-existence' (*Muwanikwa*), and 'the-one-who-existed-first' (*Mutangakugara*) (Kahari 1990: 180). To echo Janisse Ray in her novel *Ecology of a Cracker Childhood* (1999), Miriro could justifiably say, 'I was born from people who were born from people who were born from people who were born here' (4). So, even the diviner in *Ancestors* confidently says: 'There is a woman who died, silent, in your family many years before any of you were born. So don't try to remember' (145).

However, it is not the sense of being 'beyond memory' (the 'inseparable', an autochthony) being emphasized, but that of being excluded from memory. But defiantly, like an *abiku*, Miriro is reborn in her host, who is eager to tell the 'stories of the female blood in me' (45). In narrating her, he births her into the world. She in turn, reproduces herself in many places: in the mind and dreams of Mucha; in the form of a younger ancestor Tariro who died in a foreign country, running away from a forced marriage; in Mucha's brother Fanwell; and at the end of the novel where she appears with the ghost of Tariro at the 'second burial' ceremony of Mucha's father. At the end of the novel, the 'second burial' ceremony, which is meant to 'bring back' the spirit of Mucha's father into the homestead (something that was not done for Miriro and Tariro because they rebelled against their fathers), the homestead is seen burning in a surreal flame. With the burning homestead as background, 'You hear Miriro's words from faraway. She is there, pointing away from the homestead, her words getting fainter and fainter[...]. Tariro, too, is fading. She refuses to look at the homestead which gave her away like a goat at the market place. The two walk from this land of ancestors in which they have lived with tears in their eyes and burdens in their hearts' (195). As a figure that can traverse between the real world and

the otherworld, the spirit of the disabled child points to the lack of stability, wholeness and completion that characterizes the postcolonial world. But more important, Miriro's apparition brings to the fore an ominous sense of the nightmare of female history, and the systematic erasure that it suffers, in a patriarchal order. The erasure and exclusion that Miriro as a disabled girl child, and a disabled person, suffers can therefore be located in the way societies deal with the extraordinary or anomalous which are judged against a norm.

Rosemarie Garland Thomson (2002) offers what could be defined as the missing dimensions of Ato Quayson's theorization of disability in postcolonial writing.¹⁷ By bringing feminism to disability studies, she helps us to understand, how for instance, Miriro becomes multiply disabled as a girl, and as a disabled person. Without conflating the disabled body with the female body, Thomson theorizes disability in the same ways that feminism has theorized gender. She argues that: 'Both feminism and my analysis of disability challenge existing social relations; both resist interpretations of certain bodily configurations and functioning as deviant; both question the ways that differences are invested with meaning; both examine the enforcement of universalizing norms; both interrogate the politics of appearance; both explore the politics of naming; both forge positive identities' (ibid.: 233). This is not the place to rehearse all of Thomson's analytical categories as outlined above, but suffice it to say that in *Ancestors*, 'Disability is

¹⁷ Rosemarie Garland Thomson's (2002) path-breaking essay 'Theorizing Disability' could easily be considered as offering the missing dimensions in Ato Quayson's (2002) essay. Although her essay is not directly concerned with postcolonial writing, she is concerned with bringing feminism to disability studies, and suggests 'how the category of disability might be inserted into feminist theory so that the bodily configurations and functioning we call 'disabled' will be included in all feminist examinations of culture and representation' (232).

the unorthodox made flesh, refusing to be normalized, neutralized or homogenized' (ibid.: 235). It carries with it a moral charge indicting society's insensitivity. Thomson lends disability a revolutionary quality by further describing it thus: 'Shaped by history, defined by particularity, and at odds with its environment, disability confounds any notion of a generalizable, stable physical subject' (ibid.: 235). It points to society's capacity to mutate in unpredictable directions, and to its vulnerability not only to external forces, but to the 'stranger in our midst [the disabled figure], within the family and potentially within the self' (ibid.: 252). For Thomson, 'disability suggests that the cultural other lies dormant within the cultural self, threatening abrupt or gradual transformations from "man" to "invalid"' (ibid.: 252).

In the context of *Ancestors*, as I will illustrate, there are attempts to contain the threat that Miriro's dumbness and deafness poses to society's imaginaries of stability and continuity. The strategies used recall Mary Douglas's (1966) study of how societies deal with the dangers posed by the anomalous other. Douglas identifies five ways society uses to 'confront events which seem to defy its assumptions' (ibid.: 39). In Thomson's words, this is because 'cultures do not tolerate such affronts to their communal narratives of order', so an 'irremediable anomaly translates not as neutral difference, but as pollution, taboo, contagion' (2002: 244).

The first way of dealing with anomaly, according to Douglas, is 'to settle for one or other interpretation' (39) so ambiguity is reduced. In *Ancestors*, there is no attempt to appreciate Miriro beyond the fact that she is 'the silent one' (9) with no other attributes,

and thus reduce the ambiguity she represents 'by assigning the anomalous element to one absolute category or the other' (Thomson, 244). The process reduces the multifaceted girlhood represented by Miriro 'to particular identifying traits' (ibid.).

A second strategy as identified by Mary Douglas is the physical elimination of the anomaly in order to eradicate the disabled difference. In *Ancestors*, the fathers marry off Miriro to a drunk and worthless man, in order to get her out of their homestead.

A third strategy involves 'a rule of avoiding anomalous things [which] affirms and strengthens the definitions to which they do not conform' (39). This is achieved by segregating them, so that we should see 'the negative side of the pattern of things approved' (39). Miriro suffers all this by being called 'Miriro, the bringer of anxiety into the homestead' (*Ancestors*, 13) or by being told that, 'Children like this must not eat meat' (*Ancestors*, 16).

A fourth way to deal with anomaly is to label it 'dangerous'. This is meant to reduce 'dissonance between individual and general interpretations' (Douglas, 39). Douglas sees the strategic advantage of labelling the anomaly 'dangerous', because, 'Attributing danger is one way of putting a subject above dispute. It also helps to enforce conformity' (40). When Miriro's father hears that there are white priests interested in bringing up Miriro at the mission, 'Father did not mind. He saw the opportunity to rid the homestead of whispers into the night' (18), and therefore enforce silence on the existence and memory of the disabled difference, since it is viewed as a danger to all. Because 'these

[anomalous] characters operate as embodiments of an unnamed, profound peril, the narrative resolution is almost always to contain that threat by killing or disempowering the disabled character' (Thomson, 246). For Thomson, it is not only because 'disability is such a contingent condition', but that 'bodies that are disabled can also seem dangerous because they are perceived as out of control. Not only do they violate physical norms, but by looking and acting unpredictable they threaten to disrupt the ritualized behaviour upon which social relations turn' (ibid.: 246).

A fifth way of dealing with anomaly as discussed by Mary Douglas is to incorporate the anomalous elements 'into ritual', in order to 'enrich meaning or to call attention to other levels of existence' (40). In Douglas's words, 'ritual, by using symbols of anomaly, can incorporate evil and death along with life and goodness, into a single, grand, unifying pattern' (40), which in *Ancestors* conforms to society's desire for a narrative of order, predictability, and continuity. This is perhaps one of the most interesting strategies as it is represented in *Ancestors*. The birth of Miriro is viewed as an ominous message from the land and the ancestors: 'The land smiles sometimes, but at times it is sadly mourning. Sad when that which the land does not wish is born' (141), or, 'Oh, how the ancestors can punish the living!' (142). Miriro's presence as a disabled girl child who will deny her father grandchildren and cattle, and will not grow in expected ways, disturbs the social order exactly where it reproduces its communal narrative of continuity. It is the same, downtrodden girl who is normally expected to be the mother of the nation, while at the same time, she is excluded 'from the sphere of public national life' (Boehmer 1991: 6). When she is disabled, much else that convenes the narratives of origin and growth of

society is thrown into disarray. But the disabled girl child also serves as a useful dualism to a society that courts rigid binaries in order to enforce a single-eyed view of the norm.

In this regard, Thomson argues: 'Just as the dominant culture's ideal self requires the ideological figures of the woman to confirm its masculinity and of the black to assure its whiteness', so the 'atomized self demands an oppositional twin to secure its able-bodiedness' in order to 'naturalize a norm' (ibid.: 253). Thomson brings in Bakhtin's concept of the disorderly body in order to suggest 'the radical potential that the disabled body as a sign for difference might possess within representation', as she believes that the disabled body embodies 'perspectives with the potential to refigure the social order' (ibid.: 247). Miriro's disorderly body represents a radical subversion of homogenising narratives of 'one identity, one growth pattern, one birth' (Boehmer 1991: 6), and by extension, she upends the story of the nation itself. By transcending the possibility of 'becoming an icon of all human vulnerability' (Thomson, ibid.: 250) through the possession of a compelling narrative of self, she points up the faultlines in her family history.

One of the ways she uses to achieve this is through transforming one pillar of patriarchy, the boy, into a willing and competent listener and narrator. By picking on Mucha, the boy child, Miriro is relying on the most effective conduit of such horrifying dreams and narratives. This is because in Shona mythology, the stories and dreams of children are considered informative. According to Herbert Aschwanden (1989:272), the dreams and stories of children 'are interpreted as neither symbolical nor as an indirect statement. [...] Future events are seen directly in children's dreams. If a child dreams that its grandmother

is dead, it means that she will die within days or weeks.’ When Mucha tells his father about how he always has a dream about his death, the father takes it very seriously: ‘I have told your mother that all you do at school is dream about my death. She cries as if I had already died. Whoever it is you are planning my death with will one day tell everyone stories’ (50). One of the reasons Aschwanden gives to explain why adults stop children from telling stories is that, ‘The direct and probably correct message of the child’s dream is much too “shocking” for an adult. It is said that such dreams nip in the bud any doubts, and instead of taking defensive measures one resigns oneself to hopelessness’ (273). Michael Taussig notes a similar lore associated with children’s ‘ethical immaturity’. This is because the ‘child is a “little child” and has not yet mastered the art of knowing what not to know’, so it ‘sees and talks straight’ (Taussig 2003: 458). So, Miriro manipulates the medium of boy childhood in order to secure a more reliable conduit for her voice.

However, what may be considered to be the alternative representational politics in the telling of a disabled girlhood by a haunted boyhood, is not only the fact that Mucha manages to depict disability as the cultural other that lies ‘dormant within the cultural self, threatening abrupt or gradual transformation’ (Thomson 2002: 252). It is Mucha’s understanding of the burden of narrating the metaphysical guilt associated with the deeds of one’s ancestors in order to assuage the pain of an equally ambiguous force.

In *Ancestors*, we explored the ways in which the disabled other represents minoritized difference. But Mucha enables us to witness not only the shattering of the fictions of communal order which patriarchy represents, but the way in which Miriro sloughs off her

identity as an icon of deviancy and vulnerability. She acquires the status and power of an invulnerable spiritual force, the benefits of which she rubs on Mucha as her host because he acquires a transcendental vision of history which only spirits can possess.

The experience of surreal vision, which spirit possession affords, also sets aside the limitations of gender in narrating a gendered story. Mucha is able to deploy fluid positions in narrating, 'her story', 'our story'. Viewed through the trope of spirit possession, itself a manifestation of the fantastic and the extraordinary, Miriro's disabled self signifies both the instabilities of a patriarchal order founded on exclusions and the disabling of its constituent members (girls and women) and the points at which it becomes vulnerable to its own imaginaries of continuity and stability. Ancestor worship, which is central to Mucha's father's agricultural success, is an acknowledgement of the interdependence of the living and the dead. But it is from the space of the dead, from which Mucha's father seeks continuity, that the most unexpected challenge for a constitutional review of patriarchy comes through Miriro. Because Miriro is dead, and an ancestral spirit, she can forcefully agitate for changes as an equal in the spirit world. But she is not just an ancestor, but a silent and angry one. An ancestor who does not speak, cannot be spoken to easily, and is a cause of much perturbation among mortals.

In an interesting way, in Mucha's story, we see how the fear of disability, and the fear of a silent (dumb and deaf) and angry ancestor, itself an anomaly, doubles into the resilient power of abnormality in cultural discourse. Miriro's dumbness and deafness is troped as this resilient abnormality dormant in cultural life, and the fear of the anarchy it represents

because ‘the disabled body stands for the self gone out of control’, or ‘the body that refuses to be governed’ (Thomson 2002: 253). Herein lies the revolutionary potential of Miriro’s girlhood. Doubly advantaged by its disability and silence, it becomes a field for insurrection in the most disturbing way. It is a far-reaching response to the portrayal of girl childhoods in a narrative of suffering. Her childhood represents a textualization of ‘muteness in women that in turn becomes a discourse of interiority and resistant silence’ (Laurence 1994: 156). Her childhood, as a ‘textual structure’ (Coe 1984: 84-85), moves away from the standard constructions of silence as a place of oppression and disability as vulnerability. She begins to represent silence as ‘women’s different ways of feeling and knowing – perhaps silences hiding fears, angers, taboo thoughts – as well as representing the available means of expression in particular historical and cultural circumstances’ (Laurence, 156), while her disability as disorder coalesces potential iconic material for the refiguring of the social order.

Conclusion

In this chapter I explored the ways in which girl childhoods are depicted in Yvonne Vera’s *Under the Tongue*, Tsitsi Dangarembga’s *Nervous Conditions* and Chenjerai Hove’s *Ancestors*. There is an interesting pattern in the images of childhoods in these three novels. They do not only emanate from a tight matrix of suffering which makes the experience of girlhood in a nationalist aesthetic seem monolithic, but point towards possible experiential mergers and compromises as adumbrated and negotiated in *Ancestors*. It appears that the girlhoods under study emerge into visibility and personhood in the absence of a certain type of boy childhood, as in *Nervous Conditions*; the

recuperation of a particular girl childhood in *Under the Tongue*; and the haunting of male history by female voices such that it raises the costs of patriarchal arrogance and amnesia in *Ancestors*.

These childhoods, which are about asserting a space in which women's rather than men's sensibilities predominate, are shaped by dystopian symbols of death and dying, deafness and dumbness, all intricately connected to the quest for memory and speech and reclamation in silencing master-texts. It is important to note that in these three novels not all girlhoods and childhoods are told 'through silences too horrific to disturb' (Sanon, in Francis 2004:75) in a history where there is 'no room for [a woman's] own horrors in the midst of the political tales' (ibid. 75), as in *Under the Tongue* and *Ancestors*, but also through a dialectic of opposition and appropriation as instanced by Tambu's narrative in *Nervous Conditions*.

It can be concluded that the tropes of death and dying, deafness and dumbness, speak to the hollowness and tragedy in the rallying and silencing political tropes of 'son of the soil' and 'children of resistance'. They do suggest the complex politics involved in plotting a narrative out-of-loss. In these three novels, girl childhoods are spaces upon/through which these politics are archived, retrieved and mapped into sites of reclamation. They are means of rewriting a 'viable polyphonic narrative of the nation' (Christiansen 2004), in ways that subvert the standard constructions of female history in the Zimbabwean 'nationalist aesthetic' (Muchemwa 2004) as an unending and inescapable nightmare of silence and suffering.

But something ought to be said about these girl childhoods' relationship not only to death and dying, but to power and violence. Contrasted to Zhizha's absolute subjection and helplessness in the face of a brutal patriarch, and the fragility of the sources of her self-narration (the snail and tortoise metaphors), there is a strong element of violence in the ways in which Tambu and Miriro claim and enter narrative space. Also, in relation to otherness, Tambu deals with her own otherness as severely as she deals with the different other, while Miriro as spirit child uses blackmail to get Mucha to tell her story. Miriro, now an ancestral force, though she remains a child, because she died when she was a child, appropriates undiluted power for herself which she exhibits in order to cow Mucha into acquiescence: 'As for human beings, they are little ants in my palms. I do not crush them between my fingers, but I can take them to where I want and see them wriggle their way back to where they think their dreams ought to be taking them' (17-18). It appears that the habits of the spirit world remain patriarchal and unreconstituted, whether inhabited by male or female ancestors. Miriro as an ancestral spirit deploys practices characterised by unilateral actions that force her 'host' to act on orders. These girlhoods, as represented by Tambu and Miriro in so far as violence and power are concerned, dumb or not; dead or alive; delineate and foreshadow social practices that do not make their presence in fiction auspicious for the figuration of a new social order. Much of this violence and power is glossed over in the criticism of these two novels, much emphasis being placed on the spectacle of a girl child's suffering and (self-) authorship.

CHAPTER 5: DYSTOPIC CHILDHOODS

Introduction

In *Jikinya* we see what Musaemura Zimunya called the ‘airy-fairy’ world of Ngara village in which the white girl Jikinya is ‘only a nymph, a fictional symbol of racial reconciliation’ (1982a: 54). In recreating a space of memory through the childhood of a white Jikinya, the novel sacrifices historical fact to what Robert Pattison (1978: 114) calls ‘the construction of a cohesive literary fable’. Similarly, *Dew in the Morning* creates impressions of seeming plenitude and stability in a context where black people are already under violent colonial rule. But in sharp contrast to *Jikinya*, its setting is not only a reminisced country of the mind, but a site upon which the tensions of a changing geography and history work themselves out. The social changes, however, are such that, in spite of the discernible spatial differences in terms of where and how the African family is relocated, the core values and pillars of Godi’s family are still intact. In other fictional spaces, these values, and the spaces that engender them, are defended by childhoods that are symbolised as the “sons of the soil”, or collectively named “children of resistance”, in the nationalist aesthetic as discussed in *A Son of the Soil* and *Child of War* in Chapter 3. These are childhoods that draw inspiration from what intrigues Godi’s childhood in *Dew in the Morning*, the land itself, but unlike Godi, they seek to repossess it through armed struggle. I have already pointed out how these children of resistance are mythologies of boy childhoods created by Zimbabwean “patriotic history”, and that they exclude the

possibilities of other lived experiences of children in the same history.

In this chapter I discuss, in the order in which I present them here, the short fiction of Charles Mungoshi (1972, 1980), Dambudzo Marechera (1978) and Memory Chirere (2000). In the discussion, I suggest a reading of the portrayal of childhoods which moves away from an inexorable natural vulnerability, of which the child is a universalized icon in a violent society, to that of socially constructed vulnerability, which the child upturns in different ways in these stories. Specifically, I am interested in the ways these childhoods may be considered to represent a new, if somewhat depressingly dystopic, figuration of an alternative cultural narrative order.

In *Coming of the Dry Season* (1972) and *Some Kinds of Wounds* (1980) Charles Mungoshi portrays children and childhoods caught up in what Zimunya has described as the archetypal drought: the destruction of African culture under colonial rule and ‘the consequent loss of identity’ (1982a: 4). There is an acute sense of vulnerability, and even a suggestion of complete destruction of what used to be the African family. Zhuwarara, in turn, is intrigued by the way in which Mungoshi delineates the strains of growing up in a violent colonial society in which the ‘bonds of kinship are slowly unravelling’ (1987: 133). In Mungoshi’s stories, the material base of Shona tradition, the land, has been taken away by the white settler. In the wake of dispossession and dislocation, Mungoshi’s characters assume the mantle of a ‘marooned species trying desperately to cling on to a spiritual heritage in an environment that is fiercely hostile to its preservation’ (Zhuwarara, *ibid.*). This characterisation of Mungoshi’s fiction contrasts sharply with *Dew in the Morning*,

and even *Nervous Conditions*, where the African family is, arguably, still viable, although under enormous strain. The lack of enduring and sustaining family relations in most of Mungoshi's short stories point to a spiritual crisis and psychic alienation that characterize childhoods represented in *Under the Tongue* and *Ancestors*. But the surreal image of the burning homestead at the end of *Ancestors*, and the total disruption, if not destruction, of the imaginaries associated with the institutions of motherhood and fatherhood, and even childhood, while adumbrated in Mungoshi's stories, belong to the dystopic spaces of Marechera's *The House of Hunger* and Memory Chirere's short stories, 'Keresenzia', 'An Old Man' and 'Plastics and Cardboard' (2000).

In the novella 'House of Hunger' we discern outlines of a social and political idea of childhood, whose politics are shored up by a subversive narrative regime. The symbolic acts of Marechera's canon-defying childhood narratives are meant to institute 'narrative disequilibrium' (Harris 2002) with nationalist cultural politics. 'House of Hunger' portrays a dysfunctional nation-family in which childhood is bereft of the script of founding nationalist traditions. This way, we witness the infertility and erosion of a childhood and sonship hitched to the nationalist project, examples being Wilson Katiyo's *A Son of the Soil*, Ben Chirasha's *Child of War* and Geoffrey Ndhlala's *Jikinya*. Marechera's childhoods are projects that are designed to do demolition work on the founding imaginaries of Zimbabwean cultural and political nationalism. His poltergeistic presence in Zimbabwean cultural politics has therefore been resisted with great hostility by nationalist critics who view him as a traitor and pariah. By showing that adulthood is not necessarily a desirable social state, and that childhood cannot be used as a pliant tool of

Zimbabwean political imaginaries, his portraits of childhood have helped to forestall the predictable teleologies in the constitution of a generic nation-family. In this act of insurgency, Marechera has found an equally tenacious and inventive rival in the young writer and critic Memory Chirere. Chirere's stories, collected in an edited anthology *No More Plastic Balls* (2000), resist Marechera's characterisation of childhood as engulfed by a threatening adulthood, and instead provides examples of childhoods that torment, and even kill adults and other children. My concern then in this penultimate chapter will be to explore the nature of the agency of the resisting subject as symbolised by these dystopic childhoods.

Charles Mungoshi

Zhuwarara (2001) and Zimunya (1982a) have evolved critical topoi to depict the morphology of the child in Mungoshi's short stories. They are generally meant to read off childhood as constituted by a sense of fatal vulnerability. Such a conceptual framework imposes limits on the scope of childhood as both a lived experience and an artefactual reality. This is because, 'concern for the natural vulnerabilities of childhood is displaced or augmented by concern for socially constructed vulnerabilities' (Mayall 1994: 4). Yet, in being obsessed with the cyclic and debilitating tropes of metaphysical "drought" and "hunger", from which they draw the insidious and dystopian motifs of vulnerability, Zhuwarara and Zimunya miss the opportunity to discuss how, ironically, Mungoshi erects the child as a figure of resistance.

At all times, the child in Mungoshi's *Coming of the Dry Season* (hereafter *CDS*) and *Some*

Kinds of Wounds (hereafter *SKW*), mounts a severe critique against an oppressive adult authority. This could be a violent mother ('Who Will Stop the Dark', *SKW*); a vicious father ('Shadows on the Wall', *CDS*); an insensitive and abusive brother ('Brother', *SKW*) or even a friend ('The Mountain', *CDS*). The children themselves take initiative to seek sites and means of freedom ('The Setting Sun and the Rolling World', *CDS*), in spite of the restraining hold of fathers over them. Adults themselves frustrate children's initiative by denying them the opportunity to change circumstances ('The Hero'; 'The Setting Sun and the Rolling World', *CDS*), or they may even threaten the lives of their children ('Mount of Moriah', *SKW*). Adults too may not be able to figure out what the children's dreams are ('Who Will Stop the Dark') – recalling the image of the chickens that ask for what you don't know how to give ('Shadows on the Wall'). The children possess an irrepressible desire to map their own destinies in the uncertain power vacuum created by an essentially eroded traditional African family which can no longer fend for itself or give visionary guidance to its children.

The child as a narrative construct undermines the sense of vulnerability by working as a resilient oppositional critique to a reading that seeks to portray the child as the incompetent and vulnerable other. For the purposes of this study, I will focus attention on two representative stories: 'Shadows on the Wall' and 'The Crow' in *Coming of the Dry Season*.

In 'Shadows...', childhood is defined by what David Oldman (1994: 154) considers its 'opposition to adulthood'. Oldman considers the family as 'one site amongst others in

which this opposition finds expression' (ibid.). 'Shadows...' centres on the alienating violence of a broken family which leads the child to withdraw from both parents. When the mother runs away from the violent husband, her position is taken up 'by another woman who proceeds to emasculate his father so thoroughly that he himself is also compelled to seek human contact and comfort from his son' (Zhuwarara 2001: 29). There is in the narrating boy-child a sense of critical independence concerning how he generates tropes that characterise his relationship with the father. The boy-child exhibits unmistakably brutal pleasure in disfiguring the image of his violent, but equally vulnerable father.

Contrary to impressions given by Rino Zhuwarara in his analysis of 'Shadows...', it is the father, a hawkish and hovering figure, who is ultimately vulnerable and helpless when confronted both by the oppressive silence of the boy, and the unspoken depersonalising imagery attached to his memory and person. The father is consistently demonised by the son, but he has no right of reply because he never gets to hear what the boy says. The son has denied him speech. This 'unwarranted brutality' of the boy - to recall Zimunya's (1982a: 62) and Zhuwarara's (2001:32) description of the boys' killing of the crow in 'The Crow' - is couched in language that is calculated to simulate the denuding violence of the hailstorms in the story.

In one instance the father is described as 'a ghost going up to heaven'(1) where it will meet with certain damnation. Through this language the child wills the death of the father by disembodiment him, recreating images that speak of the father's alienation from the

human world. Even so, the child sees the father as an inconvenient, burdensome presence, 'a tired old woman in a room full of young people'(1). The child gets morbid in the presence of his father, and recalls a haunting 'creepy nameless feeling in a house of mourning'(1).

Which ever way we may look at it, the child is keen to consign his father to the margins of his life, if not where human remains are warehoused. By deed of cruel metaphor, so to speak, the son has revenged himself on the father, and has succeeded in displacing him as a centre of authority, tradition and meaning in his life. It is difficult therefore not to see the child as possessing initiative in resisting the image of a father he no longer believes in. His withdrawal into himself has been dramatized and probably misread by Rino Zhuwarara when he writes: 'The child withdraws into a womb-like if not funeral silence as if recoiling from the less than reassuring outside world'(2001:29). It is exactly at that moment of withdrawal that the child begins to assemble the most dehumanising vocabulary about his father. In other words, his 'withdrawal' is not a form of spiritual hibernation, but a determined assault on his father, who in his inarticulacy and desperate need for love and meaningful contact with his son, is said to have 'tried five times to talk to me but I don't know what he wants'(1).

The father's failure to make contact with his son is only one example of a series of failures to relate to anyone. We are told he had tried to convince his second wife to come back home: 'This will be the fourth time he has had to cycle after her'(1). We are also told of the violent hailstorms that are associated with the emotional life of the father and the

boy's mother. In other words, a certain quality of violence characterises the father's contact with members of the human family. He is therefore closely linked to images that recall pain: 'His stubble, I know, is as stiff as a porcupine's' (2), yet as vulnerable as the 'down on a dove's nestling'(ibid.). When far from the animal world, he is closer to the inanimate world: 'His hands were hard and pinchy and his arms felt as rough and barky as logs'(ibid.). The aura of death is upon him, 'His breath was harsh and foul'. The desolate figure of the father – a ghost, old woman, a shadow, a porcupine, a dove's nestling, a log, a decaying something – is compounded by his overall 'black scarecrow' image: 'He wore his battered hat that stank of dirt, sweat and soil'(3).

The language of exclusion that the boy deploys in painting the memory of his relationship with his father repeats the cycle of violence in which the family is trapped. Yet it appears to me that it is the father, more than the son, who needs human companionship. He seeks his women, who reject him, with the same passion he fights with them. He returns to his son when emotionally wounded, 'He preferred to talk to me rather than his new wife' (6), but for the son, 'he was too late. He had taught me silence... I had given myself to the shadows'(ibid.).

The search for shadows is an attempt by the boy to make sense of his own world, to define it and give it shape and meaning for himself. It is a mark of self-reliance, a desire to possess a language with which to commune with oneself, when the language of public contact is fraught with images of violence. It is because the father has no access to the language, and the meanings animated by the shadows for the boy, that his vulnerability is

most touching. This is when the son feels for him, albeit in a superior, pitying posture: 'All I can think of, the nearest I can come to him, is when I see that his tough grey stubble looks like the soft unprotected feathers on a dove's nestling'(6). It is the association of his father's beard with the dead nestlings that brings him close to him, the 'intimations of death' which Rino Zhuwarara (ibid.: 30) says lie at the heart of the 'chilling nightmare' that characterises the relationship between father and son.

It must be pointed out that the story 'Shadows...' illustrates not only the alienation that can occur between father and son, but the ability of the son not only to depersonalise the figure of the father, but to castrate it as well in language. The boy in 'Shadows...' denies the father certainty of continued genealogy by rejecting meaningful contact with his sire. What is threatened by this gesture of refusal are the traditions that shore up a patriarchal masculinity and lineage. The child has therefore subverted the age-old tradition of submitting to the authority of the father, in the manner of the biblical Isaac. The boy has shattered taboos associated with the accepted ways a son should relate to his father: the description of his father's beard as stubble or a porcupine's quills is an instance of the demystification, if not the killing, of the figure of the father.

In all these cases in which the father's image is torn down by the son, we are never told what the father's own counter-imagery is. The father appears to me to be the victim of his son's declared hostility, which at times spills into open confrontation when the son refuses to be carried on his father's back, or rejects his father's attempt to get into conversation with him. It would appear therefore that the child is as unforgiving as he is vengeful: 'I

don't know how I should talk to him. He has denied me the gift of language' (6) sums up the intractable position that the boy has adopted against efforts to reconcile or bridge the gulf between him and his father. He can only relate to his father ('I feel the tears in my eyes') when he imagines him in the context of death. It could easily be the relationship between a corpse and an undertaker! The cruelty that he demonstrates against his father is not too different from the brutality that the two boys display in killing the crow.

In 'Shadows...' the boy-child is far from being just an example of a vulnerable child in a hostile family. The child initiates the construction of sites from which to critique not only the conduct of his father, but the uncritical vocabulary associated with a prelapsarian 'childhood innocence'. The child recoils from what Zhuwarara calls the 'overwhelming impression of the story...that a deep spiritual wound has been inflicted on an innocent soul' (2001: 31). In fact, the child positions himself where he does not only deepen the conditions of his own alienation, but launches attacks on the figure of the father. The family in 'Shadows...' is therefore a site in which opposition to a specific context and configuration of adulthood is animated by the child.

'Shadows...' provides an instance of how childhood and children have come to the fore of the minds of adult critics such as Zhuwarara and Zimunya, but as Ann Oakley (1994: 20) argues: 'the danger is that adults may continue to be protectors of children, the representers of their interests, rather than the facilitators or active seekers out of children's own perspectives and voices.' I have already suggested that the available critical imagery that Zimunya and Zhuwarara deploy constrains what is possible to know about the nature

of childhood in Mungoshi's stories. This is because their conceptual language as critics is restricted to what Oakley (ibid.:23) theorises as 'adultist' views of childhood. This is a critical practice which, while its object of study is childhood/children, it reveals more its own concepts of childhood from an adult's point of view, while 'we learn not about children's perspectives.' This is because the critics view the terminal identity of the child as adulthood.

Karin Lesnik-Oberstein (1994: 26) gives considerable time to studying how by defining and discussing the nature of children 'adults are expressing, formulating, and projecting ideals and ideas about themselves and the non-themselves. Children, in culture and history, have no such voice' as adults tend to speak on their behalf. In such a culture and history, 'Childhood can speak only through the memories, observations, or selections and interpretations of adults' (Lesnik-Oberstein, ibid.: 26). 'Shadows...' as a story engages with these dominant concepts of adulthood and childhood, while Zimunya and Zhuwarara reproduce them in their criticism of the story.

If in 'Shadows on the Wall' the child critiques, exposes and demolishes the father figure, 'The Crow' is a demonstration of the child's attempt to escape a set of taboos meant to preserve the authority of tradition and the status of children in that tradition. By killing the crow, the two boys engage with a figure of tradition as a site of entanglement with history and culture. There is, in the boys' story what Bridget Donald (2000:24) saw elsewhere as 'a pattern of coming to grips with the past in order to loosen its hold on the present, clearing some space, in the process, for the reformulation of national identity.'

In grappling with figures of tradition, and by extension authority, the boys in 'The Crow' extend the struggle of the boy in 'Shadows...'.

'The Crow' can be read as a 'time out' adventure story; and as a symbolic narrative of resistance. As a 'time out' adventure story, as Maria Lassen-Seger (2000:192) understands such a narrative device, it is about children 'taking time away from themselves, as well as from authority, which in stories for and about children usually is adult authority.' In this case, the two boys had decided to defy their parents' instructions: 'father and mother had gone to church and left orders that we should follow. But we had planned to go hunting instead'(7). The hunting itself is a mockery: the two boys want to kill a crow when they know very well: 'We do not eat crows, and birds or animals that people do not eat are associated with the night and witchcraft in our country'(17). There are two sets of authorities being defied here: that of the parents, which is seen in terms of 'orders'; and that of custom, the crow, which is seen in terms of taboos and other prohibitions. Both ideas of authority induce a sense of fright in the two boys: the crow 'is always frightening and it was safer to leave it alone'(7); also, 'one thing we were afraid of: father and mother...'(ibid.). The sense of fear is attached to contexts that conjure the fear and power of 'things of the night and premonitions of bad things to come'(ibid.). This fear is animated and intensified by the two boys' determined assault on long-held taboos. This 'time out' adventure enables the two boys to blur the borders between fantasy and reality, something similar to what Maria Lassen-Seger would call 'carnavalesque displacement' (2000:192). 'This carnivalesque displacement puts the fictive child in a position where

he/she can playfully try out a new identity and where the very authority that the child has escaped from can be interrogated' (Lassen-Seger, *ibid.*). However, while 'time out' allows a temporary exit from adult power circuits, and can empower the child in that moment when reality is suspended, it is a paradoxical and conservative literary device. According to Lassen-Seger, it means not only time away from oneself, 'but also a return to the initial order at the end of the narrative.' In this sense, the 'time out' stories do 'not only imply that adult authority is interrogated, it also means that that very authority is reinscribed at the end' (*ibid.*).

I would argue that in 'The Crow' the two boys interrogate authority through the figure of the crow (that is symbolically) rather than through a direct confrontation with its human embodiment, their parents. In 'Shadows...' the child confronts head-on the authority of the father figure. I would also argue that the return to initial order is uncertain in 'The Crow'. There is a sense of deep metamorphosis in the psychology of the boys as a result of having killed the crow. This transformation is not magical, but a recognition of human limits and potential. The sense of carnival had never taken root. According to the two boys, it was a fiction.

Now, all of a sudden, something got into us and we were fighting the crow. It was no longer fun. In fact, I don't know whether there had been a single moment in the whole business when we had thought it was fun. We were grim and sweaty. We wanted it to shut off its death-voice. (11)

The two boys are keen to demonstrate that there was never any sense of unintentional

transgression in hunting the crow. In fact there is nothing magical or carnivalesque at the end. The crow remains a crow. It does not, at any point, disguise itself as it would do in magic tales. The two boys, from the start, remain two little humans whose combined strengths and imaginations are tested to the limit by the crow's refusal to die (in fact, their characters are severely tested by the crow's ambiguous death).

What also remains ambiguous is the 'initial order'. The two boys instigate an insurrection against a set order in tradition by killing the crow. At the end of the story, there is a tacit acknowledgement that their encounter with the crow was more than a confrontation with the numinous, or with nature. It was both insightful and character-forming, and they carry this experience home, instead of rejecting it or seeking absolution for it. In fact, the experience calls for a ritual of male-bonding as the narrator tells us when he decides to throw away his catapult into the river, 'to be equal' (12) with his brother Chiko, because 'there was no more fun in proving myself tougher than he was'(ibid.). The same male-bonding had been happening in planning to defy the parents' instructions, and in killing the crow. We are only given an idea of what sort of parents the two boys had: they were afraid of them, but would still resist them. The defiance is open, but its planning is never made open to the parents (one recalls the boy in 'Shadows...' and his veiled but violent language and thoughts against his father). At the end of the story, there is a strong suggestion of secretiveness between the boys; a feeling that they will keep their newly-acquired experience and identity to themselves. There is therefore a sense of assured complicity between the two boys in the future. By presenting the two boys this way, Charles Mungoshi avoids the all too romantic portraits of childhood in most children's

books where children return to the fold of the home or school after having been chastised by figures of (good) authority or evil. There is therefore no return to an initial, stable, static or edenic order: there is only an initiation and consolidation of new experiences, and a destabilising of old ones.

This is contrary to Zhuwarara's reading of 'The Crow' as an illustration of how 'the two boys are reduced to tears by their adventure and shown to be just as vulnerable' as the boy in 'Shadows...'.(2001: 32). By taking the two boys to represent the image of the violent father in 'Shadows', Zhuwarara makes the crow stand for the innocence of 'weaker creatures' (children). He sees therefore the violence inflicted on 'an innocent crow' by the two boys as 'a version of the domestic violence that is acted out in 'Shadows on the Wall' (ibid.: 33). In the same vein, Musaemura Zimunya (1982a) employs imagery that sacralizes and mystifies the 'innocence' of the crow. Stopping short of equating the innocence of the crow with pristine childhood, he restores the crow to a primal condition, and makes its suffering at the hands of the boys sublime: 'The moral is that unwarranted brutality is forbidden. Because it is innocence incarnate, the crow does not die. ...Above all, the crow represents élan vital, that eternal flicker which taunts mankind's curiosity and exposes his vulnerability endlessly. We are tantalized again' (ibid.: 63).

Zimunya celebrates the crow as a figure of resistance, while in 'Shadows...' he suggests that the boy should conform: 'We can only hope that the boy has reconciled himself to his circumstances.' (ibid.: 62). This is what Ann Oakely called adultist views, his urging the boy to make peace with his parent . But there is an inexplicable swing to an alarmist view

when a crow (a bird) is subjected to violence by small boys. Zhuwarara immediately warns against the 'excessive' violence inflicted on the crow and explains how 'it reveals the darker and menacing side of mankind which more often than not lie hidden even in seemingly innocent looking children'(ibid.: 32).

The association of children with hidden evil and violence is centuries old. Kimberley Reynolds (1994: 23) discusses the paradoxical situations where adults may construct a childish ideal 'which is unthreatening and undisturbing'. Little wonder Zhuwarara sees little contradiction in talking about the 'fragile' or 'innocent' soul of the child when the child appears to lack control over his circumstances (the child in 'Shadows...' seemingly is the victim who does not hit back), and sees evil lurking in the child when the child has an upper-hand on circumstances (arguably, the child has the upper-hand over the crow, and whatever else it represents).

The archetypes of the vulnerability of the child in Mungoshi's stories insisted upon by some critics emphasise idealised images of childhood. The critics give undue weight to the subjugation of childhood by a violent parental authority and the over-bearing nature of oppression. This they do at the expense of teasing the text more for hopeful visions of resistance that childhood in Mungoshi's stories animates. The recognition of the vulnerability of authority itself in the face of mounting challenges from the children is therefore a starting point for talking about children as a powerful force in the way history is shaped. It is not surprising then that the liberation struggle was fought largely by young people who felt the 'fatal vulnerability' of living under a colonial regime. This was in

itself a refusal by the young people to succumb to the enervating imagery of ‘drought’ and ‘hunger’, which Zimunya and Zhuwarara seem to see as pervasive, archetypal and unassailable. Visions of childhood in Mungoshi’s stories suggest viable exit routes out of the inexorable authority of family and tradition. It is in Marechera’s *The House of Hunger* that we witness the total destruction of a symbolic order attached to the idea of the African family and tradition.

Dambudzo Marechera

In *The House of Hunger* Marechera engages with what Wilson Harris (1992: 18) has called ‘the tautology of power’, a condition produced by the replication of anti-colonial narrative politics in a post-colonial situation. Anna Rutherford (1992: iv) argues that: ‘Just as the old imperialism was intent on repressing other discourses, so too is the new nationalism, not only in Africa, but in the settler colonies as well.’ The new nationalism is built on a raft of ‘concepts of invariant identities’ (Harris 1992: 18), drawn from the practices of colonial cultural politics, its antecedent tradition. In this situation, which recalls Marechera’s ‘Protista’, there is a sense of being trapped in closed spaces and recycled social consciousness. ‘Cultural nationalism becomes an ally to political nationalism, and both act in the same way. First one distinguishes, creates, fabricates a pattern, and then one goes on to exclude all those who do not fit it. What we have is the replacement of one monocentric order with another’ (Rutherford 1992: v).

The ‘unexemplarity’ of *The House of Hunger* as an anti-colonial text is remarked on by Ranga Zinyemba in disparaging terms. Comparing Marechera’s story with other

Zimbabwean novels that are often read within the framework of anti-colonial cultural nationalism, Zinyemba bemoans the 'bleak vision' of *The House of Hunger* 'on the very eve of independence' (in Wild 1993: 258). These remarks on Marechera's fiction are not new, they have been echoed elsewhere (Wylie 1991; Mzamane 1983; Zimunya 1982a; Dodgson 1992). They form part of a coercive reading strategy that Gerald Gaylard (1993: 90) considers a 'prescriptive nationalist framework [which] subsumes a great deal else that is interesting in Marechera.' When brought to bear on Marechera's fiction, the 'nationalist framework' has not only the effect of suppressing what is possible to understand, but forecloses the possibilities of the multiply layered meanings of his texts in favour of a precast, monolithic reading. Ranga Zinyemba dismisses Marechera's writing as a debilitating disease, and stops short of calling it apocalyptic altogether: 'to move from [Stanley] Nyamfukudza to Marechera is to move from cynicism to oblivion, from sickness to death, to nothingness' (in Wild 1993: 258). Zhuwarara sums up the damning verdict: 'Put simply, part of the problem with Marechera's writing is that it dismisses aspects such as negritude, African nationalism, African personality or image, national identity or African socialism but does not bother to put anything in their place[...]' (2001: 209-210).

It is not necessary to be detained by further examples of critical hostility to Marechera's fiction, suffice it to underscore the nature of intellectual and social siege that drove him to desperation. This desperation should be linked to Marechera's description of himself as an outsider in his essay 'The African Writer's Experience of European Literature': 'I have been an outsider in my own biography, in my country's history, in the world's terrifying possibilities' (in Wild 1992: 364). It is possible to talk about the multiple displacements of

Marechera in the sense that the cryptic old man at the end of 'House of Hunger' sees it: '....cast out of village, town and country. Cast out of womb, home, family. A veritable desert' (79), but also in the sense of writing outside the prescribed canon. It is his refusal to be circumscribed by one kind of reality and canon which led him to announce: 'And in this sense I would question anyone calling me an African writer. Either you are a writer or you are not. If you are a writer for a specific nation or a specific race, then fuck you' (in Wild 1992: 221).

The dystopian childhoods of Marechera's *The House of Hunger* are not only spaces of experience but sites of cultural critique from which the idea of the nation as constructed by anti-colonial politics is 'persistently parodied and pilloried' (Franco 1989: 206). Childhood in *The House of Hunger* is a desacralized space, and a brutally neutered moral and political force. Rather, the heroism of childhood is in the ways in which it suggests the implosion of the nationalist myth of a cohesive African family as proto-nation.

In two of his stories, 'House of Hunger' and 'Protista', which will be discussed here, Marechera deploys recollections of childhood as a metaphor of creativity and a mode of critical thinking. These portraits of childhood are tailored to not only rival the monolithic nationalist narratives of change, but to supplant them with versions of changed narratives of the 'nation-family'. The use of the motif of the 'dystopic family'¹⁸, 'the cultural location in time and place' (Brannen 2004: 410), in 'House of Hunger' and 'Protista' is linked to 'a subtly imbricated series of displacements' (Stotesbury 1994: 71) of the idea

¹⁸ By which John Stotesbury (1994) means 'the family flawed, broken and disrupted, an inversion of the popular image of the idealized, unified Victorian family'.

of the family as unified nation, and the nation as unified family, as projected in Zimbabwean cultural nationalism.¹⁹ This 'dystopic family' is a nesting of a cluster of related tropes aptly named 'House of Hunger', a coalesced imaginary fissile space and historical condition. The 'House of Hunger' is a rhetorical device for rendering visible a subverted and subversive nation-family. It is in the fissured space of the 'House of Hunger' that the recollections of dystopic childhoods are shaped into a utopia and fantasy of revolt.

I suggest that Marechera's dystopic childhoods point to the emergence of something akin to the post-national in Zimbabwean fiction in the restricted sense of what Jean Franco (1989: 204) considers the complex and contested idea of the nation in Latin America where 'it is no longer the inevitable framework for either political or cultural projects.' For Marechera writing post-nationally involves writing outside and beyond the confines of what Laurice Taitz (1999) called an 'overdetermined' national history, through recourse to writing strategies 'which transgress received traditions by inventing new narrative forms' (Parry 1994: 12). These strategies include forms of deconstruction and decolonization which Chantal Zabus (1990: 104) in another context describes as the simultaneous undoing of a given order and the embedding of that new order in the text, or to adapt Jean Franco (1989: 211), 'the simultaneous dissolution of the idea of the nation and the continuous persistence of national concerns' in the text. The difference will be that in Marechera's fiction no new order is allowed to sediment, nor is the text itself.

¹⁹ I refer to the utopian image of family-as-nation as nation-family in this chapter.

‘Protista’: A Time Out Narrative

‘Protista’ (127-133) dramatizes a mythical childhood in which metaphors of journeying and exile work to prise loose the ideologies of belonging that hem in the narrator. Childhood in this instance is viewed as a space in which the struggle for self-authorship and self-capitalization is pitted against the grasping, circumscribing and prepossessing narrative of the father, and by extension, the nation. The father’s grasping palm, in which the child’s story revolves and is locked, recalls the monocentric vision of the nation as the end and beginning of the self. It is, to vary Fredric Jameson’s interpretation of the ‘omnipresence of history’, the story of a childhood that is fated to have its independent experience destroyed because it seeks to constitute the urgency of self-search outside what Jameson (1981:19) called ‘the unity of a single great collective story’.

In ‘Protista’, the narrator recalls a story told in early childhood. It is the recollection of narratives in childhood that shapes his recollection of his childhood, and how he constructs ideas of the uses to which he puts his childhood. What is important is not whether the youth in the story below can be defined as a child, but that his actions are recollected in order to serve as a source of Marechera’s artistic vision, which is located in childhood experiences. It is as if like Rob Nixon (2002: 434), Marechera has ‘had to go back and reread [his] childhood world politically as well.’

In this story, set in a drought-stricken valley in Lesapi [Rusape], childhood is recalled as a ‘ceaselessly unfinished genesis’ (Harris 1992: 15) of the imagination, a field of existential attractions which imbues childhood with what Wilson Harris (1992) theorised as ‘re-

visionary potential'. The narrator, in exile for twelve years ('I had been exiled to this raw region by a tribunal which had found me guilty of various political crimes' (127)) finds his life 'now disjointed, disconnected' (128). At this stage of personal fragmentation, he recalls the story his father told him when he was six years old. In this story, 'childhood recollected is an event in an adult life. It enriches adult perception' and 'it does not – it certainly should not – cancel, undermine, or demolish an adult view' (Walsh 1994: 218). It is a story in/of his childhood which helps the narrator to achieve what Wilfred Cartey (1991: 310) considers 'a wholing of self' by entering 'into that symbolic space and time of return to roots' (ibid.). It is necessary to quote the story at length here:

There was the story my father had told me, when I was barely six years of age, about the resilience of human roots: a youth rebelling against the things of his father had one morning fled from home and had travelled to the utmost of the earth where he was so happy that he wrote on their wall the words "I have been here" and signed his new name after the words; the years rolled by with delight until he tired of them and thought to return home and tell his father about them. But when he neared home his father, who was looking out for him, met him and said "All this time you thought you were actually away from me, you have been right here in my palm." And the father opened his clenched hand and showed the son what was written in this hand. The words – and the very same signature – of the son were clearly written in the father's open palm: "I have been here." The son was so stunned and angry that he there and then slew his father and hung himself on a barren fig-tree which stood in the garden. (128)

The story of the father and the son coheres in the founding legends of the nation which insist on the inescapable nature of its history and forms. To travel outward from the fatherland is ironically to confirm the tenacity of the father's hold on the psyche ('the resilience of human roots'). Ndabaningi Sithole (1977:18), a founding father of Zimbabwean nationalism writes about this sense of entrapment: 'The black man belonged to the Soil. It claimed him.' The journeying that the son in the story undertakes is central to the realisation of his rootedness in the "fatherland" and its myths, and his childlike dependency on his father's authority. At a physical and metaphorical level, the son is immobilised by his inability to escape his hostile roots, whose symbols he recreates in his home of exile. The child maps out his own journeys in rebellion, but he cannot author his own life-story outside the clenched palm of his father. This is because his narrative of adventure and rebellion is performed at the instigation of his father against whom he rebels, if the father is taken to mean a link in the strong chain of a genealogy that claims the son.

Breaking out of the nation-form, the fatherland, is like cutting links with one's biology and history. The desire of the child to found a story ('I have been here') for himself by journeying is a self-defining, self-making symbolic act. But as I have suggested, it lacks authority on its own terms as a narrative of self-making, ironically set off by the father who is the cause of his disenchantment with home, and as a genre of resistance. The son's narrative is entrenched in a binding archetype of the prodigal son and implicitly limits its 're-visionary potential' (Harris 1992: 19). The structure and content of his rebellion is archetypally prefigured, and 'tends to build on the way it has been circumscribed by

history' (Harris 1992: 18). Considered in this sense, the child-rebel who wants to re-invent himself suffers a double defeat: that is, in terms of the form and the content of his gesture.

The story of the rebellious son, as in Mungoshi's 'The Crow', is a narrative of symbolic resistance. It fits within what Lassen-Seger (2000: 192) calls a 'time out' adventure in which the child takes time away from himself as well as from adult authority. In 'Protista', the child goes to enjoy himself away from home, but the revolt is not sustained. But unlike the two boys in 'The Crow', he returns home to tell his father about his adventures. He affords himself the opportunity to try out a new identity, outside adult power circuits, and feels empowered to possess a story and initiate his own return. However, his return conforms to the set patterns of a narrative of seasonal migration, which while it touches on multiple centres, only confirms the enigma and ambiguity of departure and arrival in a genre characterised by circularity and monocentric forces. While 'time out' allows a temporary exit from adult power circuits, and can empower the child in that moment when reality is suspended, it is a paradoxical and conservative literary device. It means not only time away from oneself, 'but a return to the initial order at the end of the narrative' (Lassen-Seger 2000: 192). In this sense, the 'time out' narrative does not 'only imply that adult authority is interrogated, it also means that that very authority is reinscribed at the end' (ibid.). The impotence and futility of the child's rebellion is magnified by his uneventful journey, his slaying of his father, and his own death on a barren fig-tree. His death is the result of both the frustration and the ultimate tragedy of finding oneself without an original story of oneself in a seemingly foreclosed discourse of self-invention.

As a genre, the story of the boy's adventure fits the structure of many story cycles that confirm communal authority over individual narratives. The journey cycle followed by the rebellious son is already established in folklore. Daniel P. Kunene explains the significance of the journey motif in African Literature:

The hero who turns his back on the courtyards and cattle-folds and grazing fields of his home is entering this jungle with all its beasts and monsters. If he comes back alive and unscathed he will have learned some lessons of life. If he comes back scarred in body and soul, he will have tasted the hazards of being away from home, and will appreciate all the more the advantages of maintaining his links with his family and his society. Home is sanctuary. Its offer of physical and spiritual sustenance is the gravitational pull that ensures that whatever leaves it will ultimately lose its outward momentum and return. (Kunene 1985:189).

The loss of outward momentum and the ultimate return to roots confirms the son's gravitational pull towards what Anne McClintock theorised as the role of the family in most national narratives where the family is viewed as a metaphor of 'a single genesis narrative for national history' (in Taitz 1999: 29). Writing a story of self-authoring, as the son in 'Protista' discovers, may require a certain quality of violence in form and genre in order to upset tradition and frustrate its tendency to muffle dissension within its folds. His story is already written and told, and his father nurses it for him in trust ('All this time you thought you were actually away from me, you have been right here in my palm.').

The tyranny of roots, as represented by the father's clenched hand, is both imprisoning and suffocating for the son, requiring the resisting subject to stage fictions of suicidal

anarchy in a symbolic gesture of self-destruction.

What is implied by this anarchic gesture is the desire to nullify the power of the archetype of the prodigal son or the narrative of “the return to roots” which invariably suggests itself as the enduring model of experience and imposes an invariant identity. By killing his father, and the narrative that he and his father represents, the son rejects the politics of a narrative which ‘reinforces a bias, reinforces its deprivations into a self-righteous cult’ (Harris 1992: 18). The son’s gesture only suggests the undoing of a given narrative regime, in which he is subject and victim, but does not install a new one in its place. His rebellion points to the conditions under which narrative and history are - to follow Reinhart Koselleck’s (1985: 198-212) theory on the disposability of history - ‘makeable’ and ‘disposable’. The value of his death is therefore located in the possibilities of text that he opens. These possibilities inhere in Marechera’s recollection of childhood as a longing for new form.

Suggested in ‘Protista’ is the embeddedness of the narrator’s childhood in the paralysing riddle of departures and destinations, which replay the “tautology” of anti-colonial and post-colonial cultural nationalism. The new canon, represented by the rebellious son, can be as destructive as the old one, represented by the father, in that both emanate from and eddy in the same, unreconfigured narrative politics. The narrator suggests that there is need for a newer kind of childhood which he sees as an interrupted and unfinished genesis. The lineaments of this “re-visionary” childhood are not yet defined, but the feeling that ‘all grown-ups are menfish’ (‘Protista’, 133) – cannibalistic monsters – makes

the narrator suggest feverishly: 'but remember perhaps there is still a chance that the children – my head!' (133). Childhood in 'Protista' is a recollected trope of creativity and new beginnings. It is depicted as both narrative and a lived space of experience which can be arranged and rearranged to articulate the need for an end to imaginative and experiential tautology. It is perhaps why the son and the father in 'Protista' are rendered redundant as the barren fig-tree that dominates the mystical ritual landscape.

What seems to make 'Protista' a chilling dystopia, though, is the fact that it prefigures an anomic childhood whose present is cut off at both ends: that is it neither has a sustainable past nor a continuing present. It is in a sense, a childhood that mirrors death in the roots: here is a son who has eliminated both himself and his genealogy. The son's action leaves behind a void which can only be filled by the reconstructive acts of both history and memory. 'House of Hunger', the novella, provides instances of the destruction and reconstitution of versions of childhood and the narratives that usually sustain it in a nationalist framework.

"Unhappy Family", "Unhappy Children" and the End of Childhood

'House of Hunger' (1-82) depicts the moral rot in a family in which mother, father, brother and society in general do not protect the child figure from the shocks of life, but proceed to violate the child and the taboos of society in front of children. The family-as-nation is critiqued by Marechera as a hitching post for fantasies of the 'African image' with its concomitant enforced invariant identities. Marechera critiques the dominant version of cultural nationalism in the following terms: 'we raise the African image to fly

in the face of the wind and cannot see the actually living blacks having their heads smashed open with hammers in Kampala [reference to Idi Amin's dictatorship in Uganda]. We have done such a good advertising and public relations stunt with our African image that all horrors committed under its lips merely reinforce our admiration for the new clothes we acquired with independence' (*Black Insider* 1990: 84). His portrayal of unexemplary childhoods and the 'horrors' committed in the 'African family' assists him in disinvesting in what Wilson Harris (1992: 22-28) calls rituals of conformity, which the 'African image' requires for its uninterrupted continuity. His portraits of childhood are meant to institute 'narrative disequilibrium' (Harris 2002) with nationalist cultural politics.

It is the myth of the African image, and the nationalist ideologies that cluster around it, that Marechera's dystopian childhoods subvert. In 'House of Hunger', childhood is viewed as under familial siege: it is discontinuous and discordant, and performs its end in a long passage at the end of the long short story which I consider the point of the whole narrative. The passage is a detailed 'grisly portrait' of what Jan Mark (1997: 133-134), in her discussion of some influential nineteenth-century children's fiction, considered a dysfunctional family, or 'unhappy family'. It is a portrait in which the 'narrator's upbringing is poetically representative of the whole community' (Zimunya 1982a: 99). I will therefore restrict my analysis of "the end of childhood" in Marechera's 'House of Hunger' to the passage below, and will make references to related passages for purposes of illustration.

It was the House of Hunger that first made me discontented with things.

I knew my father only as the character who occasionally screwed mother and who paid the rent, beat me up, and was cuckolded on the sly by various persons. He drove huge cargo lorries, transporting groundnut oil to Zambia and Zaire and Malawi. I knew that he was despised because of mother, and because he always wore khaki overalls, even on Sundays, and because he was quite generous with money to friends and enemies alike. The only thing was that he was an alcoholic.

He once got Peter and I so drunk that mother thrashed the three of us and then shoved him out of the house for the night. The only time he came close to hitting mother was when she discovered in his travelling bag a quite elaborate set of anti-VD paraphernalia: injections, pills, penicillin, which she threw out into the dustbin. [....]

But mother was more feared than respected. She was a hard worker in screwing, running a home, and maintaining a seemingly tight rein over her husband; and, more important for me, she had nothing better to do than to throw her children into the lion's den of things white. Peter took after her, while I was more my father. Certainly father could never control Peter – only mother could do that; and therefore father handled me severely.

Peter, of course, early became the enemy of all fathers and mothers who had daughters. He and mother gave to the House a whiff of scandal strong enough to be detected throughout the whole region. When Peter became twenty-one father gave him, for a present, a new anti-VD set. Mother merely warned Peter not to get involved with married women. And I – rather grudgingly, for I was extremely jealous – gave him my dubious blessing.

I was by then more experienced in books and masturbation than in girls and street-fights and throwing dice. (77-78)

'House of Hunger' is a metaphor of a complex matrix of interlocking childhood vulnerabilities. The most obvious manifestation of vulnerability of the child is the unravelling of bonds of kinship, and what Herman Hesse called the 'first cleft in the sacredness of parenthood ... the first split in the pillar' (qtd. in Zimunya 1982a: 99). To start with, the father is no more than a caricature of founder and father of the family. He is a self-destroying and violent alcoholic, who in another passage, knocks out the front teeth of his nine-year-old son for tearing exercise-books (14). As the founder of the family, he displays little sense of his own power, and is driven out of the house by his wife. He appears more like a side affair to the mother who he 'occasionally screwed', and a half-time, fleeting provider 'who paid the rent, and was cuckolded on the sly by various persons.' The instability of his fatherhood and masculinity is only matched by the dubious identity of alcoholic, qualities which lead to his being despised by his family and community. His disorderly deviancy reduces him to something less than an infant in the eyes of his wife, and hence when he got his two sons drunk, she 'thrashed the three of us and then shoved him out of the house for the night.' In this instance, the wife considers him below the status of her sons: the latter at least can be allowed to sleep inside the house, while he is temporarily transformed into a thing of the night. He neither commands his sons and wife, nor possesses any of what Elleke Boehmer (1992: 233) considers 'talismans of fatherly power' in nationalist histories.

The mother inverts the usual patriarchal iconic material which privileges the position of

the father as invulnerable, unerring master of the house in all spheres: economic, social, sexual. She arrogates to herself the symbology of patriarchal power: the self-willed master of her destiny, author and subject of her life. But, like her husband, she remains an emblem of what threatens the unitary order of the generic family. She is neither Kofi Awoonor's (1975: 99) mother in the 'African world view' who represents 'not only the most steadfast person in the homestead, but also the symbol of the eternal giver, the earth itself. [...] our last place of refuge', nor is she Elleke Boehmer's (1992: 233) 'idealised and totemic' figure of the nation. She is of course, in an ironic sense, 'the eternal giver, the earth itself' as a whore : 'She was a hard worker in screwing', and in an inverted sense, represents what should be the attribute of the male in a patriarchal family.

The children, both boys, are mirrors of their parents: both are destined to accrue some antisocial notoriety. Peter inherits his mother's reckless sexual behaviour and '[h]e and mother gave to the House a whiff of scandal strong enough to be detected throughout the whole region.' The narrator becomes self-withdrawn into books, but indulges in masturbation, in itself a threat to a patriarchal order in which sex is both a tool of dominating the other and a means of self-perpetuation of the family. The narrator does not fulfil these basic obligations. The two sons do not belong to what Boehmer called nationalist traditions of "sonship", which often cast sons as 'resilient and courageous (the soldier, the leader); idealistic or visionary (the poet); or resourceful, or even omniscient' (ibid.: 236). Boehmer (ibid.: 233) discusses the function of the 'family drama' in nationalist literature where it may be read as 'supplying the corroborative script and choreography for the larger symbolic dramas staged in nationalist histories'. 'House

of Hunger' subverts and inverts such a script. It portrays a childhood, sonship and family bereft of the script of founding nationalist traditions. 'House of Hunger' spells the end of such sonship and childhood, placing the space for the re-visionary potential of both the 'unhappy family' and dystopian sonship and childhood. The result of this shaken cosmos is a profound sense of anomie, social and moral chaos, perhaps the first such apocalyptic instance of a dysfunctional and 'unhappy family' and childhood in Zimbabwean literature.

The unhappy family in this sense is a space bereft of the sacred, and childhood itself brutally neutered as a political and moral force as to lose its symbolic function as a source of deathless optimism in the genesis and continuation of the nation-family. The tropes of the unhappy family and unhappy childhood in 'House of Hunger' are used for the systematic dismantling of the nationalist image of the African family, and the politics that inhere in that image. The use of this deconstructive childhood and family in 'House of Hunger' is more interesting to me than the deplorable victimhood and seeming effeteness of childhood that has drawn the attention of many critics. I suggest that if the intentionally gendered trope of son of the soil in Katiyo's and Chirasha's novels is meant to shore up sentiments of national longing and belonging, in 'House of Hunger' we witness the infertility and erosion of that nationalist trope and the emergence of a different kind of childhood and "insiderhood" within the space of a fundamentally flawed nation-family.

In her discussion of 'happy' and 'unhappy' families in nineteenth-century fiction, Jan Mark (1997: 133) comments on how, 'In unhappy families the individual characteristics of each member are irrepressible. It is the internal, incompatible differences that cause the

unhappiness, the friction that in its turn engenders fiction.’ The ‘happy’ family is deployed as a philosophical idyll of harmony: ‘Happy families resemble each other in their happiness. The members of the family are happy with each other; the gestalt is happy’ (Mark: *ibid.*). In nationalist literature, the ‘happy family’ will be a founding utopia of unitary order, homogeneous vision and common destiny for all. It will contrast sharply with the ‘unhappy family’, which could be used as a bugaboo and reason for the need for the coerced cohesion of the ‘family’. For Jan Mark, the ‘unhappy’ family is used as ‘an awful warning’: ‘they reminded the good children of good parents how fortunate they were’ (*ibid.*). Jan Mark comments on how the ‘unhappy family’ was cultivated as a trope in a new critical trend: ‘As the pleasures of creating fiction began to override the urge to instruct in these early authors, so the knowledge that a perfect family is a dull one began to influence their [writers’] scenarios’ (*ibid.*: 134). The depiction of familial instability became a critical element in the new trend. Marechera’s unhappy family could easily have come out of Jan Mark’s study because his are ‘the least attractive parents in fiction, remote, violently punitive’ (Mark 1997: 140). In her discussion of imaginary childhoods, Valerie Kripps (1997: 45) notes how children’s literature ‘bears the unmistakable traces of the social relations that construct it.’ The same is true of childhood as depicted in ‘House of Hunger’: the unhappiness is deeply etched and deranging.

But Marechera’s family is too unhappy to serve merely as ‘an awful warning’ that ‘a perfect family is a dull one’ in fiction. His unhappiness is not only a habit of thought which questions the utopian cohesiveness of a pre-colonial gestalt ‘whose freedom and tradition beckoned ever more vehemently’ (Zimunya 1982a: 127), but a means to a new

consciousness of place and narrative. This unhappiness requires a new narrative which begins with the end of a prefigured childhood, and ends with the suggestion that childhood itself is both narrative, and source of narrative. As both narrative and source of narrative, childhood is a place of memory, a 'lieu de mémoire' (Nora qtd. in Krips 1997: 45-46). Recollection of childhood in 'House of Hunger' is bereft of what Jack Zipes (1983: 26) described as 'normative patterns of behaviour to describe an exemplary social constellation', but point to the uninterrupted disruption and displacement of the child's sense of family and shelter. The family is portrayed as a place in which the child is held hostage by violent forces embodied by parents. The hostility of the family-space to the child's sense of rooted certainty is instanced by the adults' unending betrayal and shattering of taboos.

The nameless narrator recalls an incident that took place in his family when he was four years old. His father, a truck driver, was away most of the time.

When I was four years old I used to sleep in the cramped space between the wall and my parents' bed. And eight nights a week the maniacal symphonies of their screwing dinned into my mind. Then for one whole week father did not come home and I slept in the bed with mother. The following week father had still not come home. One night I had just about drifted off to sleep when I woke up screaming that there was a man at the window. But she hushed me and opened the window and let him in. He instantly jumped into the bed on top of her while I reluctantly eased down onto the cold cement floor. Soon there were tremendous groans and grunts erupting from that bed and the energy of it was like

god's fist shaking satan's shirtfront. The avalanche of it was even enough to wake Peter, who usually slept like a boa constrictor that has swallowed an elephant. He at once sized up the situation; like a bat out of hell he flung himself at the man who, however – without even pausing in his screwing of mother – knocked him out cold with a backhander. Father came back three days later. I said nothing. Peter grimly said nothing. And mother looked like she was not thinking about anything at all. (48)

The trauma and shame caused by witnessing parental sex and betrayal lodge at the core of the narrator's vision of life. His creative impulse is driven by the fear of bastardy and sex, and a general suspicion of parenthood²⁰. The self-violation of the mother figure, and the almost commonsensical cuckolding of the father, is a drama replicated in the whole community. Peter, the narrator's adolescent brother, masturbates in public in order to teach the 'infants' in the township what separated the men from the boys (48-49). In one instance, a man rapes his wife in full view of the public: 'He was cursing all women to hell as he did so' (50).

The relationship between Peter and his young brother, and that of the narrator and the society at large, is characterised by violation of one kind or another. It reduces the young narrator to a voyeur, willing or unwilling, in a society where sex mirrors the intensification and escalation of hostilities both in the private and public life of colonial

²⁰ In 'Tony and the Rasta', a children's story in *Scrapiron Blues*, the narrator expresses fear of being 'dirty': 'There is a man who comes to see Tony's aunty. He comes only at night. Tony listens to them whispering and doing things which Tony thinks are dirty. Tony is puzzled because children come into the world through these dirty goings-on. Are children therefore dirty? he asks.' (214). The connection with the memory of Marechera's mother's promiscuity in 'House of Hunger' is not difficult to make.

Zimbabwe.

The narrator is both fascinated and disgusted with the beastly side of human sex and parenthood, and the fear of turning into a monster through the process of growing up. Growing up is seen as a sign of degeneration (Archard 1993: 39-40). 'Growing up means turning into a monster just like your father and your mother. Growing up is to become blah. Very, very blah²¹. [...] So when you know you are growing up you must kill yourself before you become just another very boring blah', suggests Blah in 'Fuzzy Goo's Guide (to the Earth)' (*Scrapiron Blues*: 240). Marechera is that character Blah. The experience of sexual aberrations and perversions disrupts the narrator's sense of society, family and personhood. As Mic Hunter (1990: 21) argues, witnessing abuse can be 'extremely traumatic.'

The narrator's mother, in addition to turning her children into voyeurs in her bedroom, also takes the position of what Mic Hunter (1990: 18) called a 'privileged voyeur.' The narrator recalls:

Whenever mother took away my sheets to wash them she would make me explain every single stain on them. Since they were invariably stained with semen she would contemptuously give me a long sermon about how girls are "easy" and "why don't you get on with laying one or two?" [...] "There is nothing to it," she said. "You stick it in the hole

²¹ 'Blah' is a continuously mutating word that Fuzzy Goo the child character uses to mean anything from 'boring' to 'loving': 'Blah may also mean a little human being who is very, very boring. [...] Blah may also be a girl who does not like to do things in the school bicycle shed. Blah is also a father you are ashamed of. [...] Fuzzy Goo thinks Jesus' real name was Blah, because his dog is love. Love is boring. That is why it is Blah' (.239-240).

between the water and the earth, it's easy. She splays out her legs and you bunch your pelvis between her thighs and Strike! right there between her water and her earth. You strike like a fire and she'll take you and your balls in. Right? Up to your neck. When you come you'll see it misting her eyes." (78)

The sexual tutorial devalues her image as a mother in the eyes of the boy²². Her concern for the boy's sexual growth amounts to stripping him of his manhood, in the same way she emasculates the boy's father. However, if listened to in stereo, the seemingly brutal language of the mother's pedagogy (which recalls her own energetic style of sex accompanied by 'tremendous groans and grunts' when in bed with the dark figure (48)) may betray a genuine interest in recuperating the boy's dysfunctional sexuality, and leading him to take up the role of the virile heir to patriarchy. But as a result of cumulative personal and spiritual abuse by his immediate society the boy resorts to masturbation and the secret worlds of books and refuses to grow up in the expected "manly" ways. His is a moated boyhood in the sense that he is under social siege. It is the recognition of this siege that sets into motion 'varieties of narrative longing' (Watson 1994: 174).

In discussing the place of unhappy children in literature, Victor Watson sets up a scenario which is comparable to the situation of childhood in 'House of Hunger'. He writes: 'Adult literature is not obliged to be interested in childhood, and parents do not have to understand their children. But children have to understand adults because they live in a

²² Fuzzy Goo, in 'Fuzzy Goo's Guide (to the Earth)', recalls an unflattering image of his mother, 'Mum is usually what they call a bitch. A bitch is a female dog [...]. A dog that is a bitch but is also your mother [...].' Marechera transferred the same disgust he felt for his mother's sexuality to Fuzzy Goo.

world controlled by them and they are living their lives forward, towards their own adulthood. Adulthood surrounds them and awaits them' (1994: 174). It is a great risk to be defined by adults as a child in 'House of Hunger', and it is equally dangerous for childhood to reach into adulthood, which represents symbolic degeneration of the body and spirit. Fuzzy Goo in 'Fuzzy Goo's Guide (to the Earth)' believes that 'The more you grow the nearer you are to death' (*Scrapiron Blues*: 242). Adulthood surrounds childhood in threatening ways, perhaps like a piranha-filled moat. Marechera views all adult culture as a carefully orchestrated prelude to death, especially that of children. He suspects that adults, who are constantly aware of their vulnerability and mortality, because 'the more you grow the nearer you are to death', are envious of children and would seek to destroy them precisely because adults 'remember very dimly the illusion of eternal youth which little human beings enjoy' (*Scrapiron Blues*: 242). If the two states (of childhood and adulthood) are so diametrically opposed, one being the illusion of eternal youth, and the other the death of that youth, it should be 'epistemologically baffling' (Watson 1994: 166) how childhood could be made to desire adulthood in nationalist cultural politics.

Marechera's childhoods function to forestall the predictable teleologies of childhood in the constitution of a generic nation-family where the state of adulthood is instituted as a stable, inevitable, and desirable common destiny for all. It is 'the investment in staying in such a framework, that perhaps needs to be relinquished' (Heath 1997: 26). Strategies of disinvesting in a pattern of cultural thought could easily be mapped if it is understood that: 'We pin children to childhood and childhood to a corresponding notion of the child which is no more natural, no more given from some uniquely grounded reality of "the child",

than the history and the society from which it emerged (history and society being the very *realisations* of the natural)' (Heath 1997: 26). Marechera seeks a rhetoric to speak of his engulfed childhood as a grounded reality, which represents for him a cyclic and expansive memory of a social experience. His childhood is on the one hand, 'the represented real of a social construction [that] is failing to hold' (Heath, 26), and on the other, a notion of creativity and narrative longing. In 'House of Hunger', to borrow Victor Watson's (1994: 171) phrase, 'childhood is born into articulate meaning', in spite of it being 'rich in comic and pathetic possibilities' (ibid.).

Marechera's 'nation-family' and childhood are dystopias that render 'visible that absence of any signified that could correspond to the nation. Individual and collective identity, social and family life [are] like shells from which life [has] disappeared' (Franco 1989: 205). Writing itself becomes a way of recuperating the self, but from the margins of the nation. Childhood is deployed to point to the dissolution and reinvention of a post-national space. Orphanage and bastardy, in this sense, are distinctive tropes, what Brian Oxley invested with visionary and creative possibilities. Brian Oxley focuses on the role of the orphan and what he calls the bastard - 'an outcast in search of a new group and a new identity' - in American writing dealing with an early stage of its history. He finds that the bastard and the orphan, though excluded, '[...] foreshadow a future, more inclusive re-combination' (1990: 420). Oxley imagines these re-combinations as 'the birth pains of a better, future humanity' (ibid.). Himself an outcast in the nation-family, which in itself is a deformed prototype of the conventional nation-family, Marechera finds that his childhood exists outside the myth of the sheltering family, and transforms his outsidersness, or

bastardy, into the creation story of the unaccommodated man. In this case, the man without shelter, without society, is not only a veritable social pariah, but a self-made individual who, Lazarus-like, emerges from the debris of the generic nation-family, from which he escapes the possibility of being entombed alive, to forge his own originary ground as self-founding writer. His childhood stages what Ashleigh Harris (2002: 100) considered the 'dialectic of cultural orphan and reclamation' in what she called an 'orphaned culture'. In Marechera's case, this dialectic is resolved in a narrative revolution in which the author seeks validation of his experiences.

Marechera's suspicion of his own bastardy is implied in 'House of Hunger' (48) and suggested by other critics such as Zimunya (1982a: 99, 105). The sight and memory of his mother's unbridled promiscuity suggests an implied uncertainty about his paternity, hence his general sense of unrootedness. It is not my intention to explore his biography, but it is interesting to note that the fact that Marechera was plagued by the issue points to the false cohesion of the sheltering myth of the African family, and by extension, the super-tribe, the nation. It contributes to an appreciation of the centrality of dystopic childhoods in his fiction, which are spawned by the disrupted and flawed unhappy family, which in itself had become a dystopia for Marechera, whether as history or nation. Marechera was not an orphan in the strict familial sense, but remained an outsider in the cultural nationalism attached to both the early stages of the history of the Zimbabwean novel in English and the political nationalism that the fiction by black writers was expected to contribute to, before and after independence. He was disenchanted with the 'outward signs of social and national coherence' (*Black Insider*, 85) that cultural

nationalism constructed, which he saw as 'our peculiar brand of fascism' (*Black Insider*, 84), and could not imagine himself 'in some field doing the hoeing of the revolution' (ibid., 85). It can be suggested that his own version of bastardy and orphanage, or outsidership, is the source of his imaginative freedom and creativity, which creates childhoods 'with an order peculiar to themselves' (Oxley 1990: 429), in narratives that privilege what Jean Franco (1989: 211) called 'the impossibility of the typical, the representative' that a narrative categorised as a 'national allegory' would normally include.

In an ironic sense, Marechera repeats the repetitive and constitutive metaphors of founder and father of a social idea in the ways that he institutes imaginaries of his own emergence as a writer on the margins of the nation-family. If as is often reiterated in histories of nations, the founding moment of some nations is bloodshed, pain, and loss, for Marechera, the founding vision of his writing is the excruciating pain and dislocation of his childhood – instances of which I have cited – which he sublimates into a 'crude mythology' ('House of Hunger', 7). His childhood metamorphoses into a narrative and ideology of writing situated in a specific place of memory. Childhood itself is viewed as one of several places of memory which, according to Valerie Krips (1997: 46), are '[f]unctional, material and symbolic, [...] embodied memory.' Childhoods in 'House of Hunger' as lieux de mémoire 'represent a will to remember, but importantly thrive because they also retain a capacity to change, to generate new meanings and to resurrect old ones. They are sites which, through their representations, offer the promise of reconnection to the past' (Krips 1997: 46). In 'House of Hunger', that past is rooted in interminable flux, and it is embodied in the

childhoods that Marechera depicts. The literary child is therefore not just a construct of writing, but a way of coming to terms with an enormous social experience. For Valerie Krips (1997: 46), 'that coming to terms is itself a process, part of the individual's memorialisation of a personal past. Revisions to the set of concepts which constitute "the child" are, then, likely to arouse fierce dismay: cathexes to personal and collective memories are at issue.' This hostility to revision is what Marechera's childhood challenges, both as an aesthetic construct as well as a socially lived experience.

Memory Chirere

It is in Memory Chirere's short stories, more than in Marechera's work, that we witness a drastic revision to the sets of concepts which constitute "the child". If in Marechera's fiction childhood is threatened by the inauspicious condition of adulthood, in Chirere's stories, childhood is in fact a threat to the established notions of childhood itself. A different kind of child agency emerges in the shifting sites of Chirere's stories about childhood.

Critics have over-emphasised the victimhood of children in 'House of Hunger'. They insist on reading Marechera's story within what Pal Ahluwalia and Abebe Zegeye theorised as the tradition of the 'victim paradigm the [African] continent is locked in' (2003: vi). They have not discerned how the children style their behaviours into necessary survival kits as 'insiders' who want to reduce their isolation from a particular place. Excavating for the hidden dimensions of a place would help the critic and the writer to appreciate what Ahluwalia and Zegeye (ibid.: vi) called the 'lived experience,

subterranean selfhoods, new sites of liberation and resistance' that can be brought to the surface to 'reveal [the] practices taking form in everyday life' (ibid.).

It is a pity that Marechera himself, in an attempt to amalgamate his childhood into a founding experience of his artistic vision, seems to have leaned on a lopsided reading of his recollections of childhood. He seems to emphasise entrapment, brutality, and alienation, while evidence of an oppositional experiencing of place by his children teems in the streets of his narrative. It is indeed possible to view childhood in Marechera's work as supplying a narrative that seems to proliferate in a range of directions.

As a way into the discussion of Memory Chirere's stories, two²³ brief sites of undetected child social agency in 'House of Hunger' will suffice here. One refers to the already discussed scene in 'House of Hunger' (48), when the narrator was four years old, and he woke up to witness his mother's shameless immorality and cuckolding of his father in front of his two children; and the second is the incident involving the killing and burning of the narrator's cat by the neighbourhood's children (5-6).

In relation to the first, what is often remarked on by critics is how the trauma and shame in the child's memory of parental betrayal informs the author's vision of life. What is not often remarked on is the deployment of silence by the children to deny both the father and the mother moral authority. By not telling the father, the children are displacing him as a

²³ I discuss at length the nature of children's social agency neglected by critics in Marechera and Chirere's stories in Muponde, R. 2004a. "The Eyes of a Buck": Figuring the Child in the Zimbabwean Short Story in English. In Bettina Weiss. ed. *The End of the Unheard Narratives: Contemporary Perspectives on Southern African Literatures*. Heidelberg: Kalliope. 99-116.

point of moral authority, and by so doing, they acknowledge the mother's contemptuous attitude towards the father, while at the same time escalating their moral hostility towards the mother by 'grimly' saying 'nothing'. The children's silence is a disempowering technique in that it denies the mother the right of reply, while it forestalls the possible recuperation of the father's image through some expected manly performance of disgust and anger. But more important, the children's refusal to 'tell' is not just about saying 'nothing', however 'grimly', but a rejection of a fixed status. Other ways of reading the silence would be to insist that it is either a response of the weak to events they cannot alter or that it is a damning commentary on the shocking behaviour of the mother and the unsuspecting, powerless, alcoholic father.

Some readers may prefer to read the children's silence as not only a sign of their awareness of their vulnerability if they 'sold out' the mother who in the story is more feared than the father, but an instinctive desire to protect the mother from the father's wrath. There remains the possibility that the silence could be read both as acquiescence to fate and as wilful complicity. But in both cases, the child makes a choice not to speak, to say 'nothing', in itself a manifestation of realised power, and therefore social agency, which has gone unnoticed by critics in their preoccupation with images of vulnerability of the child. Besides the children's silence, there is both physical and verbal evidence of their desire not to be excluded, or taken for granted, and avoid society's tendency to overlook them as 'beside the point' (Fiedler 1971: 473). Both the narrator's verbal attacks and his brother Peter's physical interventions to disrupt the fornication, are of equal force, and amount to an assertion of independent social agency on the part of the children. They act

not only on social events but on adult behaviour as well in order to alter them.

A clearer example of this is in the incident of the burning and killing of the author's cat by the children, in itself an acknowledgement and indictment of the violence in the author's family and society at large. The violence does not only affect the children; they also appropriate it for their own uses. While Peter, now a grown man, is busy torturing his wife Immaculate, in the presence of the narrator, the children fling the dead and burnt cat through the window (5-6). Read differently, away from readings that focus on the effect of violence and poor upbringing on children, it is easy to see how the children initiate, distribute, and control the violence which finds echoes in the fabric of society as a whole. This way, they help to shape the society that engendered them, however it is shaped, by refusing to be 'beside the point'. There is a certain bonding and growing of boyhoods that the children enjoy in the streets, which simultaneously empowers them to claim both the streets and the attention of the adults. The messiness of the streets is conquered and ordered by the children into zones and checkpoints of boyhood and manhood, as Peter's masturbating in front of young township boys is meant to demonstrate (to teach the 'infants' what separated the men from the boys). That they kill and burn the cat and stone the narrator's house is not only an expression of children's capacity for evil, but illustrates their ability to adopt and fashion social styles and repertoires that immerse them in place, making them act out the competencies and intimacies with place which characterise real 'belongers'. In other words, the children's existential insideness instances 'the deep and complete identity with a place that is the very foundation of the place concept' (Ralph 1976: 55).

However, despite the fact that childhood in 'House of Hunger' affords the reader what Pamela Mordecai called 'prismatic vision', that is, a cognitive style which construes reality in 'sometimes unresolved pluralities' (2001: 21), there is a way in which Marechera's narrative centralises 'entrapment' and 'brutalisation' of childhood by adult society. This obsession with the subjection and vulnerability of childhoods in adult society forecloses the possibilities of resilient agency detectable in the same childhoods in his fiction.

It is to Chirere that we must now turn. His stories depict the minutiae of social agency in the most unlikely characters in the most unlikely places. Chirere seems to suggest that it is the practice of the everyday, in excluded, and often forgotten, communities and characters that we are likely to be surprised by the emergence of new social concerns in 'subterranean selfhoods, new sites of liberation and resistance' (Ahluwalia & Zegeye 2003: vi).

In 'Plastics and Cardboards', Chirere provides a chilling example of how children can take revenge on an immoral and abusive parent. The story recalls Marechera's 'House of Hunger', only in the sense that the taboos that bind the relationship between father/mother and children are both transient and brittle. But Chirere's story goes beyond what Marechera's child characters could do. In this story, Luka, a boy who works the streets, and Eliza his sister who works at the dumps, beat up their crippled beggar-mother in order to restrain her sexual desire for a blind beggar Jerard who lives next door.

There are interesting concerns to be raised immediately. They have to do with how children come into the sex life of their mother (something Marechera explored), and how they can dictate the terms of a mother's sexuality (something Marechera has not explored).

Implicated in this development is the extent to which taboos surrounding a mother's sexuality are a construct that is makeable and disposable. Added to this possible project of deconstructing societal do's and don'ts, is the performance of some of the most unimaginable transgressions by the children in Chirere's story. They beat up their own mother, something anyone familiar with Shona society would never think of doing because of the cultural and spiritual bugaboos and inhibitions associated with the figure of the mother. The "prison term" for beating up a mother is as long as eternity itself, and hangs over the whole lineage of the offender until it is fully "served" through taxing rituals which cannot be elaborated here. The children in Chirere's story defy the gods in this regard. They leap over all the social hurdles and taboos that place the image and the body of the mother beyond their rebuke or scrutiny. The mother herself is doubly weighted as taboo: she is their mother; she is crippled. In beating her up, the children are multiply incriminated and damned by society: they in turn resemble Marina Warner's characterisation of the child monster. In Chirere's story, to adapt Warner, 'the Child has never been seen as such a menacing enemy as today. Never before have children been so saturated with all the power of projected monstrosity to excite repulsion and even terror' (Warner 1994: 43). However, Chirere is not detained by the spectacle of excessive

moral transgression, rather, he explores the suggestive intricacies and intimacies that the act of deconstructing a taboo involves.

By physically beating their mother for repeatedly having sex with the blind beggar, the children are bodily and emotionally entangled with the tabooed subject of a mother's sexuality. While focusing their attention on beating the mother, as brother and sister they shatter a taboo. In any case, in Shona society the subject of sex and its secrecies is not discussed between brother and sister. That of the mother's sexuality is beyond children's "knowledge". The children thus violate both customary ethics and themselves as well. It is ultimately the mother's sexuality that brings their own into contact, raising the possibility of incest. Luka's violent unveiling of the mother's body in public, 'rag after rag' (39), is not only degrading to the mother, but draws him into the realm of forbidden pleasure, that is sex with his own mother. That he calls her 'the bitch' (39) is telling: he is intimately entangled with her even as he is revolted by her body. By calling her the bitch, he places her within his sexual reach, as someone he too could violate, because she is already violated.

The degradation of the mother's body by her children is expressed not only in the lashing they give her, but her state of physical disability. She has two iron legs, which inhibit mobility, and therefore increases her vulnerability to her children's surveillance of her body. Note that in this story the adult is brutalised and infantilized by her own children, and she is the one who seeks protection and mercy:

When Luka couldn't smack her big mouth, now hidden in the plastics and cardboards wall, he dropped his belt and beckoning at Eliza to stop, got hold of their mother's blouse with his hands and began to tear it from her body, rag after rag. That is when she began to cry anew, her naked breasts dangling. She turned sharply in her agony and tried to bite her son with her teeth. That was a mistake because she exposed her mouth. Luka slapped it once, twice, thrice. She rolled over, her breast quivering from her sobbing.

"Oh no! No! Eliza! Don't kill me! Don't kill me!" (39-40).

Marechera's story insists on viewing children as the victims of adults, and as the ones sinned against, the vulnerable and alienated ones. In Chirere's story, the moral authority that children often possess because of what Fiedler considers their 'offended innocence' (1971: 480), is sublimated into a fierce desire to judge and control the adult world. It is as if the accepted teleology where the child is guided into adulthood by the adult is upset. Children in Chirere's story do remain the stereotypical and essentialised 'judge of our world – and a reproach to it' (Fiedler 1971: 471) as they, together with the society of the 'plastics and cardboards', wonder about their mother: 'For what did she want with Jerard, the blind beggar? If she got pregnant, how would she care for the child?' (40). But the scene in which the mother is beaten by her children, her clothes torn 'rag after rag', is the reverse of what is normally the situation of childhood in an adult-controlled society, at least as we know it from Marechera in 'House of Hunger' and Vera in *Under the Tongue*. Contrary to what Fiedler notes about the uses of 'abused and suffering children for the sake of pathos' (1971: 472) in other cultural texts, Chirere is keen to capture a scene of an adult's absolute subjection to her children's authority and brutality. But this is not for the purposes of 'pathos', but to subvert any unquestioned notions about children and

childhood being 'points of identification, as warrants of virtue, as markers of humanity' (Warner 1994: 46).

Chirere seems to be in agreement with Marina Warner that 'our children can't be better than we are' (Warner, 46). 'The consecration of childhood raises the real-life examples of children to an ideal which they must fail, modestly by simply being ordinary kids, or horrendously by becoming victims or criminals. But childhood doesn't occupy some sealed Eden or Neverland set apart from the grown up world' (Warner 1994: 46). To show that children may in the end 'grow up to be even more like us than they already are' (ibid.: 48), Chirere describes how the mother defies the children by actually bearing a baby for Jerard, as if to say: cripples, blind people, and beggars are also entitled to sexual pleasure, love and producing children. For the disabled mother, it is an important point to make because it undermines the children's desire to assume the features of a repressive adult society in which physical disability is a marker of impurity and danger, and thus a departure from the norm. In other words, the childhood that is figured in Chirere's story is not necessarily revolutionary, but an embodiment of a recycled consciousness of adult power, only practiced from "below".

It is interesting to pursue this point further. While the children feel justified in restraining their mother's sexual desire ostensibly for economic reasons, there is a way in which the children are taking the places of their fathers (they have different fathers), to ensure the security of the mother's sexual goods. Jerard the blind man who is led by his little daughter to the crippled mother's bed-hut each time he wants sex, is a veritable thief. He

is, in the eyes of Luka and Eliza, stealing from their fathers' sexual estate, hence the need to police the mother's body. The disgust that Luka expresses about 'his mother's crying and Jerard's deep groaning' during their love-making, is not only because he thought it was 'dirty and eerie' (40), or that the sex smelt like 'wet guavas drying and rotting in the sun' (40), it is the disgust and anger felt by a 'cheated' lover. Luka-as-his-father desires the same body that he now sees squirreled away from him by a seemingly unworthy rival. The mother, in turn, begins to regard Luka as her husband, to whom she submits her body for surveillance and punishment. When she gets pregnant in spite of Luka's hawk-eyed vigil on her bedroom door, Luka is devastated. 'Why should he go back to the shack where she now lay: big with child, groaning, asking for roasted mice, caterpillars and boiled eggs from him every time he arrived? Was he her husband?' (41).

The crippled mother, whose motherhood triumphs in the adversity caused both by disability and the terror visited on her by her two children, revenges herself on her children by taunting them with the unflattering memories of their fathers.

"You, your father came from the south. Joe, just as short and tough and yellowish as you. Joe left you when you were inside. Joe: I just hope you don't take to knives like him." Then pulling a face at Eliza, whenever she turned up at the shack without a handful of salted caterpillars, "You, your father was a tall wizard from the north. Jeremia: he wouldn't allow me to have as little as a whisper with any other man. Hard-hearted men from the north. They lock up their wives with medicines. He wanted to lock me up but I said no." (41)

The mother considers the two children to be as violent as their fathers, and they are indeed

avatars of their fathers. She believes they too want to 'lock' up her body and fix her status as a disabled and poor woman. She decides to resist them, as she views them as a resurgence of her terrible past. But this indeed is a sick society, in which hard and equally sick choices have to be made by both the children and the adults.

In the case of Chirere's 'Keresenzia' and 'An Old Man', the poor children 'seize adult status through action, sometimes violent action' (Cook 2000: 116). Keresenzia, 'a small girl with a hooked nose and brown hair'(24), first nags her grandmother Matambudziko to desperation before she murders her with a hoe handle. Matambudziko, who had gone to her neighbours to look for pumpkins with which to make the pumpkin porridge that Keresenzia was unreasonably asking for, returns home at night, to find an angry Keresenzia.

The girl was cross. She didn't answer. She didn't fidget.

"Kere! Are you in there?" The old woman walked in, head first.

There was a scuffle from behind the door and the hoe handle crushed onto the old woman's head. "Where were you? Where were you? You should have hurried!"

Ambuya[grandmother] fell, hard. Then the girl waited and waited. "Ambuya! Ambuya Matambudziko!"

Ambuya didn't move. The girl panicked and ran out of the hut into the moonlight. (26)

What is immediately clear is the way the child assumes adult authority by interrogating and punishing her own grandmother for coming home late, behaviour normally associated with adults. The punishment is excessive and results in the grandmother's death. It is at

the point of her grandmother's death that Keresenzia returns to the protective category of 'children' which Daniel Thomas Cook (2000: 108) believes 'often serves as a moral cover which shields those so named from responsibility by proposing a definitional conundrum, i.e. children, by definition, are innocent and thus are not capable of [...] murder'. Chirere, however makes the murder look exactly like the result of the wilful act of a wilful agent, puncturing in the process what Cook calls 'an already hypermoralized construction of childhood' (ibid.: 107). In Chirere's story, there is therefore no opportunity for 'the adult fetishisation of both children and of our own lost childhood' (Wood 2003: 14).

Similarly, in 'An Old Man', Chirere presents the violent world of the street children, in which the child figure 'moves in a world in which she or he appears to be virtually independent of/from adult concerns and preoccupations. This fictionalized world is youth created and youth centered, connected to adults only through some combination of subordination and rebellion' (Cook 2000: 110). Raji, the quintessence of Marina Warner's 'child monster', terrorizes other street children and kills one of them, Zhuwawo, by chasing him into busy traffic. Remorseless and ruthless, Raji warns Zhuwawo's friend Sami: 'Zhuwawo is dead. Were you not there when we chased the dog till it collided with the car?' (34). Far from being the icon of a vulnerable humanity, as a street child, 'Raji knew many businessmen and the boys always whispered slyly that when women weren't serious with anyone, they invited Raji to do things with them'(35).

The figure of Raji the street child deepens 'the adult's imaginatively-created pain of lost childhood' (Wood 2003: 14), while it disarranges 'the imaginary archetype of what

childhood even was' (ibid.). It heightens the sense of anomie that such dystopic childhoods present to adult cultures. Marina Warner describes the over-dependence of adult culture and imaginaries of continuity on the archetypes of childhood as a 'nagging, yearning desire to work back to a pristine state of goodness' (1994: 41). She points to the selfish metaphysical investments that adult cultures make in the idealized image of childhood in order to underwrite their own certainties about the future and the past. 'Grown ups want [children] to stay like that for their sakes', not the children's, and they want children to be simple enough to believe in fairies too, again, for humanity's sake on the whole, to prove something against the evidence' (ibid.: 42). But then, as Warner notes, 'the image of a child always opens up the horizon to a possible future, and so when the clouds lower, it feels darker' (ibid.). The figure of Raji, and even that of Keresenzia, represents the darkening of the horizons of adult culture in Warner's and Cook's sense. These two child figures help us to understand how '[c]hildhood does not belong exclusively or even primarily to children'(Cook 2000: 109). This is because, as Cook argues, the 'trajectories, movements and meanings which make up childhood refer as much to adults' conceptions as they do to children's emergent understandings' (ibid.). If 'the act of *defining* childhood has been the domain of adulthood' (Wood 2003: 13), it follows therefore that 'neither the idealized child nor the sexually experienced child are the *actual* voiced experiences of children' (ibid.). Such a scenario speaks of how the children are a dispossessed category, because they exist chiefly as a mythology which enshrines 'adult desires and dreams, including Romantic and Surrealist yearnings to live through the *imagination*' (Warner 1994: 42).

Chirere's stories subvert the conceptualisation of children which regards them as innocent origins without acknowledging that 'origins are compounded of good and evil together, battling it out', and that children are constructed as innocent because 'they're outside society' (Warner, 44). Like Warner, Chirere demonstrates the simple but often overlooked fact about children: 'they can't live innocent lives on behalf of adults, like medieval hermits maintained at court by libertine kings to pray for them' (Warner, 48). In this sense, Chirere differs in considerable ways from Marechera and Mungoshi. In the work of the two writers, childhoods are in the first place victims of adult authority before they become icons of rebellion against parental authority (Mungoshi) or an ideology of writing (Marechera). In Chirere, they are representations of the 'markers of humanity' (Warner 1994: 46) which inspire the fear that 'children will grow up to be even more like us than they already are' (ibid.: 48), and cannot therefore be used to represent ideals and desires that inevitably terminate in the expected adult form, which in the first place constructed the childhoods, and is the source of frustration for the childhoods. There is in Chirere's children, especially in Raji and Keresenzia, a desire to usurp agency in such a way that the child is no longer 'in need of completion by the seemingly inevitable processes of "development" and "socialization", this child stands on its own as a competent social actor at any given moment, transforming into new instances of completeness at various points along the life journey' (Cook 2000: 110). This kind of child is no longer easily useable in ideologies of origins, such as the family and nation, because it upends the conventional teleologies that structure the story of the family and that of the nation. Childhood in Chirere's stories sabotages ideologies that figure the child 'as the site of the subject's origin, whether the origin in question is natural or cultural'

(Castaneda 2002:167), or ideological. It contests the metaphysical investments in childhood as 'the embodiment of possibility in a form that can be known and, especially experienced' (Castaneda, 169) as leading to the realization of an expected adult form and culture. It does this by sullyng 'what might be called an adult desire for the child' (Castaneda, 167), where the child is valued 'as an originary site of the subject' (ibid.). Viewed as a 'resource for the present', '[t]he adult returns to childhood to reappropriate the child he or she once was in order to establish a more stable adult self' (Castaneda, 5). Chirere's children cannot be revisited and exited by adults anyhow without complications, because childhood as the past of the culture no longer offers easy recognitions. In other words, 'subjects cannot be known in advance' (Castaneda, 170) any longer. This spells a more hopeful and complex challenge to the ways narrative incepts unpredicted subjects in an unravelling national and social space such as contemporary Zimbabwe.

Conclusion

By way of conclusion, it is important to keep in mind that, for Mungoshi, the recognition of the vulnerability of adult authority itself in the face of mounting challenges from the children is a starting point for making claims about children as a powerful force in the making of history and culture. Visions of childhood in Mungoshi's stories suggest viable exit routes out of the inexorable authority of family and tradition, something that we see rehearsed in Marechera's 'Protista'.

It is in 'Protista' that Marechera suggests ways of thinking about a new narrative order which is located in childhood experiences. It is as if the author had to retrace his childhood

in order to read it politically. The retreat to a moment in childhood is a symbolic act of self-making. But writing a story of self-making, as the son in the story discovers, may require a certain quality of violence in form and genre. Without this founding violence, narrative is fraught with the tautology of a culturally framed experience. Recollection of childhood in 'Protista' is a way of longing for new form. Childhood is presented as a trope of creativity and new beginnings. What is chilling though is the strong sense of anomie when the son realises that he is caught up in a cyclic narrative, and feels that the only way to break the father's clenched hand is via murder and suicide. The son's action leaves a deep void of uncertainty. It is in 'House of Hunger' that the literary child is invested with more than reconstructive potential.

In 'House of Hunger', Marechera portrays childhood as unstable and offering no consolation to those who want childhood to '*represent* something special (innocence, truth, the renewal of ourselves, of our past, the social security of some realm of simplicity, integrity, or whatever, some authentic reality to which we can refer, in which we can find a certainty of value)' (Heath 1997: 27). He does not write within the nationalist framework which requires childhood to supply the optimism of an unfinished genesis of the nation, nor does he accept that adulthood is a common, desirable destiny for all. He depicts an adulthood that is malevolent and predatory, and therefore to be feared or destroyed: it is a social construction that is falling apart. Childhood points to the dissolution and reinvention of a post-national space in which it engenders articulate meaning. In this post-national space, or what Gerald Gaylard (1993: 101) called 'the space within and outside of the socialized symbolic order' which Marechera gives voice, childhood serves as both a place

of memory and a creation myth. Its ultimate value is its ability to suggest the dissolution of a symbolic order, while embodying a new one in the shaping of childhood.

If in Marechera's fiction adulthood is not a desirable state to grow into, Chirere's childhoods are equally not in any way a desirable social condition. They cannot be easily used as an ideology of origins, nor as a pliant tool of cultural and political imaginaries, because they upend the teleologies that the story of origins and continuity would require. Chirere therefore subverts Marechera's characterisation of childhood as engulfed by a threatening adulthood, and instead shores up the image of the 'wild child' (Warner 1994) who threatens the certainties of the adult world. However, in both writers' work, the child is not just a construct of writing, but a way of coming to terms with the void in narrative experience.

The dystopic childhoods that Mungoshi, Marechera and Chirere depict in their stories signal the end of an era of imaginative "tautology" in Zimbabwean cultural nationalism. A process similar to what Stephen Heath (1997: 27) describes elsewhere is equally present in the depiction of childhood in these stories, 'The end of childhood is doubtless the condition of a very substantial new beginning, with childhood future times [sic] a very different story.' In these stories 'what we face is a transformation of childhood, rather than its ending' (Krips 1997: 49). It is ironic that in spite of its dystopic nature, childhood in Mungoshi, Marechera and Chirere's fiction is shaped into a fantasy of revolt and rebirth. These childhoods represent therefore a new optimism constituted in a narrative revolution that will throw up new questions of history, resistance, and cultural politics in Zimbabwe.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

In my study I explored the ways in which childhood is constructed and represented in a wide range of black Zimbabwean novels and short stories written in English from 1972 to 2000. I analyzed the changing representations of childhood and examined the range of literary strategies used by black Zimbabwean writers to depict childhood. In particular, I considered how these depictions bear upon questions of history, politics and resistance. I argued that, instead of seeing childhood in romantic or idyllic terms, it is possible to see it as a contested terrain, one in which the larger tensions and conflicts of the society manifest themselves. In other words, my study sought to read the history and politics of Zimbabwe through the ways in which its writers depict the lives of children.

Childhoods are accorded by these writers a central role in social, political, and cultural concerns by being depicted not only as a matter of focalization and characterization, but a tool for the construction of a wide variety of culturally and historically specific sets of ideas and philosophies. In addition, literary childhoods, as depicted by Zimbabwean authors, offer sites that constitute and define resistance in a given national history.

The imagining of the child and childhood by the adult writer is tied to the history of the nation that inflects it. As a result, the literature itself, and the childhoods it depicts, participates in convening the meanings of history, politics and the nation. The nation itself is figured as an institution and a discursive space, whose continual disruption and reshaping is captured in the images of the childhoods in the literature.

As this study has demonstrated, plurality and contestation are central to the imagining of the child and childhood. The childhoods are reflective and 'appropriative of the discontinuities, unevenness, resistances, that are the chief features of the experience of material histories' (Green 1997: 295). The portrayal of childhoods in Zimbabwean literature represents what Preben Kaarsholm has called 'a landscape full of breaks and ruptures; but one also entailing much movement towards overcoming these breaks; and much intellectual noise and music, made in order to be heard and understood, not silenced' (2005: 23). If for Kaarsholm the 'dynamics of this landscape' provides 'a counterpoint to that of the state' (ibid.: 23), the same could be said about the multifarious contradictions and dynamics of the childhoods in the literature. They provide a counterpoint to the nationalist discourse and its inflexible brand of history and resistance, making it possible for us to start thinking about the ways in which these childhoods contest, disrupt and threaten the 'lifespan of nationalist discourse' (Kaarsholm, 22) in Zimbabwe.

In the introductory chapter I defined the area of investigation and reviewed the literature on literary childhood. I set out the thematic frames in which I located narratives that represent different ways in which childhoods contest and inhabit spaces of memory, in the process reformulating and challenging the ways they relate to the story of the nation. In Chapter 2, I contrasted the treatment of childhoods as spaces of memory in *Jikinya* and *Dew in the Morning*. I suggested ways in which the depiction of childhoods in the two novels constituted imaginaries of the birth of the new Zimbabwe. Furthermore, I pointed out that the political investments which are made in the white child by cultural nationalists

are a desire to map out a space in which the colonized contests the colonizer's intentions and assumptions. I demonstrated how they ultimately yielded to an irreconcilable adversarial position in which conflict between white settler and black indigene is viewed as inevitable. However, unlike in *Jikinya*, the depiction of childhood in *Dew in the Morning* betrays moments when an author resists and manages to break out of the master narrative which makes war between races predictable, while still drawing on its staple resources such as the imaginary of land and its loss to the white race. This way of portraying spaces of memory, through childhood, makes it possible to sense different ways of inhabiting space and history, and therefore eschewing the predictability of the patterns and uses of childhood in a culturally and historically framed experience.

Child of War and *A Son of the Soil*, as discussed in Chapter 3, are narratives that present the liberation war as historically inevitable, and the role of childhood in it as politically and culturally precast. The set of archetypes of boy childhoods that are represented here shore up the emergence of the nation through invariant and unified identities of "children of resistance", or "sons of the soil". These tropes link childhood inextricably to an identity with the "soil" and "war", the pillars of Zimbabwean nationalism, and what forms its structures of feeling. But these childhoods are so exclusively gendered that the "distinctness of a beginning", the birth of the new nation in war, which they promise, is nothing more than a resurrection and firming up of the idea of the nation as a singular, masculinist narrative, in which they are groomed and trapped.

However, in Chapter 4, I discussed how the narrative hinged on the land and war operated

differently when placed in the space of women's fiction as well as the sensitively gendered novel of a male writer such as Chenjerai Hove. I argued that, although the girlhoods represented in *Nervous Conditions*, *Under the Tongue* and *Ancestors* are shaped by dystopian symbols of death and disability respectively, they are intricately connected to the quest for voice in ways that subvert the standard constructions of female childhood in the nationalist aesthetic. These girlhoods symbolize the shifting nature of the narrative of childhood in Zimbabwean literature. They are located outside the nationalist aesthetic and its rhetoric of unified "sons of the soil". They have a complex relationship to it which makes it possible for its spaces to expand and allow a viable polyphony of childhood experiences to proliferate in a range of directions. Whereas the "sons of the soil" are trapped by their inability to challenge the position of their childhoods in the "war" narrative, which makes them equivalents of the pliant Biblical Isaac, the girlhoods represented in *Nervous Conditions* and *Ancestors* resort to violence in order to right the narrative wrongs of the past and the present.

In Mungoshi, Marechera and Chirere's work, discussed in Chapter 5, we witnessed different kinds of violence in the ways in which childhoods are deployed to fracture the predictable teleologies that make adulthood a desirable destination for all childhoods. In the work of these writers, there is a recognition of the vulnerability of adult authority, and therefore its culture and politics. It is replaced by a strong consciousness of how childhood, as a culturally framed experience, can be exited, and reconfigured in ways that ensure that both childhood and adulthood can no longer be theorized and deployed in the same ways, for the same ends.

Mungoshi portrays a childhood that serves to corrode adult power and assumptions. In Marechera's fiction childhood, while vulnerable to adult authority and its instabilities, points to the dissolution of a national space and the reinvention of a post-national space. In this space, its ultimate value is to suggest the disbanding of a symbolic order, while embodying a new one in the shaping of childhood. The end of childhood for that reason teems with all sorts of narrative possibilities that help to end an era of what I consider tautological in the imagining of the child and childhood in Zimbabwean literature. If in the nationalist discourse, as Ranger puts it, there has been too much history which has been repeated too often²⁴, there has also been in the literature repetitive descriptions of childhoods to the extent that one can also say there is too much narrative of 'vulnerable and innocent' childhoods. Even where Mungoshi and Marechera attempt to complicate these portraits of vulnerable childhoods by allowing them some wilful agency, they still succeed in showing that the childhoods are at the mercy of adult culture.

In sharp contrast to Mungoshi and Marechera, Chirere's portraits of childhoods can no longer be revisited for use in nationalist projects such as the writing of 'patriotic history' (Ranger 2005). In Chirere's stories, childhoods can no longer be imagined or desired as points of origin for ideologies such as the family and the nation or history. Nor can they be known in advance, because in Chirere's stories, childhood no longer provides just 'a symbolic representation of the state of the moral order in society' (Jenks 2004: 7) but an

²⁴ Terence Ranger (2005: 219) has aptly described what he calls 'patriotic history' in Zimbabwe as a strategy by the ruling party (ZANU PF) to 'rule by historiography', a situation in which, 'you could have too much history if a single, narrow historical narrative gained a monopoly and was endlessly repeated'.

upending of that moral order, and a severe test of 'an age-old desire [by adults] to invest in futures now rendered urgent' (Jenks 2000: 125). This spells a more hopeful and complex challenge to the ways in which narrative anticipates and mediates unpredicted subjects in an unravelling national and social space such as contemporary Zimbabwe. Here, Chirere's work evokes ways of thinking about 'post-childhood' (Jenks 2000) as a post-national reordering of narrative politics.

Whereas the dominant cultural and political discourse on childhood in Zimbabwe has largely regretted the loss of childhood, in its myriad senses of beginnings and continuity of the race, in Chirere's stories 'the child has become an index, if not an icon, of the unstable experience of postmodern social life' (Jenks 2000: 125). Contrary to Neil Postman's optimistic assertion, children in Chirere's stories are not necessarily 'the living messages we send to a time we will not see' (Postman 1994: xi), because they resist being vulnerable to a tropistic reading of childhood by cultural nationalists as 'stability, continuity and settlement' (Jenks 2000: 125), something that echoes the desire of 'patriotic history' to represent itself as the ultimate imaginary of unity, identity and order.

What should be said in conclusion, though, is that Chirere, Mungoshi and Marechera, cumulatively, suggest ways in which the textual situation of childhood could be reviewed in order to reshape a post-national understanding of what might be termed post-childhood. It is not necessarily 'the end of childhood' in the apocalyptic sense that Postman (1994) uses to describe the disruption of 'cultural patterns, belief systems and dominant ways of thinking' (Jenks 2000: 123) about childhood. Rather, it is an end which signals the ways in

which 'the various components of our conception of childhood, often contradictory, are kept in any kind of sense, if at all, with only the greatest of difficulty, the contradictions now precisely tearing the conception to bits' (Heath 1997: 26). To adapt Heath, it is an end of childhood which 'is doubtless the condition of a very substantial beginning' (ibid.: 27) freed from the predeterminations, appropriations and teleologies of a limiting cultural nationalist discourse in Zimbabwe.

Thus these childhoods, as I have described them in my study, can be understood as images of real social forces that they recreate and are creations of. As already indicated in my discussion of concepts of childhood in the introductory chapter, 'childhood [is] an idea in a society's explanation of the world' (Cunningham 1995: 2) and itself. It is central to the construction of worldviews, and as a result cannot be studied in isolation from society as a whole (ibid.: 5). Studying the depiction of childhoods in Zimbabwean literature is therefore one way of researching certain kinds of tropes which, as Bronfenbrenner (1974) suggests, constitute some of the ways a nation can predict how, and on what terms, it can survive. The literature itself, in its attempt to understand and reshape both the social and symbolic orders, will be the poorer if it ignores the distinctive knowledge and experiences that an understanding of notions of childhood suggest.

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