OF NATION, NARRATION AND NEHANDA: ACCOUNTS BY SAMUPINDI AND VERA

A research report submitted in fulfillment of requirements for the degree of Masters in African Literature

of

Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand

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Date: April 2017

Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction…….……6

Chapter 2: Mbuya Nehanda and Zimbabwe's Versions of History……..21
2.1 History, Nation and Narration…….21
2.1.1 Shona Oral History……..……..23
2.1.2 Settler Colonial History…….……24
2.1.3 Nationalist History…….25
2.1.4 Patriotic History…….28
2.2 Literature and Nation…….…….31

Chapter 3: The Nation, Samupindi, Vera and the "Frozen Image……..……..37
3.1 Interpreting and Appropriating the "Frozen Image" for Versions of the Nation……..……..37
3.2 Samupindi - Narrating Mbuya Nehanda "Within" the "Frozen Image"……..…….……..41
3.2.1 Samupindi's Visual Engagement with the "Frozen Image"…….……..41
3.2.2 Plot Summary and Style…….…….…….…….……44
3.2.3 Narrative Engagement with the "Frozen Image"…….…….……47
3.3. Vera - Narrating Mbuya Nehanda "Beyond" the "Frozen Image"……..…….…….54
3.3.1 Vera's Verbal Engagement with the "Frozen Image"…….……..….54
3.3.2 Plot Summary and Style…….…….…….…….……55
3.3.3 Narrative Engagement with the "Frozen Image"…….…….…….57

Chapter 4: Conclusion…….…….…….…….…….……..…71

Bibliography…….…….…….…….…….……..……74

Appendix 1: The "Frozen Image" of Mbuya Nehanda and Sekuru Kaguvi…….……80
Appendix 2: Front Cover of *Death Throes: The Trial of Mbuya Nehanda* (1990)……..…….81
Appendix 3: Back Cover of *Death Throes: The Trial of Mbuya Nehanda* (1990)……...82
Appendix 4: Front Cover of *Nehanda* (1993)…….…….…….……..……..83
Appendix 5: Back Cover of *Nehanda* (1993)…….…….…….……84

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Abstract

This research report uses the "Frozen Image" - a widely circulated photograph taken by the British South Africa Company of Mbuya Nehanda and Sekuru Kaguvi, the female and male Shona Mhondoros who led Zimbabwe's first anti-colonial uprising against the settlers, as its point of departure to explore the relationship between settler-colonial, nationalist, patriarchal and feminist versions of Mbuya Nehanda's role and agency in the First Chimurenga. This paper begins by demonstrating that it is necessary for nationalist discourses to seek to "lock in" the histories embodied in visual moments such as the widely and historically circulated "Frozen Image", arguing that they are reliant on the "fixedness" of gendered national temporalities. I argue that Charles Samupindi's *Death Throes: The Trial Against Mbuya Nehanda* demonstrates that when the challenge to settler-colonial projections of an African past go unaccompanied by an interrogation of historical gender relations and a broader challenge to Western modernities, it is necessary to remain faithful to, and narrate the Frozen Image, in a self-conscious, realist, imaginatively constrained narrative project. This is whereas Yvonne Vera's, *Nehanda* demonstrates that it is possible to "move beyond the image" to create a liberatory, poetic and imaginative narrative project.

Abbreviations

ANC	African National Congress
BSAC	British South Africa Company
MK	uMkhonto we Sizwe
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
ZANU	Zimbabwe African National Union
ZANU PF	Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front
ZANLA	Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army
ZAPU	Zimbabwe African People's Union
ZIPRA	Zimbabwe People’s Revolutionary Army

Chapter 1: Introduction

In a 1998 interview Yvonne Vera described the rationale for writing her debut novel *Nehanda*, saying, "I wanted to write beyond the photograph, you know, that *Frozen Image*, beyond the date, beyond the fact of her dying. If anything in my book she doesn't die, she departs." (Vera cited in Hunter 1998, p.77, emphasis mine) The "Frozen Image" Vera refers to is a photograph of Mbuya Nehanda and Sekuru Kaguvi, the legendary spiritual mediums who led what is known as Zimbabwe's First Chimurenga or liberation war in Mashonaland against the colonial pioneer column in the late 1890s (Beach 1998; Charumisai 2008) (See Appendix 1). The photograph, taken by Cecil John Rhodes' British South Africa Company (BSAC), shortly before their execution, triumphantly declared "The Capture of Nianda and Kagubi" (Charumisai 2008), signaling the suppression of resistance led by a troublesome and disobedient "native" woman they had dismissed as a "witch".

The famous "Frozen Image" moved beyond that moment and came into national circulation and the public imagination through its reproduction in historical texts, such as nationalist historian Terence Ranger's (1967) *Revolt in Southern Rhodesia 1896–7: A Study in African Resistance* and David Lan's (1985) *Guns and Guerillas: Guerillas and Spirit Mediums in Zimbabwe.* The image would also appear in school textbooks, which were the site through which Vera first came across the photograph:

> We had a school textbook which had a photograph of Nehanda and Kaguvi standing against the wall…we were taught that they were rebels who deserved to be hanged…But the image from that photograph stayed with me: without quite knowing whether this was the version of things that one should know. (Vera cited in Bryce 2002b, p.40)

Since Vera's childhood under Rhodesia's settler minority regime appropriations of this image have been many. The photograph has, for example, been cropped and turned into a portrait of Nehanda placed on a recent Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front (ZANU PF) Independence Day poster. As Eleni Coundouriotis (2014) argues, this visual representation serves the function of placing President Robert Mugabe in the tradition of Mbuya Nehanda, the Mhondoro, or royal spirit. In this way the original intention of the photograph is subverted and emphasizes "the infinite reproducibility of Mbuya Nehanda as symbol of national pride and autonomy" (Coundouriotis 2014, p.159).

The fascination with this image, and the privileging of Mbuya Nehanda as the most well-known figure of the First Chimurenga (Lan 1987; Charumisai 2008) might lie both in her refusal till the end to convert to Christianity and in her famous dying words, "my bones will rise again" which are reiterated in the narratives of both Yvonne Vera's 1993 novel *Nehanda* and Charles Samupindi's 1990 novella *Death Throes: The Trial of Mbuya Nehanda.* The presence of her "restless bones" was felt during the Second Chimurenga,

which began in the late 1960s and ended in 1979. The invocation of Mbuya Nehanda's name and revolutionary spirit, together with the presence of her then spirit medium within the Mozambican guerrilla camps was seen to provide moral authority, support and guidance to the guerrillas fighting against the Rhodesians (Johnson and Martin 1981; Lan 1987). This presence continues into post-independence Zimbabwe. Frederick Klaits, for instance, argues that the ZANU PF led government continuously draws on the "myth of political origin in the war of independence" (Klaits cited in Murray 2011, p. 157) and it within this framework that Mbuya Nehanda's presence has been transformed to index this originatory claim, such that a range of national sites such as street signs and buildings bear her name. Perhaps most telling of her transformation into "Mother of the Nation" is the Mbuya Nehanda Maternity Ward of Parirenyatwa Hospital, Zimbabwe's largest public health facility (Krishnan 2014).

Mbuya Nehanda was, of course, not the only leader to emerge during the First Chimurenga or in the intervening period until the Second Chimurenga. Yet, despite this, she has emerged as the iconic figure of Zimbabwean national identity (Ranger 1967; Beach 1998; Wilson-Tagoe 1999; Charumbira 2008). In particular, Mbuya Nehanda is frequently juxtaposed against the figure of Sekuru Kaguvi, the male spiritual leader who played a significant role in the First Chimurenga. The prominence and agency of Mbuya Nehanda in the First Chimurenga has been challenged in nationalist accounts, such as Terence Ranger's (1967) *Revolt in Southern Rhodesia, 1896-7: A Study in African Resistance* and Lawrence Vambe's (1972) *An Ill-fated People: Zimbabwe before and after Rhodes* which places male spirit medium Sekuru Kaguvi as the most influential spiritual leader in the First Chimurenga. The question of the extent of Mbuya Nehanda's role and agency in the First Chimurenga is also engaged directly in the work of historian David Beach who describes Nehanda as an "innocent woman unjustly accused" (1998 p. 27) as he argues against her centrality in the Chimurenga. Responding directly to Beach's argument, Ruramisai Charumbira (2008, p. 103) seeks to reinscribe Mbuya Nehanda's agency by engaging questions of gendered victimhood, and through "revisiting the evidence" and documentation gathered by colonial authorities' during the period of the rebellion.

Further tensions and fractures in nationalist narratives invested in the question of Mbuya Nehanda's role as a female spirit medium appear in many Shona novels. Where the oral and patriotic histories authored by the liberation movements have largely accepted the depiction of Mbuya Nehanda as the exceptional heroic figure who refused to convert to Christianity, and Sekuru Kaguvi as the effeminate, passive leader who eventually capitulates and converts (Vambe 2011); there nonetheless remains an ambivalence to her as a female spiritual medium.

Writing on the privileging of the nationalist narrative in Shona novels such as Solomon Mutswairo's *Feso,* Maurice Taonezvi Vambe (2011) points to a patriarchal ambivalence towards Mbuya Nehanda's imagery as a female fighter in Chimurenga. Vambe (2011) for example, notes that Mbuya Nehanda is addressed in masculine terms such as "baba mutswene" in Mutswairo's famous poem "Nehanda Nyasikana" appearing in his 1957 novel *Feso*. Vambe (2011) also notes that some strands of Shona oral tradition suggests that Mbuya Nehanda was possessed by a male spirit, thus implying that "women cannot achieve success in their own right unless they are associated with great male ancestors" (Vambe 2011, p. 9).

In the period after the Fast Track Land Reform program of the 2000s, deemed the "Third Chimurenga" by ZANU PF (Mkwesha 2016, p.20), a new era of political challenge to the ruling party, has seen President Mugabe being depicted as "the logical descendant of Nehanda, Kaguvi and other heroes of the First Chimurenga" (Zvomuya 2016). In this new historiography, President Mugabe is, for example, increasingly referred to by his clan name Gushungo (Ngwenya 2012; Kamhungira 2016) in national discourse as part of an effort to place the president within a supra-tribal spiritual leadership lineage (Auret 1982; Ranger 2004). By staking claim to this spiritual-traditional lineage in national discourse, President Mugabe claims his legitimacy to leadership as one that supersedes electoral politics by virtue of the supra-tribal authority claimed by royal spirits such as Mbuya Nehanda and Sekuru Kaguvi (Auret 1982). In effect, President Mugabe usurps Mbuya Nehanda's role as the spirit medium of the spirit-nation Zimbabwe.

Theoretical Framework

In her seminal essay on black and Afrikaner nationalisms in South Africa, Anne McClintock alerts to us the salient point that "[a]ll nationalisms are gendered; all are invented; and all are dangerous." (1995 p. 352, also see Yuval Davis and Anthias 1989) All nationalisms rely on an essentialism of group characteristics such as a common past, language, geographic locations to form a group politics. In *The Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson (1991) describes variations of nationalisms according to time and space. For imperialist and settler nationalisms, racist ideology was important in constructing a discourse of superiority, through which the colonisers could justify their domination and subsequently strengthen national pride in the imperial homeland. This discourse of superiority was still important in former settler colonies which saw themselves as not in opposition to, but as renewals of the original spirit of the old nation. Finally, anti-colonial nationalisms have defined national identity in opposition to their colonisers. This opposition is however limited as former colonies inherited both the arbitrary national boundaries and the colonial structures of gov-

ernance from the old regimes. They likewise inherited the style of nationalism, which had supported the previous rulers.

Expanding this understanding of the formation of anti-colonial nationalisms in his influential *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World,* Partha Chatterjee (1986) argues that anti-colonial movements emerged as a response to the imposition of alien colonial rule which justified itself by asserting the supposed inability of "backward" colonised peoples to rule themselves in the era of modernity. Anti-colonial nationalisms thus can thus be seen as strategic essentialisms deployed by often disparate ethnic groups within a colonial state, essentialising the characteristics of all those collectively oppressed, in order to overthrow oppressive colonial regimes.

According to Chatterjee (1986), in asserting their right to self-governance in the modern world of the nation-state a dichotomous outer/inner, material/spiritual, world/home discourse emerged. The first realm is external, what Chatterjee refers to as the material. This was where Western civilisations derived its power through in areas of science, technology, industrialisation and forms of governance, and thus anti-colonial nationalists accepted these modern institutions and ideas as necessary to end their oppression. Anti-colonial nationalists thus argued "not that colonial rule was imposing alien institutions of state on indigenous society but rather that it was restricting and even violating the true principles of modern government and democracy." (Chatterjee 1986)

The second realm is internal, what Chatterjee refers to as the spiritual. This paper will refer to this as the cultural-spiritual. This is where the national identity was imagined and reproduced. Chatterjee (1986) argues that "if the nation is an imagined community, then this is where it is brought into being". Thus, anti-colonial nationalism often declared its sovereignty over issues such as tradition, language, religion, novels, art, schooling and popular culture. As will be discussed in further detail, women were seen as vehicles and symbols for this realm. The reconciliation of the two realms lies in the fact that in essence the anti-colonial nationalists are not rejecting Western modernity as such, but rather that they are seeking to implement external models of modernity on their own terms as mediated through the "invented" cultural-spiritual realm.

The fact of nations being invented requires an active maintenance and reproduction of the nation, and as such all anti-colonial nationalisms rely on women for their reproduction in a number of ways. A significant part of this reliance is due to the fact that in maintaining their legitimacy to rule, for "the civilising mission", colonised women became targets as symbols of the "barbarity" of the "uncivilised peoples". Thus the reproduction of patriarchal traditional gender roles became a response to the colonial onslaught on colonised women. As Chatterjee (1985) notes widow burning in India became a key site of contestation be-

tween the colonialists and the colonised. Likewise, Frantz Fanon's 1967 essay "Algeria Unveiled" demonstrates how the defence of the veil worn by colonized women became a form of resistance for anti-colonial nationalist movements.

Nira Yuval-Davis and Flora Anthias' (1989) seminal text *Woman-Nation-State* outlines five broad ways in which nationalisms rely on women for their production, which this paper will group according to Chatterjee's conception of the internal or the cultural-spiritual sphere. In terms of the internal or the cultural-spiritual sphere, four of Yuval- Davis and Anthias' expressions of gendered nationalisms apply. Firstly, women reproduce nation as the biological "mothers of the nation". Secondly, women as biological reproducers of the boundaries nation by refusing or accepting intercourse or marriage with designated groups of men which gives rise to patriarchal nationalists' pre-occupation with the policing of sexual intercourse and "anti-miscegenation" policies. Thirdly, women as the transmitters and producers of cultural narratives as, for example, mothers, teachers and artists. Finally, women as symbols and signifiers of national difference, for example, as McClintock (1995) notes Afrikaaner nationalism has employed the figure of the "Volksmoeder" as an important cultural-national figure.

Amongst a number of other "dangerous" consequences of gendered nature of nationalism, the burden of racial and national authenticity is one that often falls onto women as Katherine Verdery (1994) illustrates in her account of Romanian nationalism's reliance on tradition as a form of legitimacy. In this case, women became the de facto 'torch bearers' of tradition as they formed the bulk of rural peasantry where old cultures and customs were maintained whilst men became labourers in the modern wage economy. This was the case for the migrant labour systems of many colonial societies on the continent that drew African men into the modern wage economy, which by implication drew "native" men into "modernity". This is while leaving African women to maintain the rural peasant livelihoods, which by implication pushed women into "tradition".

The more the colonial economy developed and industrialised, the more it came to depend on the "urbanised or detribalized natives." This posed some problems perceived not just by anti-colonialists but by colonial administrators such as the Union of South Africa's General Jan Smuts. In response to the problem the labour demands of a growing economy Smuts believed that the way to preserve "native institutions" while meeting the labour demands of a growing economy was through the institution of a migrant labour system that would ensure the maintenance of segregation. Smuts thus wrote in his text "Native Policy In Africa", part of his 1929 Rhodes' lectures in Oxford expounding on the segregationist ideology that would form the basis of apartheid rule decades later:

> "It is only when segregation breaks down, when the whole family migrates from the tribal home and the tribal jurisdiction to the white man's farm or the white man's town, that the tribal bond is snapped, and the traditional system falls into decay. And it is this migration of the native family, of the females and children, to the farms and the towns which should be prevented. As soon as this migration is permitted the process commences which ends in the urbanized detribalized native and the disappearance of the native organisation. *It is not white employment of native males that works the mischief, but the abandonment of the native tribal home by the women and children*." (Smuts 1930, p. 99-100)

Thus, it becomes apparent that patriarchal nationalists have not challenged this colonial creation of the rural-urban, traditional-modern that maps roughly along the woman-man dichotomy. And so it is unsurprising that when in the act of evoking the past and traditions as a means to legitimising and asserting nationalist claims, women have often become important repositories of the "stable past" and thus the burdens of national and racial authenticity begin to fall on them. The broader implication of this is that nationalisms are dependent on a gendered temporality wherein women are signifiers of the past traditions and thereby function as objects of national history, whereas men are signifiers of the progression of the nation and thereby function as subjects of national history.

To further complicate our understanding of the gendered temporality inherent in nationalist discourses, the notion that gender is not only sociological, as many feminist writers have had us understand, but is also historical bears discussion. Critiques of universalising notions of gender by African feminists such as Ifi Amadiume (1987) and Oyèrónkẹ́ Oyěwùmí (1997) have challenged feminists to see that Western gender conceptions and hierarchies based on biological determinism cannot be assumed uncritically for other cultures. Their work has thus challenged the "fixedness" of identities required for the reproduction racist and colonial ideas of difference, by showing that the gender binary of "woman/man" and "female/male" as is not uncritically received as universal, stable and coherent in all contexts across the world.

Importantly, for the purposes of the analysis of the narrativising Mbuya Nehanda as a female spiritual leader in the First Chimurenga, is the analysis by provided in Ifi Amadiume's (1987) critically acclaimed book *Male Daughters, Female Husbands.* In it, Amadiume analyses social relations of the Nnobi of Eastern Nigeria to deconstruct the assumed notions of gender, sexuality and power over the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial periods. Amadiume, for example, frees the position of "husband" from its association with men, and goes on to do the same for other historically masculine roles, showing that societal roles and positions have not necessarily been rigidly masculinized nor feminized in African societies.

Oyèrónkẹ́ Oyěwùmí's (1997) *The Invention of Woman: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses*, argues that historically gender was not the primary determiner of social hierarchy in pre-colonial

Oyo-Yoruba society, but instead seniority was considered most important. Oyěwùmí, firstly, bases this on the argument that historically there is no mark of gender in the Yoruba language whereas seniority is linguistically marked and, secondly, that Yoruba social institutions and practices have not historically made social distinctions in terms of anatomical difference. It is from this standpoint that Oyěwùmí (1997) argues that gender is not only socially constructed but is also historical.

Together with the work of Amadiume, Oyěwùmí destabilizes our reliance on what many have seen as the "inherent" patriarchal nature of "traditional" African culture by clearly charting how much of the gender relations we know today have come into being as a result of Western, and in particular, Victorian colonial ideas of gender and sexuality. Through such interrogation by African feminist scholars of the historical and sociological constructions of gender, we are better able to examine the structures in African societies that have enabled figures such as Mbuya Nehanda to achieve power despite our current Western influenced understanding of gender hierarchies and binaries.

Returning to Chatterjee's external or material sphere, Yuval-Davis and Anthias' identification of women as active participants in nationalist movements applies in several ways. In the first instance, the leadership of anti-colonial nationalist movements tend to be almost exclusively male and thus the movements reproduce patriarchal attitudes. Despite the predominantly male leaderships, nationalisms require the mobilisation and support of colonised women for the successful enactment of anti-colonial resistance movements. In "Mother Politics: Anti-colonial Nationalism and the Woman Question in Africa", Joyce Chadya (2003) points to the fact that the mobilisation of women often became a task of female nationalist leaders such as Bibi Titi Mohamed in Tanzania's liberation struggle. Chadya (2003) further argues that in mobilising women for political action, political movements appealed to (often patriarchal) motherisms and women in turn have often derived legitimacy from this image as "Mothers of the Nation" who were called to defend the children of the nation.

While there eventually emerged rhetorical commitments to gender equality in some movements, the question of the seemingly more threatening concept of feminism was often dismissed as a form of "imperialism". In the case of South Africa's African National Congress (ANC) African women in the party were "loath to talk of women's emancipation outside the terms of the national liberation movement."(McClintock 1995, p. 117-118) Even as anti-colonial movements decided to wage armed struggle, the patriarchal attitudes continued to undermine the rhetoric of gender equality. Writing in *Guns and Guerrilla Girls: Women in the Zimbabwean Liberation Struggle*, Tanya Lyons (2004) describes how Zimbabwe's anti-colonial movements often positioned women's participation in war as a means to gain sexual equality. Thus the image of the

woman with a baby on the back and a gun in hand was deployed by the likes of Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU)'s Zimbabwe African National Liberal Army (ZANLA) and the ANC's military wing, uMkhonto we Sizwe (MK).

Despite this image of women and weaponry, both Lyons (2004) and Fanon (1967) note that leaders of resistance movements have often been hesitant in their inclusion of women in armed struggle as combatants. When they did train women, this was often reluctantly so and even then their participation in the front line was limited. Women were often relegated to more feminine roles of transporters, informants, cooks and cleaners in the movement.

What is distressing is the wide nature of sexual abuse of women. As Teresa Barnes (2006) notes in "*Flame*: A Zimbabwean Story," female liberation fighters often had no recourse and were silenced lest they undermine the unity of the movement. This was/is the case even into the post-independence years. Further, the biological control of women was a concern for both ZANLA and MK. In the case of MK, women were not to fall pregnant while in ZANLA women were encouraged to marry and bear children for the new nation of Zimbabwe. In both cases pregnant women and mothers were often sent to camps which many saw as a punishment. Thus, in these ways, in both the external and internal realms, anti-colonial nationalist movements can be seen to have secured their "victories against" colonial rule at the expense of colonised women through the maintenance of a problematic gendered temporality.

The broader implication of this is that nationalisms are dependent on a gendered temporality wherein women are signifiers of the past traditions, thereby functioning as *objects of national history*, whereas men are signifiers of the progression of the nation and thereby function as *subjects of national history*. Thus, it is within this logic, that the "Frozen Image" of Mbuya Nehanda's and Sekuru Kaguvi's capture functions as a technology of time that fixes this period (and even life) of resistance into a stable moment of gendered temporality that has been and continues to be appropriated for various narrative strategies of the nation. Mbuya Nehanda, however, troubles the gendered temporality of patriarchal nationalisms that requires women be the objects of history and repositories of a stable past. If national narrative strategies have sought to fix Nehanda into a particular moment of past resistance, she continues to move through history rendering the nation's gendered temporality untenable. As a result, various narrative strategies have been forced to contain and thus reconcile her presence with their ideologies.

Settler colonialists have dismissed Mbuya Nehanda as a "witch" while nationalist historians such as Ranger, Beach and Vambe have privileged Sekuru Kaguvi and constructed Mbuya Nehanda her as "innocent woman unjustly accused" in the masculine crossfire. In the post-independence period, particularly since the

2000s, the rise of "patriotic history" has seen a simultaneous recognition and ambivalence towards Mbuya Nehanda's role. Mbuya Nehanda variously exceptionalised and abstracted into a symbolic object of history, masculinized, domesticated as "Mother of the Nation" and when she is most troubling, or it is most politically useful, she is supplanted, and usurped by new national spiritual figures such as Gushungo, President Robert Mugabe.

Literature Review

It is within the context of patriarchal nationalistic traditions of narrativizing that Yvonne Vera's *Nehanda* has been praised for offering a significant intervention. Desiree Lewis (cited in Murray 2011, p. 165) argues that Vera's *Nehanda* offers "a complex re-writing of the first Chimurenga that began resistance to colonial settler rule in Zimbabwe" by tracing how the stories of nations and individuals are intertwined to challenge patriarchal nationalist constructions. Vera's recovery of the repressed voice of women and centralizing of women's agency has thus largely been met with much praise and scholarly attention (Bryce 2002; Ranger 2002; Wilson-Tagoe 2002; Bull-Christiansen 2004; Mkwesha 2016; Mukiwa 2016).

Jessica Murray (2011) argues that Vera's project of fostering an alternative engagement with Zimbabwean history locates her in a group of writers that have moved away from simple adherence to historical narratives. In *Nehanda,* Vera narrativises a personal history, beginning with birth and development into adulthood wherein the titular heroine Nehanda grapples with a sense of personal and national consciousness before becoming the spiritual leader who authorises the murder of the native commissioner and thereafter is tried and executed by the colonial authorities of the Pioneer Column. In this vein, Helen Mugambi (2008, p. 440) highlights the fact that "Vera launches feminist voices from the domestic space" by locating ideological struggle within women's domestic space, transforming it into the political and philosophical arena from which Nehanda nurtures her revolutionary challenge to colonialism. Mugambi (2008) further argues that women in *Nehanda* are presented both as individuals and as a group, creating a montage effect: individually and collectively, the women either are storied or they author narratives.

The praise of Vera's inscription of a spiritual, "feminist nationalism" (Bull-Christiansen 2004; Mkwesha 2016) has also been tempered by a number of criticisms. Nana Wilson-Tagoe (1999, p.165) argues, that "Vera's recreation of Nehanda, for all the chances it represents for breaking old hierarchies and creating women's agency, still harks back to the recovery of old certainties, of truths carved in stone", thereby underscoring some of the limitations inherent in any historical account of a national figure such as Mbuya Nehanda.

As is the tendency within patriotic historicity, Vera has not totally succeeded in renouncing the lure of an image of an idealised, uniform and stable African past that is only ruptured by the colonial intrusion. (Vambe 2002, p.135). Chiwome (2002) points to the similarity with Mutswairo's, *Feso* in the portrayal of an "Edenic past" wherein the "life-sustaining beauty of the land is meant to contrast with the barrenness and desolation that its in as a result of overcrowding, erosion and other forms of land degradation that arose from colonial land policies" (2002, p.181). Likewise in Vera's *Nehanda* the past is described as beautiful until the beginning of the trouble that comes with the settlers: "Here in this desperate valley where the grass was once green I hear the birth of voices. It is hard and convulsive, like other births. The green valley is a place that holds hope and warmth. At the bottom of the hill, and then at the summit of the hill, not only would I see the wonders and trials of a past time, but even I would be transformed." (1993, p.59)

As part of this romanticism that seeks to counter negative imperialistic projections of the pre-colonial past, there is a tendency towards creating a vision of a uniform people with no internal contradictions and conflicts. Vera thus does not escape the reinforcement of the problematic patriotic historiography that centralizes Shona nationalism. The narrative problematically presents the narrative of Shona resistance against the colonialists as the singular and most important one. Accordingly, the effect of a narrative in which the Shona are seen to be representative of all indigenous people Zimbabwe is to periphalise the contributions of other groups living in Zimbabwe such as the Ndebele and Shangaan, thus legitimising the post-independence marginalization of the same groups, in deference to the Shona claim to the nation.

While praising Vera for the novel's "national symbol creation" and "ingenious creation of traditional-seeming oral expression to render her African world convincingly", Emmanuel Chiwome (2002, p.184) is also critical of what he sees as the "re-invention of Africa". He argues that the "cumulative expressions which do not accurately represent the African world in miniature could form part of process of the re-invention of Africa" and goes on to ask, "for whom is it being invented and (re-)imagined?" (ibid.)

Maurice Taonezvi Vambe (2002) mounts a convincing challenge to *Nehanda,* arguing that the re-appropriation of national consciousness and spirituality to "give them a woman-centered meanings about independence, instilling these at the heart of the new nation's consciousness of selfhood" (Vambe 2002, p.133) has the contradictory effect of creating an unproblematized collective identity of the African woman. He thus argues that "the novel's insistence on cultural holism ignores the fundamental ruptures of identity that black women have experienced since independence" (Vambe 2002, p.136), namely those that become apparent when we take into account the reality that "the material interests of poor women do not necessarily coincide

with those of rich women, most of whom participate actively in the exploitation of other women." (Vambe 2002, p.133)

In considering the scholarly responses to Vera's work, I have been most struck by Faith Mkwesha's (2016) text "Representing Nehanda: Writing Back to Colonialism's "Frozen Image" and the male nationalist tradition" appearing as a chapter in her thesis on Zimbabwean women's writers. In her thesis Mkwesha argues that Yvonne Vera simultaneously "writes back" to both the colonial representation of Nehanda as a "Frozen Image" and the male nationalist literary traditions appropriations of Mbuya Nehanda. Central to her thesis is the notion that the "fixedness" and "frozen-ness" of the famous "Frozen Image" is maintained by colonial discourse and practice, arguing that "in the male literary and nationalist tradition, she is very much alive, and often cast as muse – a source of inspiration for creativity who lends legitimacy to nationalist projects." (Mkwesha 2016, p.22)

Whilst this paper considers Mkwesha's argument persuasive, it does not interpret the "male nationalist tradition's" engagement with the "Frozen Image" as one in which Mbuya Nehanda is "alive". Rather, it interprets the settler colonial, nationalist and patriotic traditions as being dependent on the "fixed-ness" and "frozen-ness" of the Mbuya Nehanda within the "Frozen Image" such that they are able, with varied success, to incorporate and appropriate this otherwise "troublesome" historical figure into patriarchal ideologies dependent on a gendered temporality that ascribes women as objects of past histories of the nation, and men as subjects of progressive futures.

I read Vera alongside Charles Samupindi's 1990 novella *Death Throes: The Trial of Mbuya Nehanda*, which is one of the texts that Mkwesha (2016) cites as part of the "male nationalist tradition that appropriate Mbuya Nehanda in their constructions of the Zimbabwean nation by making use of the linear time of political cause and effect to script a story of revolt, resistance, defeat and victory" (2016, p.22). This novella, I argue, supports my claim about the nationalist and patriarchal reliance on the "fixedness" and "frozenness" of the image of the capture of Sekuru Kaguvi and Mbuya Nehanda. It is noted that Samupindi's body of literary work not received much scholarly attention. Where there has been an engagement with *Death Throes* it has largely been in passing reference (Coundouriotis 2014, p.159; Mkwesha 2016, p.23), and when there is a more substantive engagement, it has largely been in reference to his more popular book, *Pawns* (published in 1992b) (see Vambe 2010b). This may be due to the fact that *Death Throes*, book published by Baobab Books (incidentally the same publisher for Vera's *Nehanda*), did not circulate as widely as Nehanda. Its publication was limited to Zimbabwe and has since gone out of print.

Nonetheless, beyond the narrative contained in *Death Throes*, the novella becomes interesting and important for this paper particularly because Samupindi's engagement with the "Frozen Image" becomes immediately apparent on the front and back portions of the book cover (see Appendices 2 and 3). The front cover offers a direct engagement with the "Frozen Image" by virtue of its appropriation and interpretation of the original photograph of Sekuru Kaguvi and Mbuya Nehanda's capture. The image on the cover presents itself as almost a literal interpretation and dramatization of the title Death Throes, by simply superimposing nooses, skulls and shackles to its reproduction of the original "Frozen Image". Complimenting this, the back cover engages the "frozen" image, albeit less directly, as Samupindi emphasizes his fidelity to the "frozen-ness" and "fixedness" of that moment of capture by stating that:

> Although the work has been written as fiction, the author developed his material from ascertainable fact. The raw materials from which the story is hewn are, firstly, the original court record in the trial judge's own hand, which is with the National Archives. Secondly, there is also a mine of scripts on oral history, also with the Archives, which covers this period in question. (see Appendix 3)

This research essay argues that Samupindi largely narrates "within" the "Frozen Image", in as far as he offers a limited challenge to the settler colonial narrative. In line with the nationalist and patriotic histories that depend on a gendered temporality of nationhood, Samupindi's narrative does not interrogate Chatterjee's internal/external spheres of anti-colonial nationalisms that refashions an (internal) cultural sphere to include an uncritical adoption of historically constructed patriarchal gender relations and largely accepts the (external) Western mode of modernity by largely accepting Western epistemology and scientific rationalism, the Hegelian notion of African ahistoricity, and "official" linear time of political cause and effect.

Very much in line with the nationalist and patriotic histories that are dependent on a problematic gendered temporality of nationhood, Samupindi's narrative does not interrogate Chatterjee's internal/external spheres of anti-colonial nationalisms. Instead, his narrative falls in line with the refashioning of the (internal) cultural sphere to include an uncritical adoption of colonial patriarchal gender relations and a by and large acceptance of (external) Western modes of modernity through the assimilation of Western epistemology and scientific rationalism, the Hegelian notion of African ahistoricity, and "official" linear time of political cause and effect.

This is whereas, Vera endeavors to write "beyond" the "Frozen Image". Vera creates a feminist, spiritual nationalism that disrupts the patriarchal settler colonial, nationalist and patriotic histories that depend on a gendered temporality of nationhood. Vera's narrative disrupts Chatterjee's external/ internal spheres of anti-colonial nationalisms by reimagining historically constructed patriarchal gender relations in the (internal)

cultural sphere and interrogating the (external) Western mode of modernity as she centralizes discredited (indigenous) knowledge systems scientific rationalism, collapses Cartesian dichotomies between thinking and feeling, re-inscribes Africa's pre-colonial historicity and disrupts the linearity of "official" time through a spiritual temporality.

Nonetheless, the possibilities for the narrative that moves "beyond" the "Frozen Image" remains constrained by the limitations inherent in any historical account of a national figure such as Mbuya Nehanda. Even when trying to inscribe feminisms, however intersectional, into the ideology and practice of nationalism they remain dependent on essentialisms such as that of Shona national identity and a uniform collective identity for women that even when viewed and mobilized as strategic can function in ways that are problematic, and, as McClintock (1995) argues, dangerous.

Aims

This research essay argues that Samupindi's *Death Throes: The Trial Against Mbuya Nehanda* demonstrates that when the challenge to settler-colonial projections of an African past go unaccompanied by an interrogation of historical gender relations and a broader challenge to Western modernities, it is necessary to remain faithful to and narrate the Frozen Image, keeping a period of resistance locked in and un-interrogated in a particular moment in time, as is the function of an object of history. The result of Samupindi's "writing within the Frozen Image" is a self-conscious, realist, imaginatively constrained narrative project. This is whereas Vera's *Nehanda* demonstrates that through a re-imagination of historically constructed Western modernities, it is possible to "move beyond the image" and thus allow the period of resistance to "move" and be re-interrogated over time, as is the function of a subject of history. The result of Vera's writing beyond the Frozen Image is a liberatory, poetic and imaginative narrative project.

Methodology

Feminist researchers have argued that methodologies are gendered such that quantitative methods are historically associated with positivism, scientific, objectivity and masculinity, whilst qualitative methods have generally been associated with interpretivism, non-scientific, subjectivity and femininity (Doucet and Mauthner 2005). Lennon and Whitford (1994, p.1) argue that "feminism's most compelling epistemological insight lies in the connections it has made between knowledge and power." While there continues to be debate over what feminist methodology is and whether it exists at all (Doucet and Mauthner 2005), there is some consistency in the literature that "the purpose of feminist research must be to create new relationships,

better laws, and improved institutions" (Reinharz 1992). For the purposes of my research, a number of feminist research principles will be used as follows:

1) Standpoint Theory

Stand point theory emerges as a response to women's experiences being silenced and misconstrued and thus seeks to centre the experiences of marginalised people (Mulinari and Sandell 1999). Stand point theory assumes that people in marginalized positions are better able to see and understand their marginalization and therefore the knowledge produced by marginalized and oppressed people is more accurate than that of those who haven't lived the same experiences (Pohlhaus 2002). Thus, using bell hooks' (1994) notion of writing "from the margin to the centre", the perspectives of women, and in particular, African women, offer the best means to "look up the skirt" of historical social relations in Zimbabwe's nationalist liberation movements. Further, Patricia Hill Collins (1997) has highlighted that standpoint theory is about "historically shared, group-based experiences", alluding to the fact that standpoints must be located, and analyzed, within broader relations of hegemonic social structures (Doucet and Mauthner 2005).

2) An Intersectional Approach

Intersectionality gained prominence in the late 80s as a response to the erasure of African American women's experiences in both anti-racist and feminist activist politics, the term was eventually coined by black feminist legal scholar and activist Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991) as she spoke of the difficulties faced by black women's activism against violence. This echoes arguments levelled within post-colonial feminist studies, such as those by Chandra Mohanty in "Under Western Eyes" (1984) and Gayatri Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak", who challenged the reification of 'Third World Women' as cultural objects devoid of historical and political processes to avoid the reproduction of colonial/colonized hierarchies around gender concepts. Intersectionality thus can be seen as a theory of difference, seeking to analyse the interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, sexuality, nationality, and gender as they apply to a given individual or group, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage. In expounding the related theory of the "Matrix of Domination", Patricia Hill-Collins (1990) describes these as "interlocking oppressions". The intersectional approach will thus be important for the analysis of the historical characters such as Mbuya Nehanda and Sekuru Kaguvi, as well as the authors themselves.

Chapter Outline

The second chapter, “Mbuya Nehanda and Zimbabwe’s Versions of History”, will outline the narrative strategies which settler-colonial, nationalist and patriotic histories of Zimbabwe have employed. I argue that all three versions are upheld by a gendered temporality which fixes women as repositories of the past and thus stable objects of history and tradition whilst holding the masculine as the transmitters of the future-nation and thus as progressive subjects of the nation. Building on this, I demonstrate that while national narrative strategies have sought to fix Mbuya Nehanda into a particular moment of past resistance, she still continues to move through history, troubling and rendering the nation's gendered temporality untenable. As a result, these versions of history have had to deploy various strategies to reconcile her presence with their patriarchal ideologies.

The third chapter, “The Nation, Samupindi, Vera and the “Frozen Image”, will begin by demonstrating how the image of Mbuya Nehanda and Sekuru Kaguvi before their execution has been deployed in the narrative strategies of settler colonialists, nationalist and present patriotic histories. I argue that the “fixedness” and the “frozenness” of this Frozen Image has allowed for the maintenance of a gendered temporality of the nation required by each of these national discourses. I will thereafter demonstrate the engagement that the novels by Samupindi and Vera have had with the Frozen Image, by means of an analysis of the cover of *Death Throes* and Yvonne Vera’s utterances in interviews about this Frozen Image. The chapter will thereafter argue that Samupindi’s *Death Throes* demonstrates that when the challenge to settler-colonial projections of an African past go unaccompanied by an interrogation of historical gender relations and Western modernity inherent in nationalist and patriotic, it is necessary to remain faithful to and narrate "the Frozen Image” such that Mbuya Nehanda is “locked in” as an object of history. The result of maintaining Mbuya Nehanda as an object of history is a self-conscious, realist, even unimaginative narrative project. This is whereas Vera’s *Nehanda* demonstrates that through a re-imagination of gender relations and Western modernity, it is possible to “move beyond the image” and thus allow the period of resistance to “move” and be re-interrogated over time, such that Mbuya Nehanda “moves” as a subject of history. The result of recovering Mbuya Nehanda as subject of history is a liberatory, poetic, imaginative narrative project.

The final chapter will offer the conclusion.

Chapter 2: Mbuya Nehanda and Zimbabwe's Versions of History

Nana Wilson-Tagoe's (1999 p. 164) argument that "all history is after all a struggle for the definition of reality through narrative and involves a process of selection" is useful for an analysis of how history is deployed in an attempt to order the course of events in the present. This chapter aims to demonstrate the ways in which anti-colonial nationalist movements such as ZANU and ZAPU have come to define themselves in response to racist imperialist colonial projects that denied them self-rule. It will therefore argue all that settler-colonial, nationalist and patriotic nationalisms are reproduced through a gendered temporality which fixes women as repositories of the past and thus stable objects of history and tradition whilst holding the masculine as the transmitters of the future-nation and thus as progressive subjects of the nation.

Thereafter the chapter will argue and demonstrate that if national narrative strategies have sought to fix Mbuya Nehanda into a particular moment of past resistance, and yet she continues to move through history, troubling and rendering the nation's gendered temporality untenable, they have thus had to deploy various strategies to attempt to reconcile her presence with their patriarchal ideologies.

The chapter will finally demonstrate how literature and the various national projects have shaped each other time, arguing that this is a discursive space through which Mbuya Nehanda has featured prominently and particularly, given the relative dearth of black female writers in Zimbabwe, within the patriarchal nationalist tradition.

2.1 Nation, Narration and History

Writing of the internal spiritual-cultural sphere of anti-colonial nationalisms, Partha Chatterjee (1986) argues that "if the nation is an imagined community, then this is where it is brought into being". In *Imagined Communities* Benedict Anderson (1991, p.6) underscores the constructed-ness of national identity by defining the nation as "an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign." (Anderson 1991, p.145) This national identity, Anderson (1991) argues is imagined by the "the people" of the nation as a collective of "deep comradeship" with an eternal history that can be told in linear time.

Anderson (1991) further argues that from the start, the nation was conceived in language, not in blood, and that one could be "invited into" the imagined community and thus the narration of a national history is a common trait in these imagined communities. Drawing on this, Homi Bhabha (1990) finds it important to examine literary creations of nation's because the narration of the nation is similar to the process of writing:

> To encounter the nation *as it is written* displays a temporality of culture and social consciousness more in tune with the partial, overdetermined process by which textual meaning is produced through the articulation of difference in language; more in keeping with the problem of closure which plays enigmatically on the discourse of the sign. Such an approach contests the traditional authority of those national objects of knowledge – Tradition, People, the reason of State, High Culture, for instance – whose pedagogical value often relies on their representation as holistic concepts located within an evolutionary narrative of historical continuity. (Bhabha 1990, p. 2-3)

In the narration of Africa's history, two dominant courses have arisen, namely that of European discourses depicting Africa as having no history and the Africanist discourse as having a history remaining in the past. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel famously declared in his 1837 lectures *Philosophy of History* that "Africa . . . is the Unhistorical, Undeveloped Spirit, still involved in the conditions of mere nature". Hegel's reading of Africa was very influential in Europe's intellectual and political history, serving as a justifications of the colonial enterprise. It formed part of a wider European discourse that dismissed Arica as not being an actor in the world's history, often portraying the continent as one without a future, innocent ignorance about time, a place of a blissful, animal-like existence in the present. In effect, if Africans had any history at all, it was relegated to the realm of natural history.

On the other hand, Africanist discourse depicted as a continent of the past, of perennial traditions that determine the present—and compromise the future. This tradition finds itself: from cultural theory, built upon issues of identity and cultural essentialism, via politics, which oftentimes strives to resurrect a putative precolonial past, to philosophy. With this context, Wilson-Tagoe (1999) alludes to the centrality of history and its construction for anti-colonial nationalists:

> To have or not to have a history is a major anxiety in all areas of contemporary thought in Africa. History was the locus of difference that separated civilized from uncivilized in European perceptions of Others. Anxieties about history are thus anxieties about the meaning of history and the mode of its appropriation or representation. (Wilson-Tagoe 1999, p.155)

It would thus be critical to outline the three distinct discourses of history in relation to articulations of national identity in Zimbabwe. As Bull-Christiansen (2004, p.31) argues, it is important to underscore the political nature writing of history has had and still has in Zimbabwe.

Different agents have defined the imagined community of the nation in different ways over time. To begin with, the oral narration of history by Zimbabwe's indigenous peoples precedes the written record of history that was instituted along with the arrival of the first white settlers as part of their political justification their violent appropriation of land. Subsequently, various political powers and interest groups have continued to rely on historical narratives to justify their ideological positions and rule. Each of these patriarchal nationalism have relied on a gendered temporal logic where women remain as past objects of history and men function as progressive subjects of the future nation. Mbuya Nehanda, however, troubles the gendered tem-

porality of patriarchal nationalisms that requires that women be the objects of history and repositories of a stable past. If national narrative strategies have sought to fix Nehanda into a particular moment of past resistance, she continues to move through history rendering the nation's gendered temporality untenable. As a result, in order to maintain the gendered nature of their imagined temporal space, each nationalism has sought various narrative strategies in order to contain, or reconcile her "restless spirit" with their respective ideologies.

2.1.2 Shona Oral History

According to Shona oral traditions (including those recorded in written historical sources such as those by David Lan (1985) and Terence Ranger (1967)), the indigenous inhabitants are believed to have descended from the place Guruuswa (loosely translated as "Tall Grass"). Nehanda Nyamhika was the first female ancestor of the people whose descendants are now known collectively as the Shona. Nyamhika, the daughter of Matope (also referred to as Mutota in Mukiwa 2006), the first Munhumutapa who founded the Mutapa dynasty in the fifteenth century. (Mkwesha 2016, p.21) The Mutapa Dynasty resided over the erection of what is now known as the Great Zimbabwe settlement. In order to legitimize the dynasty and render it sacred, Matope ordered Nyamhika and her brother Nebedza to commit the ritual incest. The ritual incest was believed to have consolidated Matope's rule. Nyamhika was rewarded by allocating her land that formed part of his empire, "Handa" and thus became "Nehanda" (Mukiwa 2006). After her death, Nehanda became a mhondoro, a royal ancestral spirit presiding over the areas now known as Central and Western Mashonaland (Chiwome 2002; Mukiwa 2006). She has possessed various mediums until, 500 years later, her spirit came to occupy the body of Charwe Nyakasikana, the daughter of Mhutsa, a descendent of the Rwizi clan in the Chitungwiza area. (Mukiwa 2006; Mkwesha 2016, p.21).

Charwe, the female spirit medium who was possessed the spirit of Mbuya Nehanda, and Gumboreshumba, the male spirit medium who was possessed by the spirit of Sekuru Kaguvi, led the First Chimurenga, the first major rebellion against colonial incursion in the 1890s. Both leaders were caught and tried. Both were executed by the British on 27 April 1898. During the spectacle of her execution, Mbuya Nehanda prophesied that her bones would rise again to fight colonialism. (Mkwesha 2016, p.21) According to Yvonne Vera (cited in Bryce 2002, p.220), the oral tradition does not accept that she died.

Mbuya Nehanda's prophecy thus became the source of inspiration for the second liberation struggle, which led to the independence of Zimbabwe on 27 April 1980. During the Second Chimurenga , the spirit of

Mbuya Nehanda possessed a woman by the name of Kanzaruwa, who participated in the liberation struggle, by providing guidance and aiding mobilization efforts by the liberation movement as they operated in the country's Eastern frontier (Lan 1985; Raftopoulos 1999, p.122).

Here, the aforementioned analysis by African feminist scholars of historical gender and power relations, together with statements by Vera that it was not unusual for women to be spiritual leaders at that time (Mkwesha 2016), can show us that while pre-colonial indigenous temporal space may have been patriarchal, it allowed for a degree of fluidity in gender and power roles such that it was not as dependent on gendered binary of public versus private and constructed roles for women and thus provided spaces for women such as Mbuya Nehanda to attain power. Thus due, to its more fluid relation to gender, sex and power, pre-colonial indigenous culture, the presence of Mbuya Nehanda was not deemed as contradictory or troubling to the temporality of the indigenous nation and thus she did not need to be "contained" or "fixed".

2.1.2 Settler Colonial History

Early colonial history was constructed through archival records, district commissioners' memoirs, annotations by missionaries in colonial Rhodesia which sought to create an imagined national Rhodesian space for the settler colony, which followed in the years after the settlement of the Pioneer Column. Overall, the process of settler-colonial nation-building relied heavily on narratives of origins and justification, such as that which relied on racial stereotyping of the "backwards" black population and a myth of an ancient white civilisation in the area. (Bull-Christiansen 2004, p.44)

This sort of myth was rife in the Rhodesian settler-colonial imagination. Having been met with resistance by Africans when they first began to settler in the region under the mandate of Cecil John Rhodes' British South Africa Company, the settler community quickly needed to create an explanatory system for their presence and their occupation of land. Rhodesian settler discourses thus worked through what Lene Bull-Christiansen (2004) calls an "inside-outside" schema, such that there was a "clear-cut distinction between friend and foe/ inside and outside of the social group became necessary, as well as a discursive appropriation of the land, which had been taken and was now the issue of conflict." (Bull-Christiansen 2004, p.44)

The settlers, calling themselves the "Pioneer Column" thus proceeded to map out an imaginary space where Africans were seen as part of the natural environment along with wild animals and other natural obstacles on the way towards a developed society that was to be built by settlers who eventually defined themselves as Rhodesians. The African's primitive nature as perceived by the Rhodesians was that of a cruel child, who had to be mastered in order to be in harmony with the nature of which the African was part. The

Rhodesians thus saw themselves as the natural masters of this space (Kaarsholm 1989, p.25). Helen Brown, a reviewer of the book for Australia's *Canberra Times* described the dilemma presented by Great Zimbabwe as follows in 1984: "The ancient granite ruins of Zimbabwe in Rhodesia are a thorn in the side of those whites who defend their minority rule on the grounds that the natives have only recently "come down out of the trees."" In order to counter-act this, several myths around Great Zimbabwe abounded. Before Great Zimbabwe had been proven by archaeologists to have been built by ancestors of today's Shona people, the myth of a great ancient white civilisation had been created from the accounts of Portuguese merchants. On the basis of the racist evolutionist ideology, concluded that it was impossible for it to have been built by Africans. Instead, the "discovery" of the ruins was evidence of a white civilisation which had presumably lived there in biblical times. The biblical explanations claimed that Great Zimbabwe was in fact the residence of the Queen of Sheba and the site of King Solomon's gold mines. This myth was used to claim that white settlement in Rhodesia was not violent occupation. Rather, the Europeans were simply reclaiming "lost space". (Garlake 1983, p.2)

Importantly, Smith's allegory about the ruined state of Great Zimbabwe was important in invoking a sense of emergency in the Rhodesians who at the time were fighting African nationalists in Zimbabwe's Second Chimurenga. The urgency of self-defence was illustrated by the downfall of the great ancient white civilisation which did not realise in time the danger that it was in, a narrative schema that functions within the trope of the "Swaart Gevaar" often invoked by South Africa's apartheid administration.

Thus within this patriarchal settler colonial ideology, the troubling presence of Mbuya Nehanda required that she be dismissed as a witch as they could not reconcile her intelligence and political cunning as a leader and coordinator of the rebellion, her spiritual power as it challenged both their Christianity and investment in scientific rationalism, nor her role as a woman who had authority over men. Thus they enforced a gendered binary of public versus private and constructed roles for women and men that saw women like Mbuya Nehanda, whose role and power was dismissed and trivialised, lose the spaces of power previously available to them.

2.1.3 Nationalist History

Early nationalism in Zimbabwe has been described by the likes of Alexander (1996), Bull-Christiansen, (2004) and Pazvakavamba and Hungwe (2009) as arising in response to African people's alienation to land due to settler colonial land policy. In 1890, the Cecil John Rhodes headed British South Africa Company sent the "Pioneer Column", a group of settlers, to find gold and diamond mines north of the Limpopo

River. Instead of finding the minerals, they found large tracts of fertile land which were suitable for commercial agriculture and large scale ranching. In carrying out this early land redistribution programme, the settlers displaced indigenous people, and resettled them in "communal lands". (Pazvakavamba and Hungwe 2009) This action by the Pioneer Column was resisted by the Shona and Ndebele people, with resistance reaching a climax in 1897 during the First Chimurenga. The indigenous people had surrendered themselves once their leaders, Sekuru Kaguvi and Mbuya Nehanda had been captured, tried and eventually hung. (Pazvakavamba and Hungwe 2009)

Following this defeat, land dispossession accelerated swiftly. In successive tranches of legislature such as the 1931 Land Apportionment Act and colonial land redistribution programs in the 50s, 60s and 70s, the white settler beneficiaries (including World War II veterans and Rhodesia Front party members) were allocated land at no cost whilst the indigenous black population were dispossessed without compensation, often losing livestock and whole cropping seasons. (Pazvakavamba and Hungwe 2009)

The land redistribution dispossession suffered by Africans would thus become the catalyst for the armed struggle war. Although repressions in the form of the color bar were contested, land dispossession was the major bone of contention that would gave rise to African nationalist discourse in Zimbabwe among varying groups of indigenous people, who came to live together as a consequence of the evictions. This fostered not only local or tribal ideas of rights to land, but rather saw the development of an African nationalist claim to land. Zimbabwe's African nationalism was therefore a reply to the racist spatial discourse, which they were subject to under colonial rule. (Bull-Christiansen 2004; Pazvakavamba and Hungwe 2009)

Considerable attention has been directed towards the interaction between the nationalists and spirit mediums. Terence Ranger's (1967) *Revolt in Southern Rhodesia* and David Lan's (1985) *Guns and Guerrillas* are example of the importance ascribed to religious beliefs in certain academic work. Lan's (1985) study of the connections between ZANU's military wing ZANLA and spirit mediums during the liberation war, concludes that the popular mobilisation of the rural peasant community in support of the guerrillas was only possible because of the spiritual and moral authority granted by the Mhondoro. It was only after this initial process of acceptance that the guerrillas could begin to conscientise people socialist revolutionary ideology. Lan (1985, p. 225) quotes Josiah Tungamirai, a commander of one of the liberation armies, as saying: "When we started the war the spirit mediums helped with recruitment....Mbuya Nehanda was the most important recruit in those days. Once the children, the youth and girls in the area, knew that Nehanda had joined, they came in large numbers."

The cultural nationalism of the nationalist movement was, however, at times ambivalent towards traditional religion and spirituality. On one hand, traditional religion and spirituality, which included the veneration of vadzimu, ancestral spirits, and Mhondoro, the royal ancestral spirits such as Mbuya Nehanda and Sekuru Kaguvi was viewed as a part of the cultural heritage of the Africans and therefore important in the symbolic assertion of African rights against colonial oppression. On the other hand, traditional religion, used as part of mobilisation strategies, was considered incompatible with Marxism by most nationalist leaders. Further, the between the two liberation movements ZANU and the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) created a cleavage for a Shona cultural nationalism to emerge within ZANU, which did not have a ZAPU counterpart (Kaarsholm 1989, p.141–142; Bull-Christiansen 2004, p. 52).

It is in this period that the settler discourses of cultural supremacy were increasingly challenged by cultural nationalist versions of colonial and pre-colonial history. This version of pre-historical Zimbabwe, of which Great Zimbabwe ruins was an important symbol, was an articulation of a pre-colonial utopia when Africans lived together in unity with each other, ancestral spirits and nature until the arrival of the Europeans became central to the narration of history (Garlake 1983, p.14; Kaarsholm 1989, p.34)

The challenge lay in the incorporation of Marxism into this Africanist discourse, and thus, some historians have claimed that religion and Africanist mythology were sincere ideological beliefs held by the movement, whilst others claim that this was merely a pretext for mobilization. (Lan 1985, p. 226–228; Bhebe and Ranger 1996, p. 9–13). Officially there was a proclamation of ZANU's Marxist-Leninist and Maoist ideology which would thus require an endorsement of atheism, but when referring to the nationalist struggle of the First Chimurenga, Mbuya Nehanda and the spirituality she represented remained central:

> Nehanda Nyakasikana, appears in our war annals of postcolonial Zimbabwe as the first heroine and martyr. She did not lead just a battalion of a regional army but a national army in a national struggle for the overthrow of Company rule and recovery of the fatherland.... Nehanda was obviously a distinct and exceptional character who rose to revolutionary ascendance, not by mere display of leadership qualities [...], but principally by her spiritual power as a spirit medium. Our society has always feared and respected women possessed by spirits or medicinal power. ... It was indeed in those circumstances that Nehanda was able to demonstrate her powers and command the respect of men." (Mugabe 1983 cited in Bull-Christiansen 2004, p. 53)

For nationalist historians of this period of history such as Ranger, Vambe, and Lan, the key question has been the extent of the agency and the role Mbuya Nehanda played in the First Chimurenga, thus her prominence and agency in the rebellion has been challenged in nationalist accounts. The figure of Mbuya Nehanda is frequently juxtaposed against the figure of Sekuru Kaguvi, the other spiritual leader to have played a significant role in the Second Chimurenga. Lawrence Vambe's *An Ill-fated People* (1972) places male spirit medium Sekuru Kaguvi as the most influential spiritual leader in the First Chimurenga.

Likewise, the question of Mbuya Nehanda's role and agency in the First Chimurenga is also engaged directly in the work of David Beach (1998, p. 27) who describes Nehanda as an "innocent woman unjustly accused" as he argues against her centrality in the Chimurenga. Responding directly to Beach's argument, Ruramisai Charumbira (2008, p. 103) seeks to reinscribe Mbuya Nehanda's agency by engaging questions of gender victimhood through "revisiting the evidence" and documentation gathered by colonial authorities' during the period of the rebellion.

This narrative strategy of privileging Sekuru Kaguvi over Mbuya Nehanda, the paper would argue, is a function of the nationalist historians' uncritical adoption of a gendered temporality which does not accommodate the role of women in the public sphere of the liberation movement beyond being "innocent women unjustly accused" in the masculine crossfire. Mbuya Nehanda presents a contradiction for the public/private dichotomy assimilated into nationalist historiography from Victorian colonial gender constructions, and thus the reconciliation is achieved through the sub-ordination of her role in the First Chimurenga.

2.2.4 Official Nationalist History and "Patriotic History"

Mbuya Nehanda has been appropriated by nationalists to script a story of resistance and defeat in the First Chimurenga; revolt and victory in the Second Chimurenga (war of liberation in 1964–1979 leading to independence in 1980) and acquisition of land from 2000, leading to the Zimbabwean political and economic crisis that has been deemed the "third revolution" or "Third Chimurenga" by the ruling government (Mkwesha 2016, p.20)

The first elections after independence in 1980 were won by ZANU. Their whose rival ZAPU was later forced to enter into a coalition government and be absorbed into ZANU to form ZANU PF in 1987's Unity Accord in a bid to end the genocide of Ndebele people under the Gukurahundi campaign to suppress military and political dissidence in Matabeleland. The writing of a new history of a "unified Zimbabwe" became one of the main objectives of the new state: "Independence will bestow on us a new ... perspective, and indeed, a new history and a new past" (Mugabe cited in Garlake 1983, p. 15).

The nation's imagined space had to be rewritten in the public sphere such that the mythologies of Great Zimbabwe and the First Chimurenga were now the official discourse of the state. The historical continuity of the various struggles against colonial oppression was established through an emphasis on the mutual dependence between the liberation movements and the spirit mediums. Accordingly, Mbuya Nehanda and

Sekuru Kaguvi were now elevated to national heroes as the leaders of the First Chimurenga and the liberation struggle which was now called the Second Chimurenga. (Kaarsholm 1989, p. 192).

In the immediate post-independence period, the government adopted a pragmatic policy in which both the revolutionary and socialist ideals of the liberation war were rewritten. The issue of African rights to land was now re-articulated by the government as African rights to self-governance to accommodate the fact that the white settler minority was now perceived as a necessary partner in the quest for economic growth and national development. The redistribution of land was thus delayed as a peace settlement afforded the white land-owners a ten year period of protection. (Bull-Christiansen 2004, p. 56).

In this period, the revolutionary spirit of Mbuya Nehanda was abstracted into symbolic object of history and domesticated into "Mother of the Nation" figure. Despite the fact that the liberation movements had invoked Mbuya Nehanda as a revolutionary fighter during Chimurenga, the post-independence government was quick to contain this revolutionary spirit by converting Mbuya Nehanda from a political to a maternal figure. Symbolically, the re–domestication of Mbuya Nehanda and by extension the other women fighters of the Chimurenga was effected with the renaming of the maternity ward of Parirenyatwa, Zimbabwe's largest public hospital after Mbuya Nehanda. This is mirrored in the manner in which the former Vice President Joyce Mujuru, ex-combatant who had the nom de guerre Teurairopa ("one draws blood") came to be "Amai Mujuru" (Mother Mujuru), while her male counterparts continued to be referred to as "comrades". (Mukiwa 2006; Mkwesha 2016, p.27)

Mkwesha further argues that even though motherhood can be political, the critique is mounted against masculinist-nationalist appropriations of maternity as a means to "tame" and relegate women to the domestic sphere, whilst privileging masculine authority in the public sphere:

> "In the renaming ceremonies, Sekuru Kaguvi Street, symbolic of male mobility and authority, was born. This re–gendering of space was cemented by the 1983 Operation Clean–up, in which women found alone in the streets of Harare at night were imprisoned as suspected prostitutes. Nehanda's power and authority as a spirit medium and warrior are thus re-inflected by the postcolonial state, into that of the Mother of the Nation, while the role of the male as warrior and protector of women and children is re–inscribed as the patriarchal masculinist hegemonic nation." (Mkwesha 2016, p.27)

It is also in this post-independence period that the ZANU government sought to consolidate its military and political mandate through "Gukurahundi" a campaign wherein the Korean trained "Fifth Brigade" was deployed in Matabeleland in order to suppress dissidence that had risen out of conflicts in the encampments, originally formed to disarm and unite the two liberation armies with the former Rhodesian army. Discontented ex-guerrillas, comprising both ex-ZANLA and ex-ZIPRA combatants, deserted the camps. In response, their desertion was articulated as an organised ZAPU attempt to over- throw the government or at

least to secede the Ndebele-speaking areas from the Zimbabwean state. This charge was, however, vigorously denied by ZAPU. The result was the genocide of tens of thousands of Ndebele people. The campaign was described an act of self-defence on the part of the Zimbabwean people, who were now apparently Shona, "since the entire Ndebele- speaking part of the population was seen as the constituency of the enemy". (Bull-Christiansen 2004, p. 56)

Colonial stereotypes of the Shona and Ndebele became instrumental in the erasure of Ndebele identity from Zimbabwean nationalism. The new history of Zimbabwe was therefore largely cast as Shona history as Zimbabwean nationalism was now viewed as the assertion of Shona heritage and indigenous rights. (Kaarsholm 1989, 144; Bull-Christiansen 2004, p. 57)

Thereafter, the period leading up to the Fast Track Land Reform and ensuing political and economic upheaval, Ranger (2004) has described a new historiography emerging as a "patriotic history", that "is different from and more narrow than the old nationalist historiography, which celebrated aspiration and modernisation as well as resistance." (Ranger 2004 p.4) The nationalist discourse of ZANU PF emphasises the liberation war as a point of identification for the Zimbabwean people and is articulated as driven by a unifying spirit, against colonialism and neo-colonialism. (Ranger 2004, p.218–220)

In the 90s, the unity of the nation ZANU PF presided over was threatened on two fronts. On one hand, the labour movement and the NGO community challenged the government's structural adjustment policies that precipitated an economic downturn whilst the war veterans were demanding compensation including pensions and land which they had fought for. In response, the government chose to challenge the labour movement by directly accusing them of being backed by the British who intended to bring down the Zimbabwean government whilst enlarging the compensation awarded to war veterans. ZANU PF thus increasingly relied on liberation war history for popular support. The past glories of the liberation war were thus re-articulated so as to accommodate the attacks of the war veterans. A revival of the land issue became instrumental in turning the unruly war veterans into allies of ZANU PF (Raftopoulos 2000, p.30; Sylvester 2003, p.36—41).

In this period, a new temporal discourse was inaugurated by ZANU PF. A temporal divide between rural and urban Zimbabwe became instrumental as ZANU PF's power base was in the rural areas, while the labour movement and the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) were predominantly urban-based. Thus the rural Zimbabwe that formed ZANU PF's core constituency represented the "authentic" and "revolutionary past", whereas the urban Zimbabwe that formed an inauthentic present of "sell-outs" and "imperialist puppets". This new temporal discourse articulated by ZANU PF is what Christine Sylvester (2003, p.44–46)

terms “inappropriating the now” because the discourse functions by making the present state of the nation inappropriate to the official political discourses. In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon underlines this as the primary discursive tool of the post-independence national governments saying:

> During the struggle for liberation the leader awakened the people and promised them a forward march, heroic and unmitigated. Today, he uses every means to put them to sleep, and three or four times a year asks them to remember the colonial period and to look back on the long way they have come since then. (1963, p.136)

Thus in this discourse of the “inappropriate now”, the present is but a temporary step towards the fulfilment of a visionary future which is a re-articulation of the past glory of the African people. Therefore, it is within this discourse that “land becomes the key signifier of true Zimbabwean identity because it is the link between the past, present and future as an anti-colonial symbol of continued struggle for freedom from oppression” (Sylvester 2003, p.44–46).

Writing on the deployment of history in Zimbabwe’s current period of political challenge to the ruling party, Percy Zvomuya (2016) argues that within this new historiography, President Mugabe is “the logical descendant of Nehanda, Kaguvi and other heroes of the First Chimurenga”. In this new historiography President Mugabe is, for example, increasingly referred to by his clan name Gushungo (Ngwenya 2012; Kamhungira 2016) in national discourse as part of an effort to place Mugabe within a supra-tribal spiritual leadership lineage (Auret 1982; Ranger 2004).

By staking claim to this spiritual-traditional lineage in national discourse, President Mugabe claims legitimacy to leadership that supersedes electoral politics by virtue of the supra-tribal authority claimed by royal spirits such as Nehanda and Kaguvi (Auret 1982). Within this logic, the Fast Track Land Reform programme becomes the Third Chimurenga wherein Mugabe provides defacto political and spiritual leadership, thus forming a clear historical continuum from the First and Second Chimurengas (Zvomuya 2016).

2.3 Literature and Nation

Benedict Anderson has argued that literature can function as a mediator of the imagined community of the nation as a temporal and spatial agent because literature can narrate the national space and time with reference to a specific national community (Anderson 1991, p.26–32). Mbuya Nehanda’s “bones” have been felt in the national literary sphere. Kizito Muchemwa (2011, p. 398) describes this writing as a “moment of re-inscription” and it is within this moment that Mbuya Nehanda has left an indelible mark on Zimbabwe’s literary canon.

Anderson (1991) describes "national allegory" as one tool through which national culture is narrated, through "the one out of many" acting out the life of the collective. Throughout the war and once it had ended iconicity of the figure of Mbuya Nehanda as the inspirational war veteran continued to endure in both English and Shona language novels.

The first Shona novel, Solomon Mutsvairo's (1956) *Feso*, became a favourite amongst nationalist leaders including Simon Vengai Muzenda, Zimbabwe's First Vice President, who popularised the poem "Nehanda Nyasikana" contained in the novel (Mandova and Wasosa 2012). More contemporary works venerating the spirit medium include Garikai Mutasa's (1985) *The Contact,* Chenjerai Hove's (1988) *Bones,* Shimmer Chinodya's (1990) *Harvest of Thorns*, Charles Samupindi's (1990) *Death Throes,* Yvonne Vera's (1993) *Nehanda,* and the English translations of Solomon Mutswairo's (1988) *Mweya wa Nehanda.*

Abiola Irele (1993), argues in his seminal essay "Narrative, History and the African Imagination" that the novel became one of many facilitating modes for the nationalist reconstruction of history in contemporary historical novels as:

> [it] is not only a secure sense of being-in-history that is no longer available to the African, but also a proper sense of belonging in the world: both have, therefore, to be constructed, striven for - in other words, imagined. Narrative, in the form of the novel, has afforded a privileged mode for this process of reconstruction. (Irele 1993)

Nana Wilson-Tagoe (2002, p.155) argues that in modern African literature, the relationship between history and fiction has been complementary as well as problematic. Early writers had an anxiety to place art in the service of nation, seeing their work as both aesthetic acts and forms of new knowledge about Africa. Thus, their literary projects were heavily dependent on historical referents and contexts as it was only by engaging with history that African writers could think of themselves as historical subjects capable of new forms of subjectivity.

Wilson-Tagoe further argues that there is a "fluid interplay between history and fiction" (2002, p. 155) such that the "assumption that narrative in history merely holds together stories and events is as erroneous as the belief that fiction is strictly inventive…The impulse to narrate is inspired by conditions of existence in the real world, and fictions however imagined do not escape their correlation with their worlds. Their radical advantage is their ability, in Alexander Gelley's (1987, p. xi) words, "to project a meaning that derives from yet transcends phenomenal reality and sensory experience." (Wilson-Tagoe 2002, p.156)

Within this framework, Muchemwa (2005) describes Zimbabwean fiction as embodying "the convergence between history, memory and imaginative". Muchativugwa Liberty Hove (2011) argues that within the intervening period of colonisation beginning in 1890 and independence achieved in 1980, "the numerical

inversion in the dates ironically mirrors the radical transformation in the perceptions of the hero" (Hove 2011, p. 39), as official accounts of history were authored variously by colonial powers, nationalist liberation movements and nationalist governments.

To begin with, in the period after Mbuya Nehanda's death, colonial figures such as Jan van Riebeeck, Piet Retief, David Livingstone, Cecil John Rhodes, Leander Starr Jameson, Alfred Beit, Charles Rudd and Kingsley Fairbridge were narrativised as heroes in Rhodesian national history (Hove 2011). A number of novels of this time operated within this imagined discursive space. Settler colonial literature made much use of the myth of the ancient white civilisation that built what is now known as Great Zimbabwe, which had apparently been defeated by hordes of black savages, became instrumental as an allegory of the settler community itself and as an assurance of the African inability to progress (Kaarsholm 1981, p.131; Bull-Christiansen 2004, p.45 - 46).

This myth is perhaps best seen in Wilbur Smith's 1972 novel, *The Sunbird.* In it he narrates the allegory of Great Zimbabwe as his protagonists South African archaeologists "discover" an abandoned ancient city named Opet, which they believe to have been founded by "fair-skinned, golden-haired warriors from across the sea, who mined the gold, enslaved the indigenous tribes and flourished for hundreds of years". Initially, the evidence points to founders of "obscure Bantu origin", but eventually it bears out that the founders were Phoenicians from Carthage. The fabulous Opet had once been the centre of a great civilisation which included Zimbabwe and many other towns, which met its downfall around 450 AD when it was destroyed by of black invaders.

The liberation war was also narrated into this schema by the settler community. Again, both the myths of Great Zimbabwe and the traditional religious beliefs of the Africans were appropriated. The war itself became a reference point of the symbolic order. The Africans would be used as a metonym for the natural primitivism of the African nature. The guerrilla warriors in the bush were represented as wild beasts, savages or 'creatures of the night' all belonging to the African nature, that the Rhodesians had to control in order to protect their civilisation. Even the Marxist ideology of the guerrillas was cast as a part of this savagery. (Bull-Christiansen 2004, p. 47)

White authors who wrote about the war from within the dominant colonial settler ideology had their works published inside and outside the country and the books were made available in the bookshops. Such books include Peter Stiff's *The Rain Goddess* (1973), Michael Hartmann's *Game for Vultures* (1973), and Robert Early's *A time of Madness* (1977) (Chigidi and Mutasa 2010, p.63).

During the thirteen years of the Second Chimurenga, no single Shona novel depicting the liberation war was published.The Rhodesian Literature Bureau, which was mandated by the Ministry of Information, supervised the development and distribution of literature in indigenous languages took place ensured that it was not possible for a work of art that did not reflect the colonial settler ideology to be published and remain unbanned. Many writers took to self-censorship as they feared that if they feared both manuscript rejection by the Rhodesia Literature Bureau would reject their manuscripts, as well as the heavy hand of the Rhodesian police and the law. (Chigidi and Mutasa 2010, p.69) As Chiwome (2002, p.35) observes, "[t]he resultant fiction was underdeveloped by avoiding politics, the root of the reality dealt with in fiction".

It is against this background that during the Second Chimurenga a dissident black narrative began to express a nationalist agenda through what Muchativugwa Liberty Hove (2011) calls the "redemptionist trope of Zimbabwean historiography". It is within this moment that Mbuya Nehanda, along with other leaders such as Sekuru Kaguvi and Chaminuka were re-inscribed as heroes through both oral and written traditions (Pfukwa, 2008; Hove 2011).

The first Shona novel, Mutsvairo's *Feso* (1956), played a critical role in the creation and reproduction of nationalist ideology by "responding to colonial myths with counter-Shona myths of origin as a way of trying to prove the superiority of the past culture of Africans" (Vambe 2004, p.27). In *Feso*, Mutsvairo allegorises the life of the Shona people, rediscovers collective memories and infuses oral traditions into the written one in order to portray a "national golden age" in pre–colonial Zimbabwe, whose reconstitution becomes the basis of Zimbabwean nationalist aspirations and gives birth to the culture of omission (excluding others from the nation). (Mkwesha 2016, p.24)

The novel also contained a political protest poem "O Nehanda Nyakasikana" in which the speaker appeals to the guardian spirit of Mbuya Nehanda to come and rescue her people from slavery. Although the novel was banned and removed from the school syllabus the famous prayer to the spirit of Mbuya Nehanda, which was was recited at pungwes (night vigils or political meetings at night) during the Second Chimurenga, whilst the late former vice-president of Zimbabwe, Simon Muzenda famously recited the poem. (Chigidi and Mutasa 2010, p.66)

While advancing the nationalism of the liberation war, *Feso* has also been identified as the "literary originator of an unproblematised ethnic nationalism" (Muchemwa 2005, 195). Mutsvairo appropriates the Zimbabwean oral tradition and history in order to advance the interest of the Zezuru ethnic group (who form part of the ethnic linguistic group people who have come to be collectively known as the Shona people). He shapes the myth of Mbuya Nehanda to give birth to the politics of inclusion and exclusion in the nation as his

Mbuya Nehanda becomes a central figure in defining citizenship and belonging. In *Feso*, Mutsvairo consciously creates a myth of the nation that validates the nationalist struggle. In the nationalist project initiated by Mutswairo, Charwe loses her individual (gendered) identity and becomes a symbol of origins with which ZANU PF claims authority over the nation, delimiting membership in an exclusionary manner. (Mkwesha 2016, p.24)

In the period immediately after the war, the genre of Shona language nationalist war novels became popular. Production of Shona novels was controlled by the Literature Bureau which under the new ZANU PF led adminstration mandated state-centred narratives steeped in the glorification of the liberation war. The effect of this was such that the Shona war novel narrativised "history for nation building and national identity formation purposes as well as the fortification of a heroic tradition" (Muwati and Mutasa, 2011, p.74). It is because of this romanticising of the liberation war in the post-independence period that Shona fiction novels have been the "subject of severe criticism because of its tendency to falsify and distort history." (Chigidi and Mutasa 2010, p.61) In an interview with Itai Muwati Shona war writer Vitalis Nyawaranda, explained that the sentiment saying: "We were entering the golden age. We had lost our jobs. We wanted to promote the euphoric mood. People had yearned for change and writers were caught up in the mood – celebrating, not recording history." (Nyarandwa cited in Muwati 2011, p.75),

This "golden age" saw no less than ten Shona novels about the liberation war published in the first five years of independence alone (Chigidi and Mutasa 2010). One of the results of this distortion was the privileging of the ZANU and their military wing ZANLA (who fought the war mainly from the East, based in Mozambique) role in the Second Chimurenga, and the attendant erasure of the contribution of ZAPU and its Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army (ZIPRA) (who fought the war mainly from the west, maintaining a base in Zambia). As Chigidi and Mutasa (2010, p.74) note, virtually no Shona war novels of this period make mention of ZAPU and its leadership. By the 90s, as disillusionment began to set in, the zeal for celebratory liberation war literature died down. (Chigidi and Mutasa 2010, p.67)

Similarly, during the Second Chimurenga and immediately after independence, Zimbabwean writers of English novels began to a counter narrative the re-inscribed a black history through the recovery of lost and suppressed memories (Hove 2011). This "flirtation with recovery and celebration" (Muchemwa, 2011, p. 398) is seen with writers such as Charles Mungoshi (1975) in *Waiting for the Rain*, Chenjerai Hove (1988) in *Bones,* Tsitsi Dangarembga (1988) in *Nervous Conditions,* Shimmer Chinodya (1989) in *Harvest of Thorns,* and Alexander Kanengoni (1997) in *Echoing Silences*.

While some writers such as Dambudzo Marechera stridently challenged the nationalist narrative, and others did so to a less contested extent, much of the writing in this period sought to narrativise a sense of a unitary nationalist collective (Muchemwa 2011). In her social history of Zimbabwean literature, Flora Veit-Wild (1993) ascribes to the first and second generations of black Zimbabwean writers in English an investment in "cultural recovery and celebration". The work of authors such as Dangarembga, Chinodya and Kanengoni illustrate this investment.

Hove (2011) notes that this generation of black authors, writing both in English and Shona to recuperate and reconstruct Zimbabwean national history and the figure of Mbuya Nehanda is largely male, thereby giving credence to the narrating of nationalist struggle as male. Meg Samuelson (2002) describes a general "silencing of women in Africa", which has seen a relative dearth of female Zimbabwean writers. This is evidenced in Flora Veit-Wildt's list of Zimbabwean writers published by 1987 which includes only thirty one women out of a total of two hundred and ten writers, sixteen of whom wrote in Shona (Samuelson 2002). This provides fertile ground for manifestations of what Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar (1979) term an "anxiety of authorship", that was a pervasive feature of British and American nineteenth century women's writing stemming from Western dichotomies that sees men as "cultural producers" and women as "natural producers". (Samuelson 2002)

Chapter 3: The Nation, Samupindi, Vera and the "Frozen Image

This chapter aims to provide an analysis and demonstration of how this "Frozen Image" of Mbuya Nehanda and Sekuru Kaguvi has been deployed in the narrative strategies of settler colonialists, nationalist and present patriotic histories. It argues that the "fixedness" and "frozenness" of thus this "Frozen Image" has allowed for the maintenance of a gendered temporality of the nation required by each of these national discourses.

Thereafter the chapter will demonstrate the engagement that the novels by Samupindi and Vera have had with the "Frozen Image" by means of an analysis of the cover of *Death Throes* and Yvonne Vera's utterances in interviews about the photograph, before examining the narrative engagements with the "Frozen Image". It will argue that Charles Samupindi's (1990) *Death Throes* demonstrates that when the challenge to settler-colonial projections of an African past go unaccompanied by an interrogation of historical gender relations and uncritically adopt the "External" realm of Western modernity inherent in nationalist and patriotic discourses, it is necessary to "write within the Frozen Image" and thus keep a period of resistance locked in and un-interrogated in a particular moment in time. This is whereas Yvonne Vera's (1993) *Nehanda* demonstrates that through a re-imagination of gender relations to society and with the nation, it is possible to "write beyond the image" and thus allow the period of resistance to "move" and be re-interrogated over time.

3.1 Interpreting and Appropriating the "Frozen Image" for Versions of the Nation

We can begin the analysis of the original photograph of Mbuya Nehanda and Sekuru Kaguvi (see Appendix 1) by locating ourselves in John Berger's (2008) influential text *Ways of Seeing* in which he suggests that all images are man-made and thus all embody a way of seeing:

> An image is a sight which has been recreated or reproduced…Even a photograph. For photographs are not, as is often assumed, a mechanical record. Every time we look at a photograph, we are aware, however slightly, of the photographer, selecting that sight from an infinity of other possible sights. This is true even in the most casual family snapshot. The photographer's way of seeing is reflected in his choice of subject. (Berger 2008, p.9-10)

"The photographer's way of seeing" itself can be situated within the historical role photographic imagery has had on the continent "in constructing reality - providing visual evidence, recording evens, documenting history, portraying human types" (Bryce 2002 b, p.40). Zoning on the evidence-function of photography, we can consider Susan Sontag (2008a) description appearing her essay "Plato's Cave":

> Photographs furnish evidence. Something we hear about, but doubt, seems proven when we're shown a photograph of it. In one version of its utility, the camera record incriminates. Starting with their use by the Paris police in the murderous roundup of Communards in June 1871, photographs became a useful tool of modern states in the surveillance and control of their increasingly mobile populations. In another version of reality the camera justifies. A photograph passes for incontrovert-

> ible proof that a given thing happened. The picture may distort; but there is always a presumption that something exists, or did exist, which is like what's in the picture. (Sontag 2008a, p.5)

Paul Landau, (1993) writing "Photography and the Colonial Vision", points us to the simultaneous rise of the Victorian desire for scientific classification and imperial expansion and exploration. In light of Landau, Berger and Sontag's comments we can consider the famous photograph of the spirit mediums, Mbuya Nehanda and Sekuru Kaguvi, after their capture in 1897 (see Appendix 1).

In the "Frozen Image", the two figures stand against a brick wall, their shadows looming next to their figures. Sekuru Kaguvi is positioned on the right of the photograph. He appears emaciated, naked to the waist with a cloth tied around his waist, covering his lower body. Sekuru Kaguvi stands apart from the wall, awkwardly with this back slightly bent forward, his arms slightly akimbo. He appears uneasy and full of angst. Mbuya Nehanda is positioned on the left, with a cloth tied at her shoulder and her hands clasped in front of her. She appears to be supporting herself against the wall. Both figures seem wary, strained and uncomfortable, however it would appear that Mbuya Nehanda is somewhat more resolute in her stance as she stands with her arms clasped.

Overall, as Ruramisai Charumbira (2008) argues, this "Frozen Image" titled "The Capture of Nianda and Kagubi," was a powerful image that the BSAC [British South Africa Company] used to good effect to announce the arrest of Nehanda and Kaguvi." The photo has since served various narrative strategies over time.

In terms of the original intentions for the "Frozen Image", the photo can be considered as evidence of colonial power and supremacy over a resistant but subjugated people (Bryce 2002 b, p.40). The photograph, taken by the nascent colonial state of Rhodesia served as "incontrovertible proof" of the capture of two influential leaders of the Shona, and by extension the defeat of the Shona. The photo very directly served to incriminate these "disobedient" natives and thereby aided in broader colonial project that required the control and subjugation of the resistant "natives". While Sontag (2008a) is not entirely convinced by the camera/gun metaphor, she argues that there is

> something predatory in the act of taking a picture. To photograph people is to violate them, by seeing them as they never see themselves, by having knowledge of them they can never have; it turns people into objects that can be symbolically possessed. Just as the camera is a sublimation of the gun, to photograph someone is a sublimated murder…(Sontag 2008a, p.14-15)

In light of Sontag's version of photography as a kind of "sublimated murder", Bryce's (2002b, p.40) interpretation of the the image in light of the execution of Mbuya Nehanda and Sekuru Kaguvi does not seem so far-fetched as she considers it to say: "Look, your great spirit mediums are ordinary humans after all, just flesh and blood, which can be cut, which can be spilled. Where is the spirit now?" (Bryce 2002 b, p.40)

Such a question would thus form part of the settler colonial narrative strategy that asserted the cultural and material superiority by dismissing the spirit mediums and thereby the spirituality of the Shona people as part of a "non-sensical" and "superstitious" past, that was now impotent against the modern technologies of the colonialists. The troublesome Mbuya Nehanda could thus be dismissed as a witch that led her people under the false pretenses of "backward superstitions".

We can imagine that the British South Africa Company, taking this "Frozen Image" sought to capture and "fix" this moment in the African resistance as a representation of the African past which was, according to Hegel's words, "the Unhistorical, Undeveloped Spirit, still involved in the conditions of mere nature" (Hegel 1837, p.117). Thus, to draw on the notion of "sublimated murder", the "Frozen Image" originally served the function of "killing the spirit" of the witch Mbuya Nehanda and the indigenous people, and supplanting it with scientific rationalism and the overall Western epistemological system that the settler-colonialists would now introduce as part of their rule over the "backward natives".

We can also consider the power dynamic involved in the capturing of this "Frozen Image". The question of consent is almost a moot one, given the power imbalance inherent in the relationship between the colonialist photographer and colonized subject. We can however consider how co-operative, or resistant, the spirit mediums may have been. In examining positioning within portraits, Sontag suggests that frontality in the imagery is important to consider:

> In the normal rhetoric of the photographic portrait, facing the camera signifies solemnity, frankness, the disclosure of the subject's essence. This is why frontally seems right for ceremonial pictures (like weddings, graduations) but less apt for photographs used on billboards to advertise political candidates…Frontality implies… the subject's cooperation. To get these people to pose photographer has gad to gain their confidence, has had to gain their confidence, has had to become "friends" with them. (Sontag 2008b, p. 37-38)

In this photograph, we can assume that Mbuya Nehanda and Sekuru Kaguvi would have had to be instructed and coaxed into any particular position. Given that historical records mark that Mbuya Nehanda in particular was not co-operative throughout her trial, we can imagine that she would have had to be forced into a particular position. I would suggest that it is possible that it is a result of this unco-operativeness that Mbuya Nehanda and Sekuru Kaguvi do not face the camera directly. That Mbuya Nehanda stands against the wall can be interpreted as a withdrawal and mitigation of the invasion and violation embodied in the camera's colonial gaze as it sought to capture and classify them in its colonial imaginary.

The famous "Frozen Image" has since moved beyond that colonial moment, and came into national circulation and thereby the public imagination, through its reproduction in historical texts wherein Mbuya Nehanda is frequently juxtaposed against the figure of Sekuru Kaguvi, the other spiritual leader to have

played a significant role in the Second Chimurenga. While David Lan's (1985) *Guns and Guerillas* privileges Mbuya Nehanda, nationalist texts by Ranger (1967), Vambe (1972) and Beach (1988) tend to challenge the prominence and agency of Mbuya Nehanda in the First Chimurenga. Lawrence Vambe's (1972) *An Ill-fated People*, for example, places male spirit medium Sekuru Kaguvi as the most influential spiritual leader in the First Chimurenga.

Similarly, David Beach's (1998) "An Innocent Woman Unjustly Accused? Charwe, Medium of the Nehanda Mhondoro Spirit, and the 1896-97 Central Shona Rising in Zimbabwe." which posits that contrary to oral tradition's placement of Mbuya Nehanda at the center of the uprising, she may have simply been "an innocent woman unjustly accused." Instead, he argues, it was Sekuru Kaguvi might have been "the real hero".Responding to Beach's characterization of Mbuya Nehanda as a "victim" of a patriarchal struggle through her text, "Nehanda and Gender Victimhood in the Central Mashonaland 1896-97 Rebellions: Revisiting the Evidence", Ruramisai Charumbira (2008) queries historical facts, demonstrating that the narrativizing of official historical facts is often gendered. In line with her broader argument which privileges the leadership role of Mbuya Nehanda in the Chimurenga, Charumbira (2008), offers this persuasive comparison of Mbuya Nehanda and Sekuru Kaguvi's stances:

> In that picture she appears more self-possessed, with her hands clasped and standing much more upright, leaning against the jail wall. In contrast he looks more on edge, and standing at attention as they might have been told to do so by the photographer. (Charumbira 2008, p.116)

In the image, both figures stare ahead of them. Their gazes are not intimate and reveal of a sense of detachment to the events happening around them. In Jane Bryce's (2002b, p.40) interpretation, "the expressions of their faces are identical: blank, fixed stares, the eyes in shadow, features lined with strain and knowledge of what was to follow." To borrow bell hooks' term, I would suggest that the figures, although not looking directly into the camera, returns the camera/colonial gaze with an "oppositional gaze" such that sense of defiance can be registered in their gazes.

The "Frozen Image" has also served an important symbolic function within the male nationalist literary tradition. Faith Mkwesha's (2016) text "Representing Nehanda: Writing back to colonialism's "Frozen Image" and the male nationalist tradition" suggests that the "fixedness" and "frozenness" of the "Frozen Image" is maintained by colonial discourse and practice, arguing that "in the male literary and nationalist tradition, she is very much alive, and often cast as muse – a source of inspiration for creativity who lends legitimacy to nationalist projects." (Mkwesha 2016, p.22)

This paper does not interpret the "male nationalist tradition's" engagement with the "Frozen Image" as a "live" one as Mkwesha has done, but rather interprets the settler colonial, nationalist and patriotic tradi-

tions as being dependent on the "fixed-ness" and "frozen-ness" of the "Frozen Image" such that they are able, with varied success to incorporate and appropriate the figure of Mbuya Nehanda into their nationalist ideologies which are dependent on a gendered temporality that ascribes women as objects of past histories of the nation, and men as subjects of progressive futures.

The image has also been appropriated by the ruling party, who for example, have cropped and turned into a portrait the image of Mbuya Nehanda in an Independence Day poster (Coundouriotis 2014). This visual representation serves the function of placing President Mugabe in the tradition of Mbuya Nehanda. In this way the original intention of the photograph is subverted and emphasizes "the infinite reproducibility of Mbuya Nehanda as symbol of national pride and autonomy" (Coundouriotis 2014, p.159). This is in line with ZANU PF's patriotic history's narrative strategy of "in-appropriating the now" by centralizing a discourse of the stable, revolutionary past which Mbuya Nehanda is representative of.

Thus, it is within this logic, that the "Frozen Image" of Mbuya Nehanda and Sekuru Kaguvi capture by the British South Africa Company functions as a technology of time that serves the function of capturing and fixing this period (and even life) of resistance into a stable moment of gendered temporality that has been appropriated for various narrative strategies of the nation.

3.2 Samupindi - Narrating Mbuya Nehanda "Within" the "Frozen Image"

3.2.1 Samupindi's Visual Engagement with the "Frozen Image"

Beyond the narrative contained in *Death Throes,* the novella becomes interesting and important for this paper particularly because of Samupindi's engagement with the "Frozen Image" (see Appendix 1) of the capture of Mbuya Nehanda and Sekuru Kaguvi by the British South Africa Company through his front cover illustration (see Appendix 2). In addition, the back cover text (see Appendix 3) engages the "frozen" image, albeit less directly, as Samupindi emphasizes his fidelity to the "frozen-ness" and "fixedness" of that moment of capture by stating that:

> Although the work has been written as fiction, the author developed his material from ascertainable fact. The raw materials from which the story is hewn are, firstly, the original court record in the trial judge's own hand, which is with the National Archives. Secondly, there is also a mine of scripts on oral history, also with the Archives, which covers this period in question. (see Appendix 3)

The front cover of *Death Throes* (see Appendix 2) offers a direct engagement with the "Frozen Image" by virtue of its appropriation and interpretation of the original photograph of Sekuru Kaguvi and Mbuya Nehanda's capture. The image on the cover presents itself as a seemingly literal interpretation and dramatiza-

tion of the title *Death Throes,* through the superimposition of nooses, skulls and shackles to its reproduction of the original "Frozen Image".

The figures of Mbuya Nehanda and Sekuru Kaguvi are drawn as they appear on the original photograph standing against the brick wall. What is immediately apparent is that on the cover, Mbuya Nehanda is bathed in light, whilst Kaguvi is obscured in the dark which can be interpreted as an implicit comment on his capitulation and conversion to Christianity. Although her conversion is not mentioned in the book, we can read into the fact that within Samupindi's narrative Mbuya Nehanda is depicted as the key protagonist of the First Chimurenga, whereas Sekuru Kaguvi's role is highlighted without an exposition of his trial. It would seem that in while refraining from completely erasing Sekuru Kaguvi from the adaption of the original photograph, the illustrator has chosen to darken and thereby obscure Sekuru Kaguvi's face.

The positioning of both figures differs somewhat from that of the photograph. Here, they both stand to attention and appear to have their hands behind their back, presumably held back by handcuffs. In this sense, the cover would suggest that the fate of the two was *fait accompli.*

Unlike the original "Frozen Image", both figures have shackles on their feet and have nooses placed prominently near their heads. If we consider the two nooses, it would appear that there is a patriarchal obsession with the noose, and its symbolic function for the execution and death at the hands of the oppressive colonialists. It would seem that Mbuya Nehanda's life culminates in the confrontation with the noose.

Similarly, the two skulls that appear next to each figure's feet re-inscribes what Berger describes as the "medieval idea of using a skull as a continual reminder of the presence of death." (Berger 2008, p.91). The added detail of the skulls shifts the emphasis back to the spiritual and the mediums' connection with death and ancestors. Most importantly, the spiritual can be read as a reference to land, and agitating in the name of the ancestors. This omen of death and fear haunts the formidable landscape, a reminder of the violent and brutal past were the oppressive colonial control of body and land haunted the Shona people. If we consider that "all reality was mechanically measured by its materiality. The soul, thanks to the Cartesian system, was saved in a category apart" the cover suggests a "post-colonial gothic" wherein the post-colonial experience is constantly haunted by the colonial past." (Hughes and Smith 2003).

The colors that shade the illustration, namely red, black and pink may have been chosen for functional reasons (namely that cost-effectiveness), however it is material to note the red coloring at the bottom of the page can be interpreted as signifying blood shed that would have occurred during the Chimurenga. The font is a rather a gothic, ghoulish font.

Overall, the *Death Throes* cover illustration dramatises and emphasizes the terror of the imminent execution, superimposes on the photograph the spirit of nationalist resistance, such that the moral terms of the Chimurenga are clearly set such that the colonized Africans were clearly the demonstrable victims of the cruel and oppressive colonialists.

In further considering the emphasis of the torture and imminent death, it seems that Samupindi wants to remain close to the scene of Mbuya Nehanda and Sekuru Kaguvi's torture, hanging by the noose and continues to rehearse and re-stage this act of colonial violence in both the textual and visual manifestations. In this way, he becomes complicit in these colonial "scenes of subjection," to borrow Saidiya Hartman's (1997) phrase. In *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-making in Nineteenth Century America,* Hartman's (1997) exploration of racial subjugation during slavery and its aftermath, she examines the forms of terror and resistance that shaped black identity as they are narrated in slave narratives, plantation diaries, popular theater, slave performance, freedmen's primers, and legal cases. Hartman, for example, argues that in *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*, it becomes apparent that the moment that introduced Frederick Douglass to slavery was the beating of his aunt Hester. By locating this scene of subjection in the first chapter, "Douglass establishes the centrality of violence to the making of the slave to the making of the slave and identifies it as an original generative act equivalent to the statement I was born." (Hartman 1997, p.3). If we are to transpose this into the narrativising of Mbuya Nehanda, we can understand the centrality of the physical, spiritual and environmental violence to the making of the post-independence/colonial nation of Zimbabwe and how Mbuya Nehanda's execution figures as the original generative act equivalent to the statement that "Zimbabwe was born". Just as "the passage through the blood stained gate is an inaugural moment in the formation of the enslaved" (ibid.), the passage of Mbuya Nehanda through the noose is an inaugural moment in the formation of the anti-colonial, revolutionary consciousness of the indigenous people. Here we can consider Hartman's rationale for not reproducing a scene of subjection in light of Eleni Coundouriotis (2014) view that the narrative of Mbuya Nehanda's encounter with the noose is "obsessively told":

> I have chosen not to reproduce Douglass' account of the beating of Aunt Hester in order to call attention to the ease with which such scenes are usually reiterated, the casualness with which they are circulated, and the consequences of this routine display of the slave's ravaged body. (Hartman 1997, p.3)

Hartman prompts us to think this further about the ways in which we are "called upon to participate in such scenes":

> Are we witnesses who confirm the truth of what happened in the face of the world destroying capacities of pain, the distortions of torture, the sheer unrepresentability of terror, and the repression of the dominant accounts? Or are we voyeurs fascinated with and repelled by exhibitions of terror and suf-

> ferance? What does the exposing of the violated body yield? Proof of black sentience or the inhumanity of the peculiar institution? Or does the pain of the other merely provide us with the opportunity for self-reflection? (Hartman 1997, p.3)

Overall, Samupindi's cover certainly dramatises the visual imagination offered by the "Frozen Image" to emphasize the torture and imminent death faced by Mbuya Nehanda and Sekuru Kaguvi under the oppressive rule of the settlers. It is not immediately clear whether this return and dramatization of the scene of colonial subjection on the cover is a cathartic confrontation with the continual "repressed return" of past into the present.

In my interpretation of the cover, a representation of a "post-colonial gothic site", is not one which is redemptive visitation of violent and brutal colonial history." It does not appear to be a cathartic confrontation of the violent specters of the past, that allow us to "transcend the confines of history and the shackles of 'being' through a cycle of 'becoming'" (Laurence 2017), but rather seems to be a gratuitous visualization and reproduction of the trauma and suffering of the colonized, required for the reproduction of a masculinist nationalist discourse.

Ultimately, it would appear that Samupindi's visual interpretation of the "Frozen Image" is one that appears invested in the "fixedness" and "frozenness" of the photograph originally captured by the British South Africa. In particular, *Death Throes* covers indicate an investment in returning to the "scene of colonial subjection" by locking this particular moment of resistance by Mbuya Nehanda and the colonized against the oppressive rule of the British South Africa Company firmly into the Zimbabwean literary tradition.

3.2.2 Plot Summary and Style

The back cover (see Appendix 3) of Charles Samupindi's 1990 novella *Death Throes: The Trial of Mbuya Nehanda* offers a description of itself as "a reincarnation of a monumental personality in the history of Zimbabwe." In line with much nationalist and patriotic narrativizing, the novella limits its scope to the First Chimurenga and a recounting of the trial and execution of Mbuya Nehanda, Samupindi renders a narrative of an imprisoned Mbuya Nehanda as she is tried and eventually hanged by colonial authorities, with depictions of her life prior to the trial as she presided over the Shona uprisings, in other words only in as far as it helps us to understand the context of this trial and the eventual execution.

Chapter one finds us in court, recalling preliminary testimonies for the murder of Native Commissioner in Mazoe, Pollard, known pejoratively to the Shona as Kanyaira. This Mbuya Nehanda's trial she faced with Hwata the warrior, Gutsa the hunter and Zindoga the 16 year old who came from Nehanda's village in Mazoe.

The "red-faced" magistrate Bayley, friend of the murdered Kanyaira hears the testimony by the witnesses Pig M'saruro, the native messenger to Kanyaira. M'saruro is shocked that he must testify against the revered Mbuya Nehanda, but nonetheless is coerced into describing the murder of Pollard and Mbuya Nehanda's specific order to men of her village, saying, "Don't kill him here, kill him down there, near the river" (Samupindi 1992, p.17). The second witness M'tsakadzi provides a brief testimony. Of the accused, Zindoga is too terrified to testify, whilst Hwata and Gutsa provide their testimonies. Once it is her turn, Nehanda herself does not testify: "Not that she had nothing to say, but she considered the matter of the fate of a people far too serious to be deliberated on in this white man's court, or any court for that matter. These proceedings were a mockery of the whole issue." (Samupindi 1992, p.21) Once the initial proceedings have ended, committed all four accused for trial at the High Court.

In the second chapter, we begin with Mbuya Nehanda's perspective: "The weight of the epoch harnessed the shoulders of her thoughts for the first time." (Samupindi 1992, p.22) She recounts the capture of Chief Makoni captured, summarily tried and executed, Kaguvi surrenders, and her own arrest. We experience her sense of spiritual defeat as Samupindi emphasises her anguish: "The tears cascaded down her cheeks of their own accord, inundating her will-power. She coughed tears….They were not tears of self-pity, only… Day and night….ceased to matter. Only the suffering." (Samupindi 1992, p.23). As this happens it rains heavily, symbolising the rain-making powers of the royal mhondoro spirit. At the height of her anguish, she beseeches the ancestors:

> "And where are you, the spirits of the land? Where are you Chaminuka? Where are you?" Her voice charged against the walls of solid darkness. The echoes reverberated: Where are you? Where are you?
> "Your children are down here in this hole, where are you? Where are you? Where are you?"
> Time became relentless.
> The prison guards stampeded to her cell like buffaloes.
> Then all of sudden the continuity of the rainfall was shuttered by the roar of a lion. The ground shook and trembled under their feet and the night rattled. It was as if the lion was just outside the prison gates! (Samupindi 1992, p.24)

While this happens, Hwata, who admonishes himself for telling the "obscenely naked truth" (Samupindi 1992, p.24) without minimizing his part, nor giving the others away in the process, narrates the Shona uprising which had been orchestrated by Mbuya Nehanda and Sekuru Kaguvi (Samupindi 1992, p.25) after the defeat of the Ndebele the previous year.

The three accused men in the cell all look "spiritually sodden" (Samupindi 1992, p.25), before the sound of Mbuya Nehanda's screams signals rescue. The light of the prison guard allows them to see that a small portion of the ceiling of the next compartment was falling asunder and they use this a route of escape):

> Then, without warning, at that instant the floor shook with the roar of a lion. The three looked at each other in the darkness. Without a word each knew the lion - the Mhondoro - Nehanda heard their plea for escape and was signaling them to go ahead. All was well. The spirits of the land had heard them at this direst moment. (Samupindi 1992, p.29-30)

With Zindoga, Hwata and Gutsa having been withdrawn from the trial after their escape, Mbuya Nehanda faces trial alone in the penultimate chapter. She denies the murder of Kanyaira to the end stating she does not know who murdered him and that she merely "gave orders for my people to defend themselves against selfish invasion by the foreigner." (Samupindi 1992, p.33) When pressed further, she answers the prosecution by asserting the right for her people to kill in self-defense: "Killing! - in self-defense" and saying emphatically, "How else does one defend himself against one who seeks his life and land?" (Samupindi 1992, p.33)

In the end Mbuya Nehanda is found guilty and has to be physically subdued as she screams her warnings as the warrant for her execution is produced. The final chapter dramatises the final day of her life.

With the exception of one chapter in the book, *Death Throes*, is told in a rather journalistic, social-realist style. The effect is that Samupindi renders a narrative that is less historical fiction and more social history which corresponds to his stated objective in the first line of his foreword: "It has been done. I have tried to recreate a little mountain in the historical landscape of our nation." (Samupindi 1992, p.5) Accordingly, Samupindi writes that he had to keep reminding himself "that this writing is not an historical text, but a literary creature." (Samupindi 1992, p.5).

The desire to create a literary work is often times overrun by Samupindi's fidelity to "truth" that is "totally objective presentation unsoiled by "me"" (Samupindi 1992, p.5) which is what leads his overreliance on court and other historical records in order to narrate his version of events. He is given to rather poetic language and metaphors, the beauty of which can sometimes be compromised by his use of highly formalistic language such as that used in these phrases: "The weight of the epoch harnessed the shoulders of her thoughts for the first time." (Samupindi 1992, p.22) and "She shuddered in premonitory rigor mortis." (Samupindi 1992, p.42) His anxieties for "truth" seem to manifest in the uneasy, if not unnecessary, interjections which manifest in this example after the fact of her death is established in the final chapter:

> She was now strained like a bow-string.
> The estate of thought dwindled and perished. Futility was the urgent destination.
> The rope took it's place, and it gasped, patiently waiting for its score.
> A gong sounded.
> Time held its breath.
> The trap-door disappeared from under her feet.
> The process was swift and accurate. Death….Justice was done and the Queen of England's thirst for blood was propitiated.
> Time sighed in release.
> Question: Do all men kill the things they do not like?

Answer: Hates any man the thing he would not kill? (Samupindi 1992, p.42)

Samupindi does incorporate what is often problematically termed "magical realism" in the third chapter. This particular brief use of "magic realism" involves the invocation of the mhondoro after Mbuya Nehanda calls out for Chaminuka and the other spirits of the land. At the height of her despair, it seems her calls are heard:

> Then all of sudden the continuity of the rainfall was shuttered by the roar of a lion. The ground shook and trembled under their feet and the night rattled. It was as if the lion was just outside the prison gates! (Samupindi 1992, p.24)

This is repeated later in the later when the Mhondoro goes on to free the three accused men:

> Then, without warning, at that instant the floor shook with the roar of a lion. The three looked at each other in the darkness. Without a word each knew the lion - the Mhondoro - Nehanda heard their plea for escape and was signaling them to go ahead. All was well. The spirits of the land had heard them at this direst moment.(Samupindi 1992, p.29-30)

Ultimately, by limiting the narrative scope of the novella to improvisations and speculations that can be made based on "ascertainable fact", which comprise mostly of records from court documents and other evidence available in the National Archives, and largely maintaining a rather formalistic, realist style, Samupindi demonstrates his desire, if not anxiety, to narrate the story within the limits of "the Frozen Image".

3.2.3 Narrative Engagement with the "Frozen Image"

The Challenge to Settler Colonial History

In a clear challenge to colonial history, Samupindi appeals to historical records as a means to give credibility to his nationalist retelling. The back cover of *Death Throes* (see Appendix 3) states that "Although the work has been written as fiction, the author developed his material from ascertainable fact. The raw materials from which the story is hewn are, firstly, the original court record in the trial judge's own hand, which is with the National Archives. Secondly, there is also a mine of scripts on oral history, also with the Archives, which covers this period in question." Samupindi does not attempt an epistemological challenge to colonial history, as is the case with Vera's account (see later discussion on Vera's engagement with the "Frozen Image"), but rather a contestation of history on the epistemological terms set up by Western historical models. He predominantly bases his account on empirical evidence provided in archival and historical records kept by colonial authorities at the time. In other words, he stages his rebuttal to colonial history, a challenge to their interpretation of the historical record, without much of an interrogation of the Western paradigm of history-making.

This is for example seen in the way in which Samupindi's narrative puts much emphasis on dates, ensuring that events happened as they were recorded in colonial records, as for example, in the beginning of the second chapter:

> On September 1897 Chief Makoni captured, summarily tried and executed.
> October 1897 Kaguvi surrendered.
> Wednesday, 18th December, she, herself, arrested.(Samupindi 1993, p.22)

Each chapter and most significant events are marked by a meticulous reference to dates, as for example, chapter three, the date of the commencement of the high court trial starts "It was the second day of March, 1898." (Samupindi 1992, p.31). Similarly, Samupindi makes much use lengthy quotations of court records: "…that Nehanda, a Mashona woman residing at Chitawa's kraal in the Mazoe District, in Salisbury" (Samupindi 1993, p.31) and reproduces at length the Warrant of Execution (Samupindi 1993, p.38).

Samupindi continues to "fight" his anti-colonial battle by appearing to challenge colonial logic by highlighting the racist colonialism encountered during the period. Magistrate Bayley, for example, is quoted at length questioning the humanity of the Africans as he reflects on an argument that in the House of Lords in England as to whether the Africans be accorded human status or "placed on the same level as chimpanzees and monkeys whose only value was to grace the museums along Downing Street?" This was cause for concern as the "House was convinced that there were no inhabitants in these lands and that the gibbering things Rhodes had encountered during his journeys were apes." (Samupindi 1992, p.13) Further, Bayley describes Nehanda as "the barbaric, false, self-acclaimed Shona goddess who instigated these primitive apes to resist subjugation by the Settlers and hence, civilization. It was this horrible-looking witch that had been responsible for the murder of his friend." (Samupindi 1992, p.13)

As a corrective, Samupindi stages his rebuttal to this settler colonial account of Mbuya Nehanda through Pig M'saruro's interior monologue wherein he declares the "insanity" of the trial given that he, like the Shona other people, had never "doubted Nehanda's powers and wisdom, the great *svikiro* of the *Mhondoro* (Lion) spirit of rainmaking" because "[a]mongst the Shona, her name was song and her word law" (Samupindi 1992, p.14-15). He thus goes on to explain her powers:

> "Nehanda had to be and was consulted on important national issues. She was highly respected for her ability to sift issues, and her deep sense of circumspection and understanding of human perception as well as a formidable foresight. Hence her eminent powers of prophecy and divination. When the birth of a great Shona soldier, Mapondera, seemed to be fraught with complications she was consulted." (Samupindi 1992, p.15)

Samupindi showcases the anti-colonial argument for violence, through his speculative account of Mbuya Nehanda's interaction with Bayley (speculative on account of the fact that historical records show that she was uncooperative and refused to speak throughout the trial):

"Did the defense of your people involve murder?"
"Killing! - in self-defence. How else does one defend himself against one who seeks his life and land?"
"Killing of Pollard?"
"Killing of the enemy, the blood-thirsty usurper."
"And Pollward was an enemy, a usurper, in your eyes?"
"In my eyes the enemy is the usurper."
"And Pollard was one of them? A Native Commissioner is your enemy, not so?"
"A 'Native Cimmisioner'[sic] is a 'Native Commissioner'."(Samupindi 1992, p.33)

Such an interaction implies comparisons to other famous trials of anti-colonial figures such as that of Jomo Kenyatta's 1953 trial and Nelson Mandela's 1962-1964 Rivonia trial which focused on the legitimacy of the use of violence by the colonized in resisting colonial-apartheid oppression (Coundouriotis 2014). So impressed is the magistrate with the eloquence of Mbuya Nehanda's final monologue of retribution that he exclaims that she uses "words with panache, woman" (Samupindi 1992, p.37):

> I told my people to stand their ground against these foreigners who were snatching away their land, cattle and their heritage - plundering and routing in the process. They have decimated us they did the Ndebele. Now the land is the playground for vultures. Bones and decaying carrion are verdure in the valleys. But I warn you! I warn you oppressor that these bones will one day rise and wage a thunderous war to reclaim their heritage. I warn you…I warn you…I warn you. (Samupindi 1992, p.37

Interestingly, the extent of the limitation of Samupindi's challenge to the settler colonial account is illustrated in the conclusion of the book in chapter four wherein book ends with this official proclamation of her death:

OBITUARY
27th April 1898

> "I certify that I have examined the body of Nehanda, upon whom sentence of death has been executed, and that life is extinct."
>
> Signed: District Surgeon for Salisbury.
>
> The Surgeon was wrong. So very wrong!(Samupindi 1992, p.42)

It is ironic that Samupindi gives the final word on Mbuya Nehanda's life to the colonial authorities. The final sentence declaring that the surgeon "was wrong" fails to undercut the power of the colonial pronouncement. We are already assured of Mbuya Nehanda's defeat. We are already assured of the defeat of her people. There is no narration of the spirit that would have risen again. The entire ordeal of her execution is largely material account. When it is mentioned, her spirit has departed before the trap door opens: "The estate of thought dwindled and perished. Futility was the urgent destination." (Samupindi 1992, p.42) Immediately prior to the execution, there is not much time dedicated to her spiritual subjectivity that could have overcome the physical subjugation. Although she screamed and bit and roughly towards the end, already, we have been told:

> "This was the day it had all come to an end. The world her bones were a microcosm of was dying and the one that should follow it was clearly powerless to be born!" (Samupindi 1992, p.41)

That she is powerless and already knew of her imminent defeat is repeated many times, "her sixth sense advised her that the was the day…Her mission in this world was about to be brought to an abrupt an end. She was not bothered too much, immediately. Only that the full-stop had to come with so much drama." (Samupindi 1992, p.40) It would seem that Samupindi ultimately defers to and privileges the colonial account of Mbuya Nehanda's death, and by implication, spiritual defeat, despite his portends to the "wrongness".

The Reinforcement of Nationalist History

Hove (2011, p.42) describes Samupindi's *Death Throes* as remaining "centrally positioned in the incantatory songs whose main objective is the mythologisation of a contestatory black nationalism". Early into the narrative, Samupindi's Mbuya Nehanda states that "[t]hese bones will rise up one day and fight" (Samupindi 1992, p.11) echoing the famous last words used in nationalist rhetoric that "my bones will rise". In this vein, central to Charles Samupindi's 1992 novella *Death Throes* is his description of Mbuya Nehanda as "a country" (Samupindi 1992, p.5):

> Her hands were manacled at her deflated tiny tummy by heavy cinch and iron chains. Her legs were too little sticks with slight knots in the knee area. Knots of perseverance? They were leg-ironed. And all those chains for so withered a body! It was an affront to logic.
> She was the nation. A people (Samupindi 1992, p.5)

As Mbuya Nehanda, depicted as the embodiment of the nation of Zimbabwe, whispers that the "The war is lost…But the spirit lives on!", Samupindi emphasizes the fact after the nationalists' securing of Zimbabwe's independence, "[three quarters of a century later, this testimony was to vindicate itself. It was the paradox. A century. A millennium - and vindication, always. What a waste of effort and time!/ This was *the* nation." (Samupindi 1992, p.11)

Samupindi's narration of Mbuya Nehanda's trial which emphasizes the hanging and the torture the loss of land, "They no longer have human dignity/ The possess nothing" (Samupindi 1992, p.11) serves the function of defining the moral terms of the struggle against the invading settler colonialists. Samupindi's rendition of the trial proceedings is speculative, as the only records pertain to preliminary hearings, where the evidence shows that Mbuya Nehanda was uncooperative and refused to talk (Ranger 1967; Beach 1998; Charumbira 2008). Nonetheless, Mbuya Nehanda's imagined monologues have the revolutionary spirit defiance that have been projected onto her by the nationalists. To this extent, Samupindi's narrative can be seen

as consistent with nationalist historiography, providing an account of The Trial of Mbuya Nehanda, the events leading up to the trial, the trial and their executions.

Samupindi does however diverge from nationalist accounts such as Stanlake Samkange's (1978) novel *Year of the Uprising*, where prominence is given to Sekuru Kaguvi, his leadership of the rebellion, his capture, conversion to Christianity and death, while in contrast, nothing is said of the capture and resistance to conversion of Mbuya Nehanda, or of the spectacle of her execution, aside from the mention of the fact that both their bodies were buried in a secret place. (Muchemwa, 2005) As Mkwesha (2016, p.24) argues, the likes of Samkange were likely influenced by historical accounts such as that of nationalist historian Lawrence Vambe's *An Ill Fated People* (1972) and Terence Ranger's *Revolt in Southern Rhodesia 1896–97* (1967), which privilege male figures like Sekuru Kaguvi and Chaminuka the prophet as the ones who shaped the nature and course of the First Chimurenga.

Samupindi challenges the nationalist account through a privileging of Mbuya Nehanda such that there is an effective masculinisation of Mbuya Nehanda who is uncooperative and rebellious, refusing Christianity to the end. Conversely, this is accompanied by the feminization of Sekuru Kaguvi who is co-operative and converts to Christianity in the end. However, even as she is given this prominence, Mbuya Nehanda is reduced to an ideological instrument used to fight External enemies who have come to disturb the sovereignty of the nation.

However, to the extent that Samupindi merely narrates the trial, execution and the political events that lead up to them, his narrative is consistent with Vambe and Ranger's accounts that frame Mbuya Nehanda as existing "only within the time frame of political and social history of resistance whose outcome remains within the linear story of revolt and defeat. Speculation, if its exists (as it does in Vambe's texts), is equally confined to the terms defined by a political perspective." (Wilson-Tagoe 20 2002, p.161).

The Reinforcement of Patriotic History

At the danger of making ad-hominem arguments, it is material to note that Samupindi was a guerrilla fighter in the Second Chimurenga who was ideologically aligned to ZANU PF. Samupindi (1992) in fact declares that "the hand of ZANU shall rule". (Marima, 2011, p.165)

First and foremost, Samupindi reinforces the notion of Mbuya Nehanda as the embodiment of the spirit of the nation, stating early on that "[t]he very fact alone that she had been captured portended gloom and the disintegration of the Shona people. God!" (Samupindi 1992, p.15) In this inscription of her symbolic importance, Samupindi follows in the patriotic tradition of elevating Nehanda as an exceptional "Mother-

Africa" figure who operates at a distance from ordinary African women. The "Mother- Africa"/ "Mother of the Nation" trope is evident as he describes Mbuya Nehanda loving her people "as a mother does the child she cradles in her arms." (Samupindi 1992, p.23) Mbuya Nehanda's distance from ordinary women and the singularity of her role is emphasized through Hwata's account of the conflict between the Shona and the colonists, through which Samupindi privileges the narratives of male Chiefs, counsellors and the generals. This is a tale of the acts and alliances between prominent male figures such as Hwata's father-in-law Chivero, Chinengundu, Chiweshe, Gwanzura, Chirisei, Chinamatira, Mashamba and Dzumbunu. (Samupindi 1992, p.26-29) Aside from Mbuya Nehanda there is not a single mention of any woman, even in passing, in the entire narration of the Chimurenga and the trial.

In terms of Sekuru Kaguvi's presence, Samupindi acknowledges that "[t]he uprising had been orchestrated by Nehanda and Kaguvi….Kaguvi, in the South-West, relayed the declarator's message to Nehanda. Every white man was to be killed, and they were to be on the offensive. Nehanda consequently sparked the people into action and the explosion rocked the whole of Mashonaland and Manicaland." (Samupindi 1992, p.25) In this sense, Samupindi recognizes that they played complementary roles. However, mention of Sekuru Kaguvi in Samupindi's narration of the Chimurenga is limited to this instance and in moments where Samupindi notes his date of capture and the narration of his interception prior to Mbuya Nehanda's. There is no time dedicated to his trial and execution.

Following the Shona nationalism of the ruling party, Samupindi renders the narrative such that Shona people are the key protoganists of indigenous resistance, to the exclusion of other ethnic groups who also fought against settler colonial occupation. Whilst Mbuya Nehanda, for example, acknowledges the Ndebele during her final impassioned speech as she states, "They have decimated us they did the Ndebele" (Samupindi 1992, p.37), it is not a mention that can be read positively, but rather read as condescending comparison. Similarly, it is stated through Hwata's recollection of the uprisings that "the Ndebele had been defeated the previous year, and the Settlers had not considered the normally peaceful Shona a serious threat. Their fear had been the warlike and cantankerous Ndebele. The Shona were too involved in agriculture to have been a bother." (Samupindi 1992, p.25) Ironically, the insertion of this statement reinforces both the colonial logic of problematic, essentialist "tribal identities" and the patriotic nationalist's subsequent appropriation of this tribalist discourse.

The Third Chimurenga discourse of land is reinforced throughout the narrative and perhaps most persuasively and entertainingly in this dialogue between the District Commissioner and the captured men,

wherein Samupindi tackles both the immediate and subsequent effects of dispossession on the now landless Shona people.:

> "Remove all your belongings and leave. We do not want you here any longer!"
> One of the obstinate Chiefs stood up. "But we can't take our land with us."
> "Precisely so. Just leave with whatever you can. Tomorrow all the huts and all that remains will be burned down!"
> "But we had already tilled and sown the fields!"
> "Just leave`! Go to the Mountains and you can do whatever you want there. But don't forget the taxes. We will come and collect the taxes. If any member of the family fails to render his tax, we will arrest all the women of that family and detain them until the tax is paid." (Samupindi 1992, p. 28)

Samupindi's thus account follows in the tradition of masculinist, heroic narratives such as Mutswairo's *Mupondera: Soldier of Zimbabwe*, such that in his version Mbuya Nehanda becomes the narrative model for the "soldier of Zimbabwe". Within this mode, Mbuya Nehanda is immortalised, refusing to convert to Christianity, whilst Sekuru Kaguvi dies having converted to Christianity, a sign of his capitulation. (Coundouriotis 2014)

Beyond her trial, Samupindi does not narrate further biographic details about his protagonist, thus leaving the impression that the author's interest is in Mbuya Nehanda in so far as she is quite literally a medium through which to tell the story of the birthing of the nation of Zimbabwe nearly a century later. His narration of her life events and her interiority are told only in as far as they relate to the Second Chimurenga, as well as his narration of her subjectivity only in as far as it relates to the anti-colonial resistance, is very much in line with the patriotic historical tendency to objectify and abstract Mbuya Nehanda into a national symbolic figure.

Mbuya Nehanda is reduced to an ideological instrument used to fight External enemies who have come to disrupt the unity and sovereignty of the indigenous nation. (Mkwesha 2016, p.24) Perhaps the most telling sentence in this book is this one: "The resource she had been to her people was one that is not simply used, but expended in its usage." (Samupindi 1992, p.42) By maintaining Mbuya Nehanda as an object of a past, revolutionary history, Samupindi thus maintains the gendered temporality that reproduces Zimbabwe's masculine patriotic discourse. In order to do this, Samupindi must therefore ensure that his narrative account is written within the confines of the "Frozen Image". Stated differently, Samupindi demonstrates that when the masculinist patriotic challenge to settler-colonial projections of an African past is unaccompanied by an interrogation of historical gender relations and a broader challenge Western modernities, it is necessary to remain faithful to and narrate "the Frozen Image" in order to keep this period of resistance locked in and uninterrogated in a particular moment in time. The result of Samupindi's "writing within the Frozen Image" is a self-conscious, realist, at time imaginatively constrained narrative project.

3.3 Vera - Narrating Mbuya Nehanda "Beyond" the "Frozen Image"

3.3.1 Vera's Verbal Engagement with the "Frozen Image"

Whilst the cover of *Nehanda* (see Appendix 3) does not directly engage the "Frozen Image", Yvonne Vera's utterances in interviews about visual imagery and the "Frozen Image" have provided much insight. In terms of the relationship to visual imagery and writing, Vera spoke about her writing process saying this in a 2002 interview with Jane Bryce in Bulawayo:

> I've always been visually oriented, and before I worked at the National Gallery, perhaps my larger influence was film, and how images are prepared, constructed and made to move. I also have a strong leaning towards photography. When I'm writing, I start with a moment - visual, mental - that I can see, and I place it on my table, as though it were a photograph. This moment, is so powerful that I can't lose sight of it, visually or emotionally. From it I develop the whole story, the whole novel. Everything ripples around that, the story grows out of the image. For me, an entire history is contained in such a moment. (Bryce 2002 b, p.40)

Vera she went on to describe the original visual moment that contained "an entire history":

> "We had a school textbook which had a photograph of Nehanda and Kaguvi standing against the wall…we were taught that they were rebels who deserved to be hanged…But the image from that photograph stayed with me: without quite knowing whether this was the version of things that one should know." (Bryce 2002 b, p.40)

As has been alluded to in the discussion of Berger's *Ways of Seeing,* photography is implicated in the ways in which we see ourselves, as simultaneously observers and objects of the gaze. Where we position ourselves in relation to the object is a function of where we situate ourselves politically. For writers such as Vera, Bryce (2002) argues, "the task is one of dissolving the boundary between subject and object, spectator and screen, inner and outer, so as to expose and bring to life what has hitherto been hidden and unconsidered, either invisible or totally objection."

We can thus locate Vera's stated motivation for writing *Nehanda* within this understanding. In a 1998 interview with Eva Hunter, titled "Shaping the Truth of the Struggle" she explained her relationship to the "Frozen Image" thus: "I wanted to write beyond the photograph, you know, that Frozen Image, beyond the date, beyond the fact of her dying. If anything in my book she doesn't die, she departs."

Thus, through these verbal statements by Yvonne Vera wherein she repeatedly affirms a desire to expand and interrogate the histories that are contained in the "Frozen Image", it becomes immediately apparent that unlike settler-colonial, nationalist and patriotic discourses, Vera is not invested in the "fixedness" of that moment of resistance, and thus seeks to "write beyond the Frozen Image".

3.3.2 Plot Summary and Style

Yvonne Vera's 1993 novel *Nehanda* adheres to the feminist notion of the "personal as political" as she fictionalizes the life of the titular heroine Mbuya Nehanda in the style of *bildungsroman.*

This non-linear narrative begins with Mbuya Nehanda taking a moment to survey the parched landscape that is filled with turmoil, before her capture and execution by the settlers. In this waiting, we feel the portends of something terrible about to befall her and her people as she states: "Nothing will save her from this final crimson of death; it is too much like her inner self." (Vera 1993, p.2)

Thereafter, the spirit of Mbuya Nehanda is depicted as choosing a group of women to birth her in the realm of dreams. As the women sit in the hut waiting to preside over her birth, one of them, a traveling trader, relays the story of the first sighting of "strangers" to the land near their village. This is among the first sightings of white men, which due to their lack of respect for the ways of the Africans and how they relate to the land, is understood as a sign of death.

Mbuya Nehanda's childhood is relayed, she is a playful and inquisitive child. She is depicted as young woman entering a spiritual and political consciousness as the turmoil of white presence begins to unfold around her, and the village, and it is in this period that she begins to be troubled by illness. Witnessing this, Mother fears for her daughter as she experiences sombre visions that lead her to the conclusion that her daughter, Nehanda, is not "her own". Mother initiates a ritual ceremony to establish which spirit has chosen her daughter as a medium.

The village itself experiences trouble as drought begins to ravage the landscape. Upon seeking the help of their ancestors at their "holy tree of rain", they find that it has been taken over by the settlers who have chosen against the taboo of the villagers and the ancestors, to settle at the top near the hill. The villagers attempt to reason with the settlers, but they are arrogant and pre-occupied with their own plans to "civilise 'the natives'" by converting them to Christianity and introducing "order and justice" to their way of life. It is in this period that we are introduced to colonial administrators, Mr Browning and Mr Smith.

In response to this turmoil, Mbuya Nehanda is possessed by the Mhondoro which leads her to convey the message to the villagers that the ancestors are disgruntled and feel betrayed that they have tolerated the sacrilegious ways of the settlers for so long. The ancestors believe that the time has come for the Africans to rise up and fight against the settlers who threaten their way of life.

This begins the uprising, in which fellow spirit medium Sekuru Kaguvi emerges to lead the people. Mbuya Nehanda retreats to a sacred cave in the hills where the villagers have come to relay the tale of their battles and guidance from Mbuya Nehanda and the ancestors. Initially, the Africans are successful as they take the settlers by surprise. Numbers of settlers are killed, including Mr Smith. Eventually, the Africans be-

gin to lose against the onslaught of the settlers. Returning to the cave to seek guidance from Mbuya Nehanda, they find that she is gone. Seeking to escape the search party after her, Mbuya Nehanda has fled into the woods. The Mhondoro remains with and follows the Africans, but without Mbuya Nehanda there to intercede on their behalf, they are without guidance and lose the battle against the settlers as they kill their people and destroy their village. In this period, Sekuru Kaguvi is captured by the settlers who attempt to convert him into Christianity.

Seeing that her people are being decimated, Mbuya Nehanda allows herself to be captured in order to stop her people's suffering. As they had done with Sekuru Kaguvi, they attempt to convert Mbuya Nehanda. She however refuses this. They inform her that Sekuru Kaguvi has been executed. In the end Mbuya Nehanda escapes the execution in spirit.

In general, "Vera's dense poetic prose, her allusive style, and her ability to handle the most difficult subjects and confronts taboos often evokes strong and diverse responses in the reader" (Muponde and Madodzwa-Taruvinga 2002, p.xi). Despite her writing being described as "spare to the point of minimalism" (Bryce 2002, p.218), Vera's poetic and lyrical style is rich and symbolically charged as is evidenced in this excerpt:

> Here in this desperate valley where the grass was once green I hear the birth of voices. It is hard and convulsive, like other births. The green valley is a place that holds hope and warmth. At the bottom of the hill, and then at the summit of the hill, not only would I see the wonders and trials of a past time, but even I would be transformed. (Vera 1993, p.59)

Vera has also been considered as Zimbabwe's most prolific woman creative writer in English by virtue of her bold use of language, a symbolic style and willingness to use the "surreal" (Primorac, 2004, p. 165; Lunga 2010, p.3). Her use of the "surreal", which may otherwise be read problematically as "magic realism", or more accurately as the "spiritual" is evidenced in this early paragraph in this book which narrates the spiritual temporality that Mbuya Nehanda occupies:

> The women were here to welcome the child. Each of them had already met the child in dreams which they could not recall. By visiting their dreams, the child had picked them out to receive her. (Vera 1993, p.6)

Kizito Muchemwa (2002) argues that Vera's post-modernist technique shares many characteristics with Dambudzo Marechera's writing "in the fracturing of traditional narrative and narrative forms, the disordering and re-ordering of identities, the re-ordering of language to capture new experiences and solipsism of narration" (Muchemwa 2002, p.3). He further argues while Marechera's style follows in acknowledges a tradition which he interrogated, quarried and parodied to yield new meanings, Vera writes a unique style which Muchemwa (2002) describes as an amalgam of a "lyrical method", post-modern narrative techniques,

and reconstructed orature through the foregrounding of language, voice and presence in her fiction. Vera's writing is thus "presented not as a direct deconstruction of phallogocentric discourse but as a recovery of the repressed discourse of women" (Muchemwa 2002, p.3)

While some critics such as John Lunga (2010, p.10) have complained that "the storyline is unclear" and thus has an "apparently confusing narrative technique", this paper concurs with Mukiwa's assertion that Vera's *Nehanda* successfully "employs a narrative that extricates itself from the linear time of patriarchal cause and effect" (Mukiwa 2006, p.38).

Ultimately, by expanding the narrative scope of *Nehanda* to include a reimagination of the personal history of the spirit medium and her society beyond the events of the First Chimurenga and the execution of Sekuru Kaguvi and Mbuya Nehanda, as well as one that is not bound by maintaining a fidelity to the places, names and dates that directly correspond with the written historical record, whilst employing a poetic, sometimes opaque writing style, Vera demonstrates her desire to narrate the story beyond the limits of the "Frozen Image".

3.2.3 Narrative Engagement with the "Frozen Image"

The Challenge to Settler Colonial History

Very early on into Vera's *Nehanda,* we are made aware that the author is mounting a highly ambitious challenge to the central tenets of Western modernity that give rise to Chatterjee's External realm of anti-colonial nationalism. By the end of the second page of her non-linear narrative, Vera has already made this apparent by describing the spirit of Mbuya Nehanda thus:

> Arrogant in its own conception, it challenged the familiar categories of birth and death. It moved at once in opposite directions, with time and against time, collapsing all time within its perturbed interior. (Vera 1993, p.2)

By locating her narrative firmly within the spirituality of Mbuya Nehanda and the Shona people Vera mounts an ambitious challenge that operates on its own terms. At the highest level, Vera interrogates and disrupts the Hegelian notion of African ahistoricity; a Western epistemology reliant on scientific rationalism, Cartesian and Kantian principles that create mind-body, spiritual-material, feeling-thought dichotomies amongst many others; Western ontology of time, teleological "progress" and so-called "academic history". (The latter of which will be further explored as Vera's engagement with nationalist history is analyzed.)

To begin with, if Hegel's African historicity would posit that Africans only become subjects of history through the colonial encounter, then by locating the narrative within the her story of Mbuya Nehanda's birth and the period initially preceding it, rather than focusing on the colonial encounter and resultant

Chimurenga, Vera asserts that Africans have indeed been subjects of history long before the arrival of the "strangers".Together with the non-linear and "circular" narrative strategy, Vera's centering of a spiritual consciousness gestures towards an escape and disruption of Western, colonial or "official" time and in this way, challenges the Western teleology of progress. Homi Bhabha argues that the ritual myth of spirit possession is "curiously mixed and split, polymorphous and …[articulates]…multiple beliefs" (Bhabha, 1994, p.50), such that spirit possession's cyclical return to the past and back to the present is in opposition to official time which presents a linear and hierarchical teleology of events, thus suggesting that "spiritual" time is aware of [its] 'timeliness' and crisis in the version of history which it represents. (Wilson-Tagoe 1999 cited in Bull-Christiansen 2004) Similarly, Jesus Martin-Barbero (1993) suggests that spirit possession represents "a world decentralized, horizontal and ambivalent which enters into radical conflict with the new image of the world designed by "'reason': vertical, uniform and centralized" (1993, p.91 cited in Vambe 2002). Accordingly, in the Shona life philosophy, the Africans inhabit the land in the present but, it is only an interlude in the spatio-temporal relationship in the spiritual realm between the ancestors and the Africans. As a spirit-medium, Mbuya Nehanda establishes the link between departed ancestors and their living descendants and thus is a liminal figure interceding between all the realms of the present, past and future as is embodied in this statement: "The dead are not gone. The dead are among us, guiding us to clearings in the future where we shall all triumph." (Vera 1993, p.63).

If, as Vambe argues "spirit possession is a time lived not only for the collectivity and its recurrent communal memory but also for the [possessed] individuals in so far as it is a time of personal growth." (Vambe 2002, p.127), then it becomes apparent how by anchoring the lives of Mbuya Nehanda and the Shona people in their spirituality, it is possible that "the world-view of the Africans does not break down, as it for example does in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1959)" (Bull-Christiansen 2004, p.42). Unlike the collapse experience of Okwonkwo and his village of Umofia's as a result of the clash between African spirituality and Christianity, Vera's characters do not succumb to or break down as a result of this colonial encounter.

Through the narrativizing of the attempts by the colonial administrators to convert Sekuru Kaguvi and Mbuya Nehanda, Vera mounts a challenge to the "inherent" superiority of Christianity and its role in the colonial civilizing mission. Unlike Mbuya Nehanda's outright resistance to hearing of the Christian "gospel", Sekuru Kaguvi is willing to make an attempt to understand the priest's religion. While Sekuru Kaguvi is historically recorded as having been persuaded by his convert daughter Dziripi to convert to Christianity after initial resistance (Charumbira 2008), Vera does not make this explicit, but instead shows his spiritual separa-

tion from his ancestors within his dreams after the interaction with the priest. Avoiding the reductive image of Sekuru Kaguvi as the "sellout" to Christianity, Vera uses the interaction between the priest and Sekuru Kaguvi after his capture to show how the latter actively engages and interrogates Christianity's philosophy of resurrection and eternal happiness in the afterlife in a manner that is revealing of a rich and complex life philosophy embodied in Shona religious cultural beliefs. As the priest tries to convince Sekuru Kaguvi that his "God is the true God. He is the way to eternal happiness" (Vera 1993, p.105), Sekuru Kaguvi mounts a philosophical challenge to the Christian understanding of happiness as separate from present life and work:

> If a man harvests his crops, that is happiness. If a man marries and has children, that is happiness. If a man talks to his neighbours and they respect him, that too is happiness…It is not punishment for a man to do all he can for a good harvest. For a man not to labour is laziness. (Vera 1993, p.105).

Vera thus poses a critique of the religious intolerance and eurocentricity of the Christian missionaries. (Bull-Christiansen 2004, p.42) Where Sekuru Kaguvi makes an attempt to understand the priest's position, despite his disbelief, the priest is not able to tolerate difference and so can only conclude that the African "god is an evil god," the priest appeals to him. "I am here to save you from the eternal flames." The arrogance of the priest was shocking." (Vera 1993, p.106) As Lene Bull-Christiansen (2004) argues, in this scene Vera dismantles "the discrepancies of the settler discourses by turning the signs of inferiority around. Vera points out that laziness, which for the settlers was the mark *par excellence* of the primitive nature of the African, can ironically also be described as the spiritual longing of the Europeans." (Bull-Christiansen 2004, p.42) In the case of Mbuya Nehanda, she resists conversion to the end. When Mr Browning takes Mbuya Nehanda to task for this, she refuses to communicate verbally and instead she:

> "began to dance, to laugh and talk so that the ward- ers were obliged to tie her hands and watch her continually, as she threatened to kill herself…She dances against Mr Browning and his God, she dances the faces of her people, the betrayal of time, the growth of wisdom, the glory of their survival ...She dances in harmony with the departed who protect the soil from the feet of strangers...Then she lets out a scream that sends Mr Browning across the other side of the room." (Vera 1993, p.116)

The attempt to conversion is thus seen as not only attack on her and her personal beliefs, but on her people and her way of life. Thus by extensively narrating and depicting what may be seen as a spiritual history and temporality throughout *Nehanda,* it becomes possible for the world view of the Africans to endure the colonial encounter through the force of Mbuya Nehanda's spirit. Mbuya Nehanda's bones will be the driving force behind the greater battle of the Second Chimurenga which she, in her spiritual capacity, "sees the future clearly and distinctly, and is fulfilled. But for now, her people will continue to be killed until evidence of her death has been found." (Vera 1993, p. 94) In order to achieve this, Vera flouts the settler-colonial introduction of Western scientific rationalism as binaries between life and death; spiritual and material are col-

lapsed, such that the Africans are able to sustain themselves against the spiritual and material onslaught of colonial rule, such that they are able to escape the portends of physical death. In line with this framing, Vera does not provide a materialist account of Mbuya Nehanda's execution, as, for example there is no mention of the noose, or even of the executors. Instead we are left to infer her physical death as Vera focuses on narrating Mbuya Nehanda's spiritual consciousness as she separates from her living body to the world of the ancestors. It is narrated in such a way that it is not a defeatist encounter, but rather a triumphant one in which Mbuya Nehanda surpasses the moment of her own death by virtue of the circularity of African life and death:

> My people will not rest in bondage. The day has ceased too quickly." Her telling awakens the dead part of the living, who are also divine because they are descendant from the departed dead…. She welcomes her departed, and the world of her ancestors. The whiteness around her eyes has turned to a redness that is also death. The chasm between the living and the dead is broken. A wave of nausea moves in circles within her, searching.
> The wind covers the earth with joyful celebration [sic] (Vera 1993, p.97)

Tellingly, the final sentence does not end with a full stop. While it may be well a typing error, it is also reasonable to interpret this as symbolic of circularity of the narrative, such that Vera deliberately left the story of Mbuya Nehanda open-ended as her bones would in future "rise again".

Maurice Vambe (2002) is however critical of Vera's appeal to African spirituality, for a number of reasons. (One of the reasons of which, will be discussed here, and the rest will be discussed in more detail as we look into Vera's engagement with nationalist and patriarchal historiographies.) Vambe is critical of Vera's use of spirit possession, arguing that it is "contradictory" in so far as spirit possession "can be used to maintain the status quo and in other contexts the same spirit possession refuses the myth of diachronic historical time and the possession celebrates the myth of eternal return and regeneration." (Vambe 2002, p.127) Further, Vambe (2002) critiques Vera for her "uncritical use" of spirit possession as a mode of resistance and argues that it inevitably "reflects the writer's conscious or unconscious wish to retain African values which are defines as unchanging" (Vambe 2002, p.127).

In terms of Vera's engagement with colonial gender constructions, we can begin by locating our analysis within Oyèrónkẹ́ Oyěwùmí's (1997) argument, made in *The Invention of Women: Making an African sense of Western gender discourse*, that gender is not only socially constructed but is also historical. It is an assertion that destabilises our reliance on what many have seen as the "inherent" patriarchal nature of "traditional" African culture by clearly charting how much of the gender relations we know today have come into being as a result of Western, and in particular, Victorian colonial ideas of gender and sexuality.

In Vera's *Nehanda,* it becomes apparent that Zimbabwe had its own gender ideology prior to the colonial incursion that was disrupted by Victorian gender constructions. Whilst pre– colonial Zimbabwean

society was patriarchal, the narrative shows that there was an allowance for fluidity and flexibility in gender roles and relations (Mkwesha 2016, p.25). As Ifi Amadiume (1987) argues in *Male Daughters, Female Husbands,* societal roles and positions have not necessarily been rigidly masculinized nor feminized in African societies. Whilst communicating the arrogance and lack of knowledge of the colonial administrator Mr Browning, Vera satirizes his misreading of the Shona culture by depicting Browning's dismissal of Mbuya Nehanda as he "doubt[s] the natives can listen to an old woman like her. This society has no respect for women, whom they treat like children. A woman has nothing to say in the life of the natives. Nothing at all" (Vera 1993, p.75). Contrary to their belief, spirit possession by the Mhondoro offered Mbuya Nehanda power in her community. Vera explains that in Mbuya Nehanda's time anyone chosen by the ancestors could emerge as a leader (Hunter 1998; 79). Browning and the other Victorian patriarchal colonialists are unable to believe that Mbuya Nehanda has the authority to lead and co-ordinate the uprising and thus dismiss her as a "wizard" (Vera 1993, p.77). When they are forced to recognize her power, they see her as an exceptional woman, quite apart from the ordinary women in her society.

Importantly, Vera counteracts the exceptionalism of Mbuya Nehanda by depicting the women as active participants in Shona culture. In the birth scene, Vera depicts the women as traders, travelers and disseminators of knowledge. Women such as Vatete are also invited to participate in judicial decision-making at the dare. Likewise, during the Chimurenga the women are depicted as being equal and active participants in the defense of their society. Colonization disrupted pre-colonial Shona culture that allowed for a degree of fluidity in gender roles by introducing "order, [and] culture" (Vera 1993, p.55) that included a gendered binary of public versus private and constructed roles for women and men that saw women lose the spaces of power previously available to them. Subsequently the nationalist liberation movement adopted this model during the liberation struggle, thus disempowering both women generally and the Mbuya Nehanda who now operated as an "exceptional woman". (Mkwesha 2016, p.25) (See further discussion under "The challenge to patriotic history")

The Challenge to Nationalist History

Vera's *Nehanda* has been praised for its feminist intervention that "gives voice to previously suppressed narratives and brings into focus fissures in the nationalist discourses of power" (Muponde & Taruvinga 2002, pp.xi).

To begin with, the centrality that Vera's novel gives to Mbuya Nehanda and her woman-centred world is an ideological choice provides a direct challenge to the privileging of Sekuru Kaguvi over Mbuya

Nehanda in nationalist historiographies such as the accounts in Laurence Vambe's (1972) *An Ill-fated People* (1972) and Terence Ranger's *Revolt in Southern Rhodesia* (1967). In Vambe's history, Sekuru Kaguvi's role as the "cosmopolitan" go-between the Shona and Ndebele, his royal conservative base and his ability to straddle ethnic and class divisions made him "the most obvious choice when the men who shaped Shona national policy in these momentous times looked around for the man best suited to meet the challenges of the coming war." (Vambe 1972, p.118) Similarly, for Ranger, Sekuru Kaguvi was "more than a spirit medium" and it was his visionary leadership style that was instrumental in harnessing "the appeal of the religious systems into something more radical and revolutionary;…a prophetic leadership operating over and above the restrictions implied by the hierarchal order and links with the past." (Ranger 1967, p.214).

Vera counters this by clearly centralizing Mbuya Nehanda's role. Mbuya Nehanda has direct contact with ancestors who communicate with her "through dreams and consciousness" whereas Sekuru Kaguvi interprets Mbuya Nehanda's messages from her Mhondoro. It becomes apparent that Mbuya Nehanda derives her power from the ancestors whereas; Sekuru Kaguvi derives his power from the people (Mukiwa 2006). Whilst the roles of the two mediums are complimentary, Sekuru Kaguvi only takes charge once Nehanda has left: "when she has left, the horn blower emerges out of character. His name is Kaguvi" (Vera 1993, p.67)

When the Shona religious philosophy is challenged by the priest, Sekuru Kaguvi is portrayed as life–loving and to that extent he is willing to engage with Christianity, whereas Mbuya Nehanda is steadfast and resolute about its threat to the Shona way of life. Through the exchange between Mr Browning and Kaguvi, Vera illustrates the incompatibility of traditional religion and Christianity, and in this way appears to demonstrate that Sekuru Kaguvi is not a true Mhondoro as he finds himself losing his spiritual consciousness after his interaction with the priest. (Mkwesha 2016)

This begins the uprising, in which fellow spirit medium Sekuru Kaguvi emerges to lead the people. Mbuya Nehanda retreats to a sacred cave in the hills where the villagers are come to relay the tale of their battles and guidance from Mbuya Nehanda and the ancestors. Initially, the Africans are successful as they take the settlers by surprise. Numbers of settlers are killed, including Mr Smith. Eventually, the Africans begin to lose against the onslaught of the settlers. Returning to the cave to seek guidance from Mbuya Nehanda, they find that she is gone. Seeking to escape the search party after her, Mbuya Nehanda has fled into the woods. The Mhondoro remains with and follows the Africans, but without Mbuya Nehanda there to intercede on their behalf, they are without guidance and lose the battle against the settlers as they kill their people and destroy their village. In this period, Sekuru Kaguvi is captured by the settlers who attempt to convert him into Christianity.

Vera, however, does emphasizes their roles as loving and complementary. For example, when Mbuya Nehanda is informed by Mr Browning that Kaguvi has been hanged, she is crestfallen as her “face [is] cracked, like mud on a riverbed” (Vera 1992, p.117)

Nana Wilson-Tagoe (2002) highlights the fact that in Vambe and Ranger’s accounts Mbuya Nehanda “exists only within the time frame of political and social history of resistance whose outcome remains within the linear story of revolt and defeat. Speculation, if it exists (as it does in Vambe’s texts), is equally confined to the terms defined by a political perspective.” (Wilson-Tagoe 2002, p.161). Countering this, Wilson-Tagoe continues that Vera crafts a narrative

> that extricates itself from the linear time of political cause and effect. Conceiving of the political in wider ways, it enlarges a contrasting potrait of Nehanda in which royal birth, secular authority and charisma are marginal to a visionary consciousness that explores possibilities for new voices and selves. Nehanda’s centrality and function within the disarray and confusion of colonial occupation have significant implications for the collective consensus and the values it enshrines. (Wilson-Tagoe 2002, p.162)

Through her text, “Nehanda and Gender Victimhood in the Central Mashonaland 1896-97 Rebellions: Revisiting the Evidence”, Ruramisai Charumbira (2008) queries historical facts, demonstrating that the narrativizing of official historical facts is often gendered. This is challenge mounted in response to David Beach’s (1998) text "An Innocent Woman Unjustly Accused? Charwe, Medium of the Nehanda Mhondoro Spirit, and the 1896-97 Central Shona Rising in Zimbabwe” which posits that contrary to conventional wisdom that placed Mbuya Nehanda at the center of the uprising, she may have simply been "an innocent woman unjustly accused.” Instead, he argues, it was Sekuru Kaguvi might have been “the real hero”.

Charumbira (2008) firstly analyzes how evidence was collected and handled when given by men and by women, highlighting the case in which a "Zambezi" woman’s report was deemed unreliable at face value, in stark contrast to similar reports given by men and women who were seen as "friendlies" by the colonial officials. Secondly, she examines the arrest and trial of Mbuya Nehanda and Sekuru Kaguvi wherein all the witnesses and the accused were men. Most importantly, in assessing the evidence, Charumbira finds that Beach's portrayal of Mbuya Nehanda can be attributed to his failure to situate his work within an analysis of the power dynamics between the colonizers, colonized, colonized women and colonized men. Charumbira (2008) thus recovers Mbuya Nehanda from the status of victim such that she emerges “neither a feminist nor an anticolonial heroine.”

In *Nehanda,* Yvonne Vera shares a similar distrust of so-called “academic history”. It is a distrust that comes from the fact that history is political and so, is gendered, raced and classed. In a 2002 interview with

Joyce Bryce speaks of her misgivings of the official historical record which does not correspond with the oral history, locating it first with the Hegelian notion of African ahistoricity:

> History begins in 1896 when the Europeans came here, and it continues like this: the spirit medium Nehanda did this, in such and such a year, in such and such year she was hanged on 27 April…A*nd I realized, No, no, no! Our oral history does not even accept that she was hanged, even though the photographs are there to show it, because she refused that, she had already departed.* Her refusal and her utterances are what we believe to be history. What was the nature of that departure, and why we believe in it so much as a nation, when the history books say something else, were questions that were very important to me. (Vera cited in Bryce 2002, p.220-221; emphasis mine)

In keeping with this freedom from a "fidelity" to the historical record, Vera's Nehanda a work of "historical fiction" provides no dates and no place names and where, for example, dealing with characters deemed as historically significant colonial figures such as the murdered native commissioner H. Pollard, she is instead creates her the Mr Smith who is eventually murdered and Mr Browning. Vera does not bother with the details of the trial, nor of giving a materialist account of the hanging and instead focuses on what has been termed the "spiritual history" of that encounter.

This approach to history intrigued historian Terence Ranger who appreciated that they were are part of a deliberate narrative strategy to "fight back" male dominated nationalist history "by deploying a matrilineal mode of history-telling." (Ranger 2002, p.205):

> I first met Yvonne Vera because I am a historian. In 1993 I bought and read Nehanda. I was astonished by Vera's obviously deliberate refusal to draw upon works of history or anthropology. It seemed too, that as a young urban woman that she had had no direct experience of the rituals of possession by a senior ancestral spirit. Nehanda was an extraordinary feat of imagination. Vera had set out to imagine from the ground up and from the sky down what it would mean for a girl to make herself open to the ancestors so as to re-establish communication between them and the living. The wonderful details of Nehanda - more powerful and plausibleble than those recorded by anthropologists - sprang entirety from Vera's mind….Vera told a workshop in Oxford in 1997 that she had come to the meeting in some apprehension, fearing that I would berate her for historical inaccuracy. Instead, she remembered, I told her, *"It's all absolutely wrong and I love it,"*. So she said, "he gave me permission to distort and I have gone on distorting. (Ranger 2002, p.203; emphasis mine)

It is curious that Vera would have described her histories as "distortion". In another interview with John Vekris published in 1997, Vera described her relation to the historical record as follows: "I am free from what actually happened and I want to be able to be convincing. So I would say that it is true but it is not verifiable." While Ranger is able to be appreciate her approach, stating that her "refusal to be bound by the "facts"" struck him as "sublime" and that it challenged his own practice, his understanding of her historical project is limited to his fidelity to "verifiable" history, which is underscored by his insistence on this spiritual history as "wrong".

Toni Morrison (2008), commenting on the knowledge systems and spirituality of African-American people in her essay "Rootedness: The Ancestor as Foundation", underscores how this adherence to "verifi-

able" history without the attention to the political economy of knowledge leads to the discrediting of marginalized peoples' histories:

> We also accepted what I suppose could be called superstition and magic, which is *another way of knowing things.* But to blend those two worlds together at the same time was enhancing, not limiting. And some of those things were "discredited knowledge" that Black people had; discredited only because Black people were discredited, therefore what they knew was "discredited". And also because the press toward upward social mobility would mean to get as far away from that kind of knowledge as possible. (Morrison 2008, p.60; emphasis mine)

Accordingly, Vera, by collapsing Western dichotomies that, for example, separate thought from feeling, recovers and centralizes "other ways of knowing things" over the "official historical record":

> By history, I simply I mean a record. I felt I had an Internal, intimate knowledge of our ancestors, and how they impact on our relationship to ourselves, to death, to life, to time, to sky, to rock…I had just become aware that I understood this, but that somehow it wasn't anywhere in a book where I could read it, and I didn't know why, *except maybe the knowledge has become discredited by others ways of seeing…..* I wrote it in a very emotional state of clarity of understanding that there are alternatives to 'history' and that in fact that we had constructed it very differently in our lives, in our discussions, in our beliefs. When we went to fight in the liberation war it was because we believed that this woman was somewhere else, but nobody would openly - in a classroom, for example - acknowledge that. And I thought, I'd better write about it, since that's where I can see a concentration of all our beliefs and what makes up our identity as a people, how we create legends and even how we recreate our history. Because, as Africans, our history is there to serve us, not us to serve it. In Nigeria, they can create new gods, isn't it? That's how we were as well. *The legend, the history, is created in the mouth, and therefore survival is in the mouth.* That's what I wanted to capture in *Nehanda.* (Vera cited in Bryce 2002, p.220-221; emphasis mine)

Thus, Vera demonstrates that history is not fixed, not least to the historical record, and in so doing becomes successful in her project of "restoring the past" (Vera 2002, p.165).

The Challenge To and Embrace of Patriotic History

As previously discussed, African feminist scholars have shown that gender is not only sociological but historical. The introduction of Victorian colonial gender constructs that rigidly masculinised and feminized societal roles according to a public - private binary was subsequently not did not challenged by patriarchal nationalist figures.

Following independence, nationalists maintained the colonial gender binary. This new gender logic required that the likes of Mbuya Nehanda be exceptionalised as "Mother of the Revolution", "Mother Africa", "Mother of the Nation" such that within patriotic history, the veneration of Mbuya Nehanda leads to her domestication into the private role. Her now symbolic role does represent an opportunity for the elevation of the status of ordinary women but instead carved out a liminal role for this "exceptional" woman.

This corresponds with Elleke Boehmer's (1992, p.233) suggestion that in nationalist representations the mother-figure, "Mother-Africa" symbolizes national territory (land) and for national values such that "symbolically she is ranged above men; in reality she is kept below them." In this nationalist narrativizing,

Mbuya Nehanda was objectified within the patriarchal logic that held the woman's role as "that of emblem, two-dimensional and either tainted or sacrosanct. Even as she is granted the part of single glorified heroine, she is seen as super-human (no normal woman could be this way) once again removed from real life, once again inviolable…[In contrast]…male roles in nationalism may be characterized as metonymic as author and subject of nationalism, the male is a part of the nation, or contiguous with it." (Elleke Boehmer 1992, p. 233)

By narrativising the life of Mbuya Nehanda from birth to death, Vera inscribes a subjectivity that transforms the figure from the symbolic abstraction she has become in the post-independence public imagination into a complex subject. Phatisa Nyathi: she is not just a medium; at birth you only have the potential; she goes through much to become the spirit-medium; (Marima, 2011, p.177). By virtue of deliberately departing from social cultural religious practices in pre-colonial and colonial Zimbabwe s, "a combined focus on history and gender in exploring her writing reveals gender itself as a historical category that may be re-imagined and transformed."(Wilson-Tagoe 2002, p.159)

As part of this re-imagination, Vera interrogates the images of African women in male-centre African nationalist discourse. Vera uses the scene of Nehanda's birth to re-appropriate and recover women's agency and role in society as solely as they are linked to fertility. In this scene motherhood is not the site of domestication as it is envisioned in masculinist nationalist tradition, but instead it is a site through which women's agency and imagination across various parts of society is reimagined and articulated. To begin with, women preside over her spirit's journey in the world thereby recovering Mbuya Nehanda from her isolation as a singular, exceptional woman operated as an "honorary man" and locating Mbuya Nehanda within a matrilineal lineage of women who have also been chosen by the ancestors, and each of them has already met Mbuya Nehanda in dream:

> The women were here to welcome the child. Each of them had already met the child in dreams which they could not recall. By visiting their dreams, the child had picked them out to receive her. (Vera 1993, p.6)

The spiritual temporality embodied in this dream world offers a site for alternative resistance and national consciousness to develop. It becomes a realm women can claim as cultural knowledge and history makers. Maggi Phillips observes, that in African literature by women writers, dreams not only disturb and challenge the "rational" stability of male-centred knowledge systems but that the dream also becomes valuable storehouse of experience with which to explore narratives and question the nature of knowing across the breadth and depth of the human story" (Phillips 1994).

Furthermore, in this scene we come to see that the women occupy multiple roles in their societies as mid-wives, traders, story-tellers, diviners and dreamers. Vatete, the midwife for example, has a higher status, and "was also among the shapers of wisdom, who determined the future of the village" (Vera 1993, p.9). She, had "no qualms about sitting on a stool like a man" was invited to the dare and participated in judicial activities of her society.

In affirming the multiple roles that ordinary women played in pre-colonial society, Vera also included a portrayal of women as defenders and fighters for their society. In narrating the uprising against the colonialists Vera, shows that the struggle was not the preserve of men as is illustrated in this scene where boys and girls threw fist-sized rocks "while the men and women hurl boulders as large as a person's head." (Vera 1994, p.72) Thus, in Vera's vision of the Chimurenga, men and women, as well as boys and girls are all seen as agents playing mutually supportive roles within society. Through her Afro-centric narrative tale of matriarchy and female spirituality thus crafts a vision of what many scholars have identified as a "feminist nationalism" (Bull-Christainsen 2004; Marima, 2011, Mkwesha 2016).

Vera's "feminist nationalism" is not accepted however not without critique. Maurice Taonezvi Vambe (2002) mounts a convincing challenge to *Nehanda* arguing that the re-appropriation of national consciousness and spirituality to "give them a woman-centered meanings about independence, instilling these at the heart of the new nation's consciousness of selfhood" (Vambe 2002, p.133) has the contradictory effect of creating an unproblematized collective identity of the African woman. He thus argues that "the novel's insistence on cultural holism ignores the fundamental ruptures of identity that black women have experienced since independence" (Vambe 2002, p.136), namely those that become apparent when we take into account the reality that "the material interests of poor women do not necessarily coincide with those of rich women, most of whom participate actively in the exploitation of other women." (Vambe 2002, p.133)

As is the tendency within patriotic historicity, Vera has not totally succeeded in renouncing the lure of an image of an idealised, uniform and stable African past that is only ruptured by the colonial intrusion. (Vambe 2002, p.135). Emmanuel Chiwome (2002) points to the similarity with Mutswairo's *Feso* in the portrayal of an "Edenic past" wherein the "life-sustaining beauty of the land is meant to contrast with the barrenness and desolation that it in as a result of overcrowding, erosion and other forms of land degradation that arose from colonial land policies." (Chiwome 2002, p.181) Likewise, in Vera's *Nehanda* the past is described as beautiful until the beginning of the trouble that comes with the settlers:

> Here in this desperate valley where the grass was once green I hear the birth of voices. It is hard and convulsive, like other births. The green valley is a place that holds hope and warmth. At the bottom

> of the hill, and then at the summit of the hill, not only would I see the wonders and trials of a past time, but even I would be transformed. (Vera 1993, p.59)

As part of this romanticism that seeks to counter negative imperialistic projections of the pre-colonial past, there is a tendency towards creating a vision of a uniform people with no Internal contradictions and conflicts. Vera thus does not escape the reinforcement of the problematic patriotic historiography that centralizes a Shona nationalism. The narrative problematically presents the narrative of Shona resistance against the colonialists as the singular and most important one. As Vambe (2002) argues:

> Zimbabwe is the spirit province of the great Shona ancestor Nehanda, then it follows that there are two distinct Zimbabwes. There is the nation/spirit province, owned by ancestors of the Shona people in which the Shona have perpetual, inextinguishable right of the autochthons to live and govern forever. And there is the territory that was Rhodesia: the borders of which were drawn by politicians in Britain and Portugal with no regard for the peoples who lived within them, with a history less than a hundred years long. Within this second Zimbabwe live Shona but also Ndebele, the Shangaan, Whites and other marginal ethnic groups as well. (Vambe 2002, p.134)

Accordingly, the effect of a narrative in which the Shona are seen to be representative of all indigenous people Zimbabwe is to periphalise and even erase the contributions of other groups living in Zimbabwe thus legitimising the post-independence marginalization of the same groups, in deference to Shona claim to the nation.

While praising Vera for the novel's "national symbol creation" and "ingenious creation of traditional-seeming oral expression to render her African world convincingly", Chiwome (2002, p.184) is critical of what he sees as the "re-invention of Africa". He argues that the "cumulative expressions which do not accurately represent the African world in miniature could form part of process of the re-invention of Africa" and goes on to ask, "for whom is it being invented and (re-)imagined?" (ibid.)

In response to Chiwome's concerns regarding for whom Vera's Africa is being re-imagined, it is plausible that Vera intends this re-imagination of African society for the women who have been silenced by patriarchal repression of cultural memory. We might find this line of rebuttal in Vera's editorial foreword to the *Opening Spaces* anthology of African women's writing where she states: "A woman writer must have an imagination that is plain stubborn, that can invent new gods and banish ineffectual ones." (Vera, 1999, p.1)

In terms of the Third Chimurenga discourse's of the colonial question of land, Vera's text highlights the risk for the nation of disconnecting the two aims of the war, that is, the liberation of the land and the recovery of the cultural past (Mangwanda 2002, p151):

> It is a hard thing to see strangers on your land. It is even harder to find a stranger dancing on your sacred ground. What mouth can carry a sight such as that? We were afraid only of our ancestors who had been offended. How would we cleanse the soil? (Vera 1993, p.23)

In narrativising the spiritual dissonance that accompanies the dispossession of land, *Nehanda* underscores the spiritual affinity with the natural world. In what Carolyn Martin Shaw (2002, p.25) identifies as an "eco-feminism", wherein earth, sky, water, rock, wind, air and other natural elements act almost as characters giving meaning to the text that go beyond the functional or romantic to reflects the world through its contradictions and antagonisms. Thus, Vera emphasizes the Shona people's view of themselves as custodians of the land, and challenges the contemporary notion of land as individual property: "We allow him to dig for gold, but the land is not his. The land cannot be owned. We cannot give him any land because the land does not belong to the living." (Vera 1993, p.42–43)

Accordingly, the Shona view themselves as custodians of land, protecting it for the departed ancestors and future ancestors, and thus the impending dispossession by the settlers is described as a sign of death. Despite this, they do not immediately engage the aggressor, and for this, they earn the ire of their ancestors who communicate through Mbuya Nehanda a "message of retribution" that demands that "[t]he land must be cleansed with your blood. You must fight for what belongs to us, and for your departed." (Vera 1993, p.61). Mbuya Nehanda goes on to say:

> Can we defeat an enemy whose god is already in our midst? Rise up, I say. Rise up and fight….Spread yourselves through the forest and fight till the stranger decides to leave. Let us fight till the battle is decided. Is death not better than this submission? There is no future till we have regained our lands and our birth. (Vera 1993, p.66)

Bull-Christiansen (2004, p.76) argues that Vera's portrayal message of retribution and spirit of defense against the dispossession of land finds parallels in one of President Mugabe's 2002 addresses at National Heroes' Acre (where "national heroes" are buried) wherein he claimed that the glorious departed called for the Zimbabwean people to carry out the Third Chimurenga:

> Each grave here speaks to our Nation through the undying, immanent spirit of the heroic man or woman whose transient remains it keeps. Each one of these lives will tell you a tale of fortitude; will chastise you when your courage and endurance weaken, reminding you that there is no life too precious to be laid down for this Nation; no battle too hard to be fought for this land, indeed no enemy too big, too powerful, too awesome to be fought and vanquished for this land. Each one of these lives will remind you with the harshest of languages that there is no price big enough to fetch this Nation; no gold, no silver, precious enough, to buy its sovereignty. We are not for sale; Zimbabwe is for Zimbabweans; we are not for the highest bidder, indeed, we are not for the British bidder. Those who lie here struggled and died for a cause and that cause is fundamentally the land which must come back; which is coming back and, for the peasant, which has come back in significant quantities. This is the land which until now was being held by the sons of our colonial oppressors at our expense. This is the land which our victorious heroes could never desire to see remaining in the hands of the people they defeated. (Mugabe 2002a cited in Bull-Christiansen 2004, p.76)

Thus by invoking the lives and deaths of those who fought in the prior Chimurengas, President Mugabe calls for a spirit of self-defence, which is defined "through the opposition between a peace seeking

African and Zimbabwean identity and an aggressive English and European identity" (Bull-Christiansen 2004, p.76) and the continued battle to reclaim land from post-independence settler occupation.

Ultimately, in critically assessing the novel, Nana Wilson-Tagoe's argument that "Vera's recreation of *Nehanda,* for all the chances it represents for breaking old hierarchies and creating women's agency, still harks back to the recovery of old certainties, of truths carved in stone" (Wilson-Tagoe 1999, p.165) holds.

In many ways Vera is successful in writing "beyond" the "Frozen Image" to create a feminist, spiritual nationalism, seeking to disrupt the patriarchal settler colonial, nationalist and patriotic histories that depend on a gendered temporality of nationhood. Vera's narrative disrupts Chatterjee's external/ internal spheres of anti-colonial nationalisms by reimagining historically constructed patriarchal gender relations in the (internal) cultural sphere and interrogating the (external) Western mode of modernity as she centralizes discredited (indigenous) knowledge systems scientific rationalism, collapses Cartesian dichotomies between thinking and feeling, re-inscribes Africa's pre-colonial historicity and disrupts the linearity of "official" time through a spiritual temporality.

Nonetheless, the possibilities for the narrative remain constrained by the limitations inherent in any historical account of a national figure such as Mbuya Nehanda. Even when trying to inscribe transformative feminisms, however intersectional, into the ideology and practice of nationalism they remain dependent on essentialisms such as that of Shona national identity and a uniform collective identity for women that, even when viewed and mobilized as strategic can function in ways that are problematic and as McClintock argues, dangerous.

Chapter 4: Conclusion

If we are to draw on Yvonne Vera's stated relationship to visual imagery, we can argue that an "entire history" can be contained in a single "visual moment". (Bryce 2002 b, p.40) This paper has sought to demonstrate why it is necessary for nationalistic discourses to seek "lock in" the histories embodied in visual moments such as the widely and historically circulated "Frozen Image" of the capture of Mbuya Nehanda and Sekuru Kaguvi by arguing that they are reliant on the "fixedness" of national temporalities for the reproduction of their discourses. (Amadiume 1987; McClintock 1995; Oyěwùmí 1997)

In the case of settler colonial discourses of difference, fixed ideas of Africans as "backward", "ahistorical", and in effect "out of time" have been necessary to justify their colonial rule. (Hegel 1837; Chatterjee 1986). In bringing the colonized "into time", a gendered temporality is created such that the "colonised man" is able be brought into the modern future and thus function in the public as a subject of history, whereas the "colonised woman" must remain in the traditional past and thus function in the private realm as on object of history. In articulating their right to self-govern, anti-colonial nationalists have largely accept the colonial public-private temporal binary that Partha Chatterjee (1986) has described in his external/internal framework.

Despite the desire to "fix" Mbuya Nehanda into this "frozen" moment in time, her legendary bones have indeed "risen" and have been "restless" in troubling the nationalist discourse by rendering the gendered temporality that reproduces the various discourses of nationalisms untenable and thus various narrative strategies have been deployed to keep these "bones" locked into a moment of history.

This relationship to time, gender and modernity has thus been demonstrated in the paper's argument that the "Frozen Image" of Mbuya Nehanda and Sekuru Kaguvi capture functions as a technology of time that serves the function of capturing and fixing this period (and even life) of resistance into a stable moment of gendered temporality that has been appropriated for various narrative strategies of the nation.

The "fixedness" of the "Frozen Image" captured by the British South Africa Company has served settler-colonial discourses that have dismissed Mbuya Nehanda as a superstitious witch, whose "spiritual power" can be revealed by scientific rationalism and the technologies of Western modernity, namely the camera, to be non-existent. (Bryce 2002) Likewise the "fixedness" of this visual moment has served nationalist historians who have sought to privilege Sekuru Kaguvi's role in the First Chimurenga whilst casting her as an "innocent woman unjustly accused" (Beach 1998; Charumbira 2008). Thereafter, the "fixedness" of the "Frozen Image" has served patriotic discourses as they have variously abstracted Mbuya Nehanda into a symbolic object of history, masculinized her, domesticated her as Mother of the Nation and thereby depoliti-

cized her, and when it has become politically expedient they have completely usurped her and installed President Mugabe as the medium of the true Mhondoro of the Zimbabwean spirit nation. (Bull-Christiansen 2004; Mkwesha 2016)

In the literary realm, the paper has thereafter sought to demonstrate the varying engagements that novelists Charles Samupindi and Yvonne Vera had with the "Frozen Image" as they have sought to write "within" and "beyond" the "Frozen Image" respectively.

The cover Charles of Samupindi's novella *Death Throes* has offered an important visual interpretation of the "Frozen Image". Through what this paper interprets as a dramatization and restating of what Saidiya Hartman (1997) terms the "scene of subjection", that is, the torture, trial and execution by the colonial authorities, Samupindi demonstrates the importance of the "post-colonial gothic", wherein the past always haunts the present, for the reproduction of a patriarchal, masculinist discourse. Samupindi's stated anxiety to remain close to what can be seen as a fixed notion of the "truth" and "official" historical record, can thus be attributed to his social realist style of writing that limited the narrative to a dramatization of facts ascertainable according to the written and oral records contained in the Zimbabwe National Archives.

Charles Samupindi's *Death Throes* thus demonstrates that when the challenge to settler-colonial projections of an African past goes unaccompanied by an interrogation of historical gender relations and the uncritical adoption of the "external" realm of Western modernity inherent in nationalist and patriotic discourses, it is necessary to "write within the Frozen Image" and thus keep a period of resistance locked in and uninterrogated in a particular moment in time. The result of Samupindi's "writing within the Frozen Image"of a self-conscious, realist, and at times, imaginatively constrained narrative project.

Yvonne Vera's utterances about the "Frozen Image" have been fruitful, in so much as they have provided the thrust for this paper. Beyond this, interrogating her approach in implementing her vision of "writing beyond the image" has demonstrated both the possibilities and limitations inherent in trying to re-imagine the life of a national figure such as Mbuya Nehanda. Even when trying to inscribe feminisms, however intersectional, into the ideology and practice of nationalism they remain dependent on essentialisms such as that of Shona national identity and a uniform collective identity for women that, even when viewed and mobilized as strategic can function in ways that are problematic and as McClintock (1995) argues, dangerous.

Nonetheless, Vera is in many ways successful in writing "beyond" the "Frozen Image" to create a feminist, spiritual nationalism, seeking to disrupt the patriarchal settler colonial, nationalist and patriotic histories that depend on a gendered temporality of nationhood. Vera's narrative disrupts Chatterjee's external/ internal spheres of anti-colonial nationalisms by reimagining historically constructed patriarchal gender rela-

tions in the (internal) cultural sphere and interrogating the (external) Western mode of modernity as she centralizes discredited (indigenous) knowledge systems scientific rationalism, collapses Cartesian dichotomies between thinking and feeling, re-inscribes Africa's pre-colonial historicity and disrupts the linearity of "official" time through a spiritual temporality.

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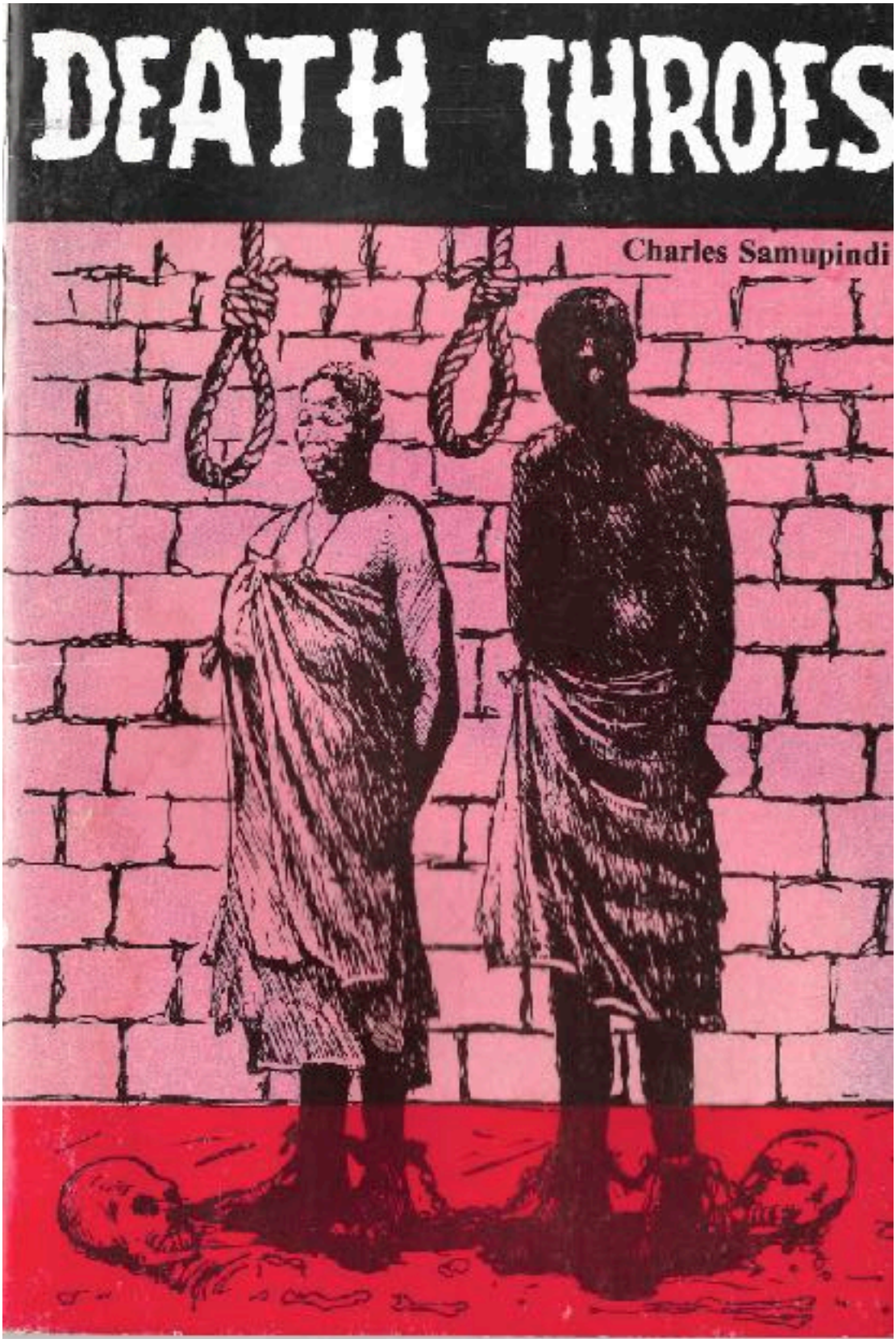
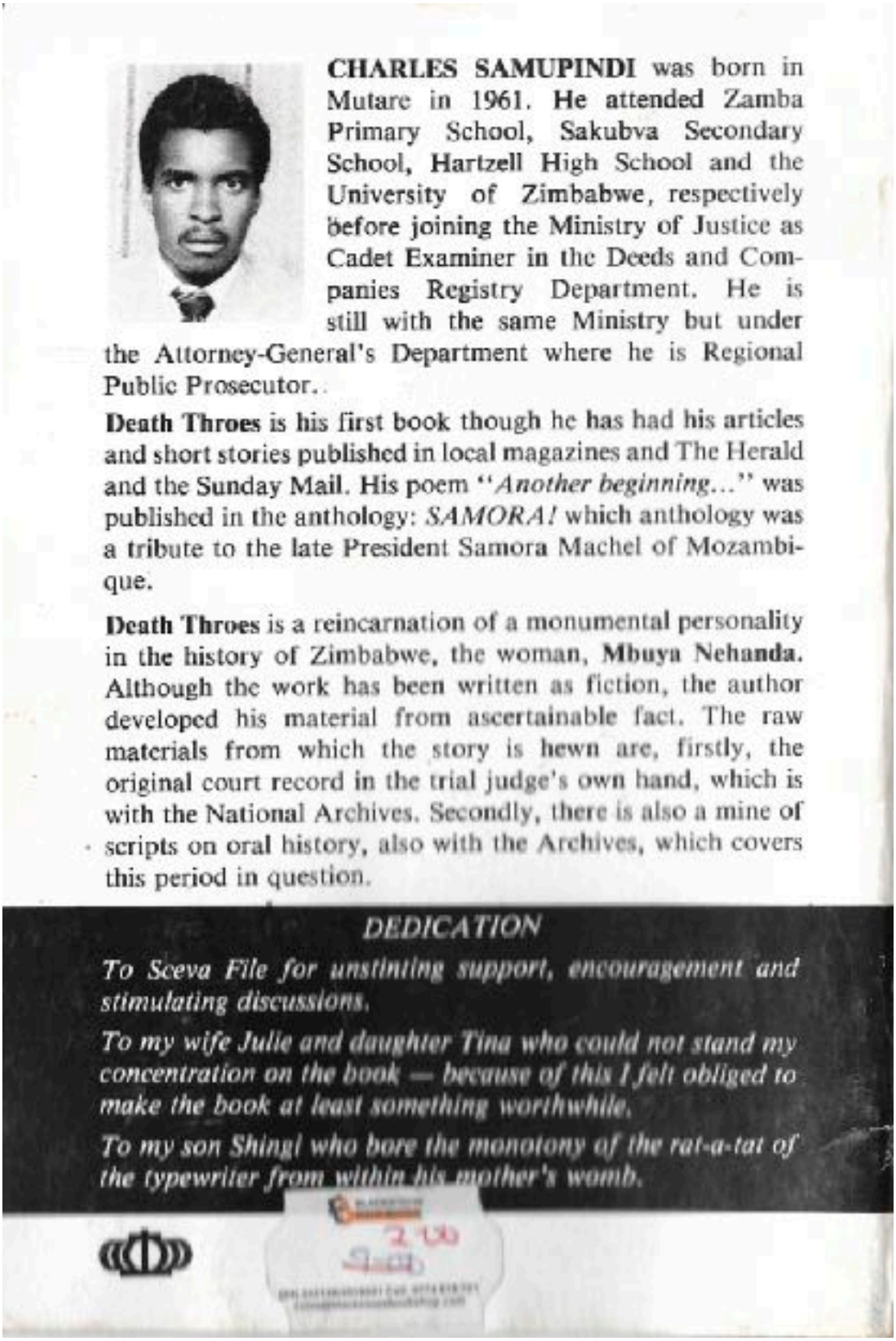
Appendix 1: The "Frozen Image" of Mbuya Nehanda and Sekuru Kaguvi, 1898

Plate I Charwe, the medium of Nehanda (left), with the medium of Kagubi in prison. 1897.

Appendix 2: Front Cover of *Death Throes: The Trial of Mbuya Nehanda* (1992), Baobab Books



Appendix 3: Back Cover of *Death Throes: The Trial of Mbuya Nehanda* (1992), Baobab Books



CHARLES SAMUPINDI was born in Mutare in 1961. He attended Zamba Primary School, Sakubva Secondary School, Hartzell High School and the University of Zimbabwe, respectively before joining the Ministry of Justice as Cadet Examiner in the Deeds and Companies Registry Department. He is still with the same Ministry but under the Attorney-General's Department where he is Regional Public Prosecutor.

Death Throes is his first book though he has had his articles and short stories published in local magazines and The Herald and the Sunday Mail. His poem "*Another beginning...*" was published in the anthology: *SAMORA!* which anthology was a tribute to the late President Samora Machel of Mozambique.

Death Throes is a reincarnation of a monumental personality in the history of Zimbabwe, the woman, **Mbuya Nehanda.** Although the work has been written as fiction, the author developed his material from ascertainable fact. The raw materials from which the story is hewn are, firstly, the original court record in the trial judge's own hand, which is with the National Archives. Secondly, there is also a mine of scripts on oral history, also with the Archives, which covers this period in question.

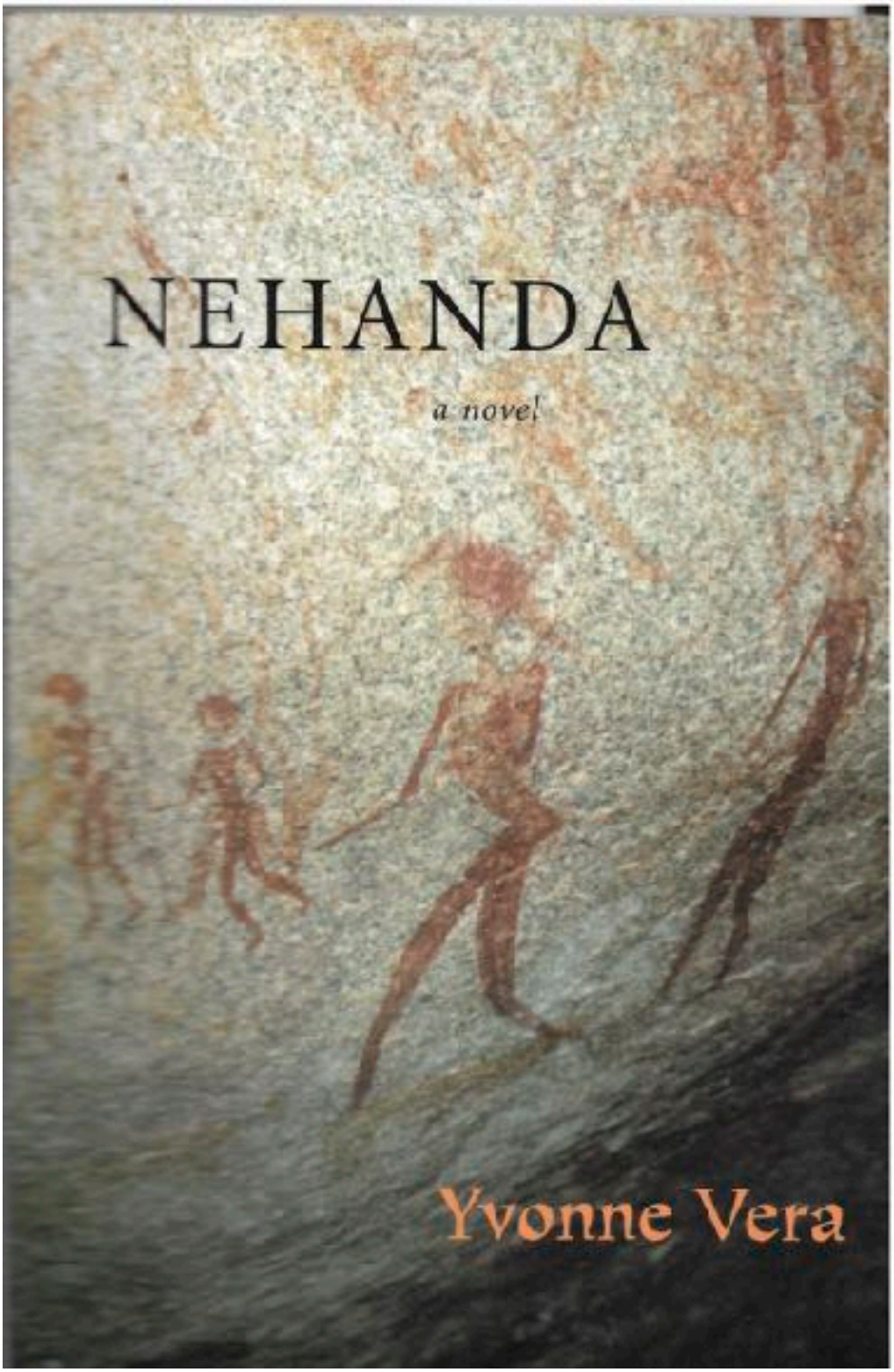
DEDICATION

To Sceva File for unstinting support, encouragement and stimulating discussions.

To my wife Julie and daughter Tina who could not stand my concentration on the book — because of this I felt obliged to make the book at least something worthwhile.

To my son Shingi who bore the monotony of the rat-a-tat of the typewriter from within his mother's womb.

Appendix 4: Front Cover of *Nehanda* (1993), Tsar



Appendix 5: Back Cover of *Nehanda* (1993)

NEHANDA

In a Zimbabwe village, in the late nineteenth century, amidst disturbing reports of strangers on their land, people gather to perform ceremonies to welcome a new-born. They call her Nehanda, and she has come bearing signs of specialness. When Nehanda grows into a young woman the nature of her gift finally becomes evident. She has been chosen by the ancestral spirits to inspire a war against the invaders, who have attained a stranglehold on the land. And so the course of events unfolds, leading to its inevitable conclusion.

Told in beautifully lucid and evocative prose, this is the story of a people's first meeting with colonialism.

"...crisp and touching...restrained and well-focused, *Nehanda* is a careful presentation of the powers of leadership and continuity which come to the fore in threatening times."
—Stephen Gray, *The Weekly Mail & Guardian* (South Africa)

"A stunning, beautiful and poetic novel." —*The Herald* (Zimbabwe)

Yvonne Vera was born in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, and attended university in Canada. She is the author of *Why Don't You Carve Other Animals* (stories), *Without a Name* (novel), and several other acclaimed works of fiction.

A TSAR Book
ISBN-10: 0-920661-41-6
ISBN-13: 978-0-920661-41-3
$15.95

9 780920 661413