REPRESENTATIONS OF EVERYDAY LIFE IN POST-2000 ZIMBABWEAN SHORT FICTION

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WALTER KUDZAI BARURE

orcid.org/0000-0002-9169-4874

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Supervisor: Professor Lynda Gichanda Spencer

Co-supervisor: Dr Doseline Kiguru

Abstract

This dissertation explores the dynamic nature of cultural productions and the perpetual flux in everyday experiences within Zimbabwean social and cultural spaces over the past two decades. Amid Zimbabwe's contemporary techno-economic milieu, there has been a remarkable surge in literary works initially tailored for print readership, then adapted for digital platforms. This shift reflects broader changes in the country's cultural production, where the interplay between traditional publishing and digital innovation has opened new avenues for literary expression and access. The overarching goal is to investigate the connection between contemporary short fiction in Zimbabwe and the material processes of transformation and reproduction across various historical periods, forms, contexts, and platforms. It focuses on print and digital archives characterised by ephemerality, aesthetic disobedience to established norms, and the deconstruction of conventional narrative structures, motifs, and characters. These creative processes thrive on borrowing, sampling, and remixing elements from orature, novels, short stories, music, and films. The study argues that these adaptive modifications empower writers to experiment flexibly and capitalise on their literary content. It includes an interpretive analysis of short stories written in English by marginalised writers, published in print magazines such as *Parade*, *Moto*, and *The Sunday Mail Magazine*, as well as on digital platforms like blogs and *Facebook*. The primary objective is to illustrate how contemporary writers use fictional depictions of everyday life to interrogate prevalent themes like survival, circular migration, venality, occultism, and sexuality. The theoretical framework draws on the concepts of everyday living by De Certeau (1984), Newell and Okome (2013), and Adesokan's (2023) technologies of reuse. These theories underpin the analysis of textual and interpretive practices in print and digital publications. Ultimately, this dissertation underscores the mutable nature of contemporary literary developments in Zimbabwe,

highlighting their profound implications for writers and readers in an era marked by technological advancements and shifting paradigms of literary consumption.

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Chapter 1: Mapping the Zimbabwean Literary Landscape

This thesis examines representations of everyday life in selected popular Zimbabwean short fiction written and published in English by marginalised writers on the periphery of the Zimbabwean literary canon. The present research falls within the ambit of popular culture. It intends to demonstrate how post-2000 fictional representations of everyday life in Zimbabwe serve as inventive means for marginalised writers to resist and interrogate themes of survival. These themes encompass notions of survival, hustling, circular migration, violence, crime, and occultism. When I refer to marginalised writers, I mean authors usually overlooked by mainstream publishers who consider their literary content and aesthetics inadequate for inclusion in the literary canon.[1] I am keenly interested in how these marginalised writers historically utilised print magazines and continue to leverage digital platforms to assert their sense of belonging and express concerns on social, economic, and political issues in Zimbabwe. This study analyses explicitly popular short fiction from Zimbabwe, paying close attention to the factors that have driven a shift in publishing practices from traditional print magazines to digital platforms.

The critical underpinning for my choice of post-2000 short stories, from both traditional print and digital archives, is significant. This deliberate choice responds to the scholarly gap created by the tendency of researchers to prioritise fiction found in print anthologies and novels, while largely glossing over short stories published in popular print magazines and digital platforms during the same period.[2] The Zimbabwean economic context, marked by instability and widespread poverty, has played a pivotal role in shaping literary production and consumption (Staunton, 2016). The high cost of books has rendered print publications a luxury, making free or low-cost online fiction a vital alternative. Importantly, focusing on marginalised literary forms is timely and necessary for a deeper understanding of the complexities of post-2000 Zimbabwean literature.

Furthermore, my choice of short fiction as the literary genre for exploration in this thesis is grounded in three key premises. Firstly, the study aims to trace the origins of the short story

[1] Marginalised writers share a collective experience of being underrepresented voices, consigned to the margins of the dominant literary narrative. This marginalisation is further underscored by Karin Barber (2018, p.20), who aptly labels them as "underdogs," emphasising the broader socio-economic structures that systematically undermines their influence and visibility.

[2] For a detailed exploration of post -2000 Zimbabwean fiction and non-fiction, see Nyambi (2013); Magosvongwe (2014); Manase (2016); Chidora (2017); Sibanda (2020) Pfalzgraf (2021).

form in Zimbabwe and examine its evolution by highlighting the continuities and discontinuities that have shaped it. It does not, however, seek to undervalue traditional short stories, whether written by multiple authors or by a single writer. Instead, it foregrounds how emerging writers navigate the form and the challenges they encounter in their creative endeavours. Secondly, the inherent malleability of short fiction allows for creative experimentation with language and style and to be published across various platforms, encompassing both traditional print and numerous digital mediums. The versatility of short fiction challenges the conventional perceptions that may have contributed to its marginalisation. Thirdly, this study seeks to question prevailing assumptions, re-evaluate the value of short fiction and contribute to a detailed appreciation of its role in literary expression. Importantly, this study traces recent shifts in contemporary writing and publishing that enable marginalised Zimbabwean writers to circumvent mainstream publishers operating in an oligopolistic market. Understanding the structures prevalent in publishing becomes imperative for assessing how these authors overcome limitations that hinder their bargaining power and pose challenges for smaller publishers to thrive in the industry.

Specifically, this thesis scrutinises the portrayal of everyday life in Zimbabwean short fiction against the backdrop of existential challenges. The analysis focuses on short stories published in popular print magazines, namely *The Sunday Mail Magazine*, *Parade,* and *Moto*. The selected narratives from these magazines are Tashaya Clemence's "I Only Managed to Escape with My Son's Bike" (2000), Nhamo Muchagumisa's "My Cold and Rigid Wife" (2002), Mathias Lukungwe's "All for the Belly" (2003), Munyaradzi Maburutse's "The Perfect Solution" (2004), and "The Party" (2007), and Rugare Mareva's "If You Were in My Shoes" (2007). The study also includes an analysis of six short stories from the now-defunct *Ztorie Bhuku* blog: Leroy Mthulisi Ndlovu's "Birth" (2013), Death" (2013) and "Locked Gates and Tall Grass" (2017), Lenni Mdawini Sibanda's "Death on Wheels" (2013) and "Sex, Shebeen, Orgasms, and Beer" (2013), Noluthando Frost's "Beloved" (2013), and Sozah Ruzario's "How Juju Can Get Back Your Lost Lover" (2013). Furthermore, a detailed examination of six short stories initially published on *Facebook* is conducted. This set includes "Ambition Prevails" in Banabas Karuma's anthology, *What Preys in the Night* (2021), "Hell Hath No Fury Like a Woman" (2021) by Isdore Guvamombe, and "Blood Bath" Part 1 and 2 (2022) by Vine Ziwane, featured in *The Queensdale Report*, an online magazine on *Facebook*.

Literary representations emerging from the tumultuous post-2000 period serve as a strategic move to reflect the socio-political context and explore how literature becomes a powerful medium for articulating and responding to crises (Nyambi 2019; 2013). By situating these short stories within a specific historical and political backdrop, my research aims to uncover how popular short fiction becomes a dynamic means of engaging with and responding to everyday societal challenges. The historical, economic, social, and political conditions that shape the backdrop of stories unfolding in Zimbabwe are deeply intertwined with the nation's colonial legacy, post-independence struggles, and ongoing challenges of governance and economic instability. Understanding these conditions requires an exploration of the country's trajectory from colonial rule to independence and its subsequent attempts at nation-building.

Zimbabwe's economy has undergone cycles of growth and severe crises, defined by authoritarian governance, widespread corruption, and contested elections (Nyambi 2019). These factors have fueled hyperinflation, high unemployment, and industrial collapse, profoundly shaping the everyday struggles of its population. A significant consequence of these economic challenges, particularly in the post-2000 era, was the collapse of the publishing industry. This decline was exacerbated by nativist politics and the harsh realities of market-driven economic structural adjustment policies, which eroded critical infrastructure and stifled creative industries.[3] Consequently, numerous magazines and book publishing companies closed down.[4] Those that remained operational shifted their focus to publishing educational textbooks and sought manuscripts primarily from established and successful writers. Enna Sukutai Gudhlanga and Godwin Makaudze (2007, p.8) observe that Zimbabwean publishers tend to prefer established writers over emerging ones due to the reluctance to risk publishing material from lesser-known writers. However, it is important to highlight that the challenges faced by Zimbabwean writers due to infrastructural and economic impediments are not isolated but are shared by many African nations. Stephanie Newell (2002, p. 1) aptly observes that inadequate transportation networks and

[3] In 1991, the Government of Zimbabwe made a pivotal shift, abandoning its interventionist economic strategy and embracing a market-driven Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP). This significant change marked a departure from the pre-ESAP era from 1980-1990, characterised by a prolific output of novels, anthologies and magazines published by various publishing houses. The subsequent decline in published works post-ESAP may be seen as a consequence of the economic challenges introduced by this policy shift. See Patrick Bond (2007) for a fuller discussion on how ESAP brought about changes in resource allocation, economic policies and the trajectory of the nation's economic development.

[4] For example, Baobab Books and Weaver Press, along with magazines like *Mahogany*, *Horizon*, *Tsotso*, and *Trends*.

inefficient distribution systems plague the publishing infrastructure on the African continent. These challenges collectively hinder the widespread circulation of newly published books, creating a formidable barrier for literary works to reach a broader audience. In the Zimbabwean context, as in other African countries, the ramifications of these obstacles are particularly pronounced for lesser-known writers. The limited exposure of their literary works becomes a pressing concern in an environment where traditional publishing channels struggle to surmount these entrenched barriers. I argue that recognising the shared predicament writers face across the continent necessitates a collective re-evaluation of the conventional approaches to publishing.

My exploration of alternative sites of publishing is not merely a response to challenges faced by lesser-known writers but a strategic response to systemic constraints imposed by the existing publishing infrastructure and economic conditions. Alternative publishing platforms, especially digital spaces and online platforms, emerge as viable solutions for writers struggling to publish locally or internationally. Dina Ligaga (2012, p.1) contends that insufficient attention has been paid to the increasing significance of the internet as an alternative platform for generating understanding and meaning about everyday experiences. Online platforms like blogs and *Facebook* allow writers to bypass traditional distribution channels and connect directly with a global audience. Such online sites become indispensable spaces where lesser-known writers can present their work without being confined to the geographical limitations imposed by economic and infrastructural challenges. To comprehend the economic and infrastructural challenges faced in present-day Zimbabwe, a comprehensive exploration of everyday life, publishing structures, and canon formation in colonial Zimbabwe becomes imperative. These interconnected aspects provide valuable insights into the socio-cultural, political, and historical dimensions that influenced the shaping of literary legacies.

The colonial publishing context and canon formation in Zimbabwe

Early published accounts of and about Zimbabwe (formerly Southern Rhodesia) by missionaries, travellers, hunters, colonial administrators, historians, and writers manifested in various literary forms. These writings included poetry, letters, diaries, memoirs, pamphlets, brochures, newspapers, magazines, novels, novellas and short stories. This diverse array of literary expressions reflects the multifaceted perspectives and genres through which people from different walks of life and with varied interests conveyed the early narratives about Zimbabwe. The

literature produced during the colonial era contributes to a collective body of knowledge that mirrors and perpetuates colonial ideologies. Valentin-Yves Mudimbe (1994, p.ix) contends that Eurocentric writings derived from the experiences and narratives of travellers and explorers form an archive that he terms the "colonial library". Louis Bolze (1980) succinctly categorises pre-colonial literature as 'pre-pioneer' (writings from the 15th to the 16th century by Portuguese missionaries and travellers) and early colonial writings as 'pioneer' literature (from the mid to the late 18th century). Similarly, Anthony Chennells (1982) characterises early colonial writings as imperial romances, implying a certain idealisation of the colonial experience.[5] Yet, delineating pre-colonial and colonial literature into different periods oversimplifies the complexities of the historical and cultural contexts within and outside these writings. Such categorisations carry implicit assumptions about the nature and purpose of these literary works, thereby warranting a closer examination of the underlying ideologies and power dynamics inherent in such classifications. I argue that focusing solely on written works from specific time frames excludes the rich oral traditions that convey cultural, historical, and communal narratives passed down through generations.

Accordingly, the history and place of Zimbabwean literature were influenced not only by written works such as newspapers and popular print magazines but also by orature. Benedict Anderson (1983) contends that the rise of print capitalism, characterised by the mass production and dissemination of printed materials, played a pivotal role in forming modern nations. It is noteworthy that the literary and publishing trends of Southern Rhodesia were modelled on those of South Africa, given the colonial ties and shared histories.[6] Colonial newspapers, namely *Mashonaland Herald*, *Zambezian Times*, *Rhodesian Herald*, *Umtali Post*, *Bulawayo Chronicle* and *Gwelo Times*, were established within the first years of settlement (1891 to 1897) and targeted a white settler market.[7] The orientation of these newspapers toward a white market resulted in a prescriptive configuration that systematically divided the audience along racial lines (Dombo, 2017). Colonial newspapers catered primarily to the white audience and hence played a

[5] See David Livingstone's (1857) *The Missionary Travels and Researches in South Africa*, William Baldwin's (1863) *African Hunting and Adventure from Natal to the Zambesi* and Frederick Selous' (1881) A *Hunter's Wanderings in Africa*.

[6] The Rhodesian Printing and Publishing company was an affiliate of South African based Argus Press which owned prominent newspapers and bookstores in Southern Rhodesia.

[7] In 1890, small newspapers like *Tuli Times* and the *Nugget* were in circulation, often being handwritten or produced using a cyclostyle. See Dombo (2017) and Mugari (2020).

role in shaping and affirming a settler identity that was distinctly separated from the experiences and perspectives of other racial groups. Consequently, these newspapers actively reinforced existing racial hierarchies and contributed to the establishment of a segregated readership.

Print capitalism, through the dissemination of newspapers and books, did not lead to the emergence of what Anderson (1983) calls a "shared print culture". This intentional segregation underscored the broader racial dynamics and power structures prevalent in Southern Rhodesia during the colonial era. Julie Bonello (2010, p.345) contends that, while the *Rhodesian Herald* and the *Bulawayo Chronicle* were owned by the South African Publisher, Argus Press, and provided a vital facet of everyday life in Southern Rhodesia, they were not immune to biases and propaganda. The South African Publisher Argus Press held considerable influence over public opinion. This influence raises questions about the authenticity and objectivity of the settler identity portrayed in these newspapers, as the agendas and perspectives of external entities may have shaped them. The early white settlers' desire to replicate British life was evident in their attempts to impose a familiar class structure centred on the supremacy of British cultural norms (Msindo 2016). This discursive reproduction of British society was not merely a nostalgic longing for the homeland but a deliberate strategy to legitimise their colonial authority. As much as the settlers aspired to reproduce British society, the realities of colonial life in Southern Rhodesia required adaptation. As a result, they borrowed significantly from the racially segregated social structure that had taken shape in South Africa. This strategic borrowing was evident in the implementation of racially discriminatory laws and policies, which not only entrenched white supremacy but also ensured their continued economic and political dominance.

Despite the increasing literacy rate in the early 19th century among the black population, the colonial administration was reluctant to produce reading material that catered to African readership (Veit-Wild 1993). Sylvester Dombo (2017) observes that missionary societies had to negotiate and collaborate with the native department of education to produce reading material for blacks. Under the colonial government's mandate, missionary societies printed semi-secular Christian church newsletters and magazines for their newly converted followers. The colonial project, facilitated by Missionary Societies, aimed to pacify the minds of the native population, instilling Christian teachings, discipline, and decorum through the impartation of basic literacy and arithmetic skills. During the colonial era, short fiction became popular in newspapers and magazines, but it was sidelined as trivial writing inferior to other literary forms such as

auto/biographies and novels, which were historical and influenced by archival and oral records. Newell (2006) observes how colonial newspapers and magazines amplified the voices of emerging writers. While Newell's (2006) insights focus on colonial Ghana, her argument can be extended to other African countries. Furthermore, these early writing platforms did more than simply bring visibility to emerging writers; they were instrumental in transforming them into what Newell (2006, p. 231) terms "the new literati", writers who actively pursued and attained literary recognition through these mediums. I am interested in how nascent writers in colonial Zimbabwe used discursive traditions embedded within their cultural milieu when writing their literary works. I assert that assessing the struggles and adaptations of writers within this colonial period sheds light on how colonial policies affected indigenous communities in Southern Rhodesia. The impact of these colonial policies resulted in profound cultural disruptions in everyday life. Such changes reveal the wider effects of limited access to publishing resources for black voices, which contributed to the perpetuation of colonial ideologies and further exacerbated economic disparities.

Historical conditions prevailing in Southern Rhodesia meant that not all short stories submitted by black writers were published. Early print newspapers and magazines in colonial Zimbabwe were owned by white proprietors, who inevitably shaped the scope of the published content despite their outwardly liberal stance. Although these publications ostensibly provided a platform for black voices, they simultaneously reinforced colonial gatekeeping structures within the literary establishment. Some short stories were rejected not only because they did not align with the literary interests of the editor but also because their literary potential was lost in translation. Tim McLoughlin (1990) notes that before 1902, short stories published by black writers in popular magazines were scarce and sporadic compared to those of their white counterparts due to colonial editorial and educational policies in Southern Rhodesia. Newspapers, journals and magazines like *NADA*, *Native Mirror*, *Mashonaland Paper*, *Munyai Washe*, *Umbowo Hwe Ukristo*, *Mapolisa*, *Jewish Guild Journal*, *Rhodesian Railway Review*, *New Rhodesia*, *Fledgling*, *Rafters*, and *NB* predominantly published folktales, epics, narrative chronicles and fables because of their less subversive nature.[8] Folktales published in these newspapers, magazines

[8] *Native Mirror* was later renamed to *Bantu Mirror*, was established in 1931 as the first weekly newspaper for black Readers in Southern Rhodesia. It was authorised to publish government notices from the Native Department in English, isiNdebele, and chiShona, making it a key medium for communication between the colonial government and the local population. In addition, Christian magazines like *Munyai Washe* and *Umbowo Hwe Ukristo*, published by the Dutch Reformed Church and the American Methodist Church, respectively, played a significant role. These Christian publications were widely distributed in mission schools and among early converts.

and journals had to be simple and straightforward to suit an audience with a perceived level of education that was not deemed highly advanced (Mcloughlin 1990; Vambe 2004; Dombo 2017). McLoughlin (1990, p.77) further highlights that colonial editors, mainly missionaries, Native Commissioners and colonial administrators, ordinarily criticised and dismissed many folktales by potential black contributors as lacking originality. According to Harold Scheub (1998, p.3), folktales from Southern Africa go beyond mere moral lessons and carry profound cultural, social, and political messages. By reducing them to a form of rudimentary moral instruction akin to Aesop's fables, there is a risk of overlooking the depth and complexity of the intended messages embedded in these narratives. Similarly, Ernest Emenyonu (2013, p.2) contends that colonial editors and publishers lacked heightened sensitivity towards Africans who, unlike them, "did not derive their entertainment from books" but through orature in the form of folktales passed from one generation to another. Rather than adhering to formalist approaches that concentrate on structure and aesthetic elements, I consider the functional aspects of folktales in representing everyday life during the colonial period.

Functionalism enables us to understand how folk narratives adapted to the changing socio-political conditions during the colonial period (Mandubu, 2020). Instead of viewing folktales as static entities, this approach recognises their dynamic nature, which consistently incorporates elements from both indigenous and colonial cultures. Folktales also allowed writers to authentically represent the essence of their culture, preserving and transmitting it through their literary creations. Simultaneously, they also sought to connect with readers with similar cultural backgrounds, fostering a sense of familiarity and identification. Newell (2006) contends that writing is intricately linked to a culture of reading, positing that readers naturally evolve into writers. In essence, literary works have a shared set of cultural references, values, and norms that were taken for granted by colonial editors. The literary efforts of emerging black writers were systematically suppressed, depriving them of equitable access to the means of literary production and reading materials. In stark contrast, Rhodesian publishers habitually promoted narratives penned by white authors. An illustrative example is found in the works of Arthur Shearly Cripps, such as *Faerylands Forlorn: African Tales* (1910) and *Cinderella in the South: South African Tales* (1918), both of which are substantial adaptations heavily drawing from Greek and Roman folklore. At the same time, it is important to note that early short stories by white writers typically aligned with the established status quo. In lieu of challenging colonial everyday life, these stories tended

to glorify Victorian beliefs that upheld the supremacy of European civilisation and reinforced colonial norms and attitudes. Essentially, the freedom accorded to white authors was unparalleled, owing to the colonial gaze, Settler's ideology and editorial policies. This disparate treatment emphasises the systemic barriers that impeded the development and recognition of black literary voices during the colonial era.

The configuration of a divided and racialised literary space in Southern Rhodesia provides a revealing insight into the workings of ideological state apparatuses, such as the press and colonial education. Mission schools like Gokomere, Kutama, and St Augustine initially functioned as vocational training centres but were later transformed into primary and secondary schools, exclusively admitting black male students (Shizha and Kariwo 2011; Zvobgo 1981). Flora Veit-Wild's work *Teachers, Preachers, and Non-Believers: A Social History of Zimbabwean Literature* (1993) notes that books by William Shakespeare, Charles Dickens, John Buchan, Prester John and Rider Haggard were prescribed for the primary and secondary syllabus. In light of this historical context, colonial settlement in Southern Rhodesia coincided with the formation of a literary canon shaped by the intertwining practices of publishing and political hegemony. To begin with, it is essential to delineate what constitutes a canon briefly. Ann Thompson (1988, p.60) remarks that the terms 'canon' and 'classic' evoke notions of evaluation and hierarchy. Interpreted in this manner, a canon is perceived as a reserved space for well-known, celebrated, and highly sought-after authors who vie for literary prestige. For this reason, lesser-known writers find themselves on the periphery and relegated to the lower rungs of the canon. Florence Stratton (2020, p.4) challenges the conventional view that equates a canon to "classic texts" by great writers. Adhering to such a narrow definition is restrictive and fosters the marginalisation of other literary texts and authors whose contributions may not fit traditional criteria. Seeking to deconstruct and reconstruct canons to reflect a more equitable representation of literary contributions, Jan Gorak (1991) posits that prescriptive and prejudicial standards shape a canon. These standards, which encompass evaluating literary works based on quality, thematic concerns, language, national status, race, gender, market conditions (demand for books), and institutional and publishing bias, contribute to the inclusion and exclusion of literature. Similarly, John Guillory (2023), in *Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon Formation*, contends that texts are chosen for the canon because they represent the dominant group's values and promote a desired worldview. Hence, canon formation in Southern Rhodesia was undergirded by the politics of recognition and representation.

Arguably, the process of canon formation in colonial Zimbabwe was closely linked to economic and infrastructural challenges. Economic disparities influenced which narratives gained prominence, perpetuating a skewed representation of Zimbabwean history and culture. The selective inclusion of specific works in the colonial canon reinforced hegemonic narratives while marginalising indigenous voices. Adopting Gorak's (1991) perspective, I assert that canonisation is a complex process that involves recognising and overlooking certain literary contributions. Correspondingly, Guillory (2023) contends that certain texts are chosen for the canon because they represent the dominant group's values and promote a desired worldview. Therefore, canon formation is not a neutral or objective process but a deeply ideological act that reinforces existing power structures and marginalises alternative voices and narratives.

Literary critics, publishers, editors, and educational institutions have significantly shaped our understanding of the literary canon. The colonial syllabus that was used in primary and secondary schools faced criticism from white liberals and radical nationalists, who pointed out its overtly racist nature (Veit-Wild 1993, p. 221). Louis Bolze (1980) highlights that commercial book publishing in Zimbabwe gained prominence in the late 1960s despite the existence of books published during the early settlement years. The emergence of commercial publishing in Zimbabwe can be attributed, in part, to various literary and extra-literary activities. Initiatives such as creative writing and reading groups in secondary schools, the publication of short stories in school and popular magazines, and the limited yet significant presence of newspapers all played a foundational role in this development. Veit-Wild's (1992) *Survey of Zimbabwean Writers: Educational and Literary Careers* underscores the essential role of educational institutions, particularly English departments in secondary schools and what was called the Rhodesian University, in fostering a culture of creative writing. These academic spaces not only introduced aspiring writers to literary traditions but also cultivated a robust publishing culture that was instrumental in bridging the gap between creative expression and professional literary production. This cultural ecosystem nurtured a generation of celebrated Zimbabwean writers such as Charles Mungoshi, Dambudzo Marechera, and Shimmer Chinodya.

The Literature Bureau, established in 1954, occupied a contradictory position as both an enabler and suppressor of literary expression. On the one hand, it played a pivotal role in organising creative writing competitions for manuscripts in indigenous languages, training aspiring writers, and recommending and distributing popular reading material (Chidora and Ngara, 2023; Veit-

Wild, 1993).[9] On the other hand, its gatekeeping and censorship practices curtailed the creative freedoms of writers, ensuring that literary outputs aligned with state-sanctioned ideologies. Chiwome (1998, p.9) argues that despite professing neutrality, the Literature Bureau effectively operated as a "censorship board" and refrained from publishing manuscripts deemed seditious.[10] It was only through the concerted efforts of promoting literary works written by black authors in isiNdebele and chiShona were eventually included in the school curriculum.[11] Drew Shaw (1997) observes that European mentors teaching writing skills in Zimbabwe employed conventional British models from 19th century Europe. The Literature Bureau, in its role as a gatekeeper, carefully selected and edited manuscripts that adhered to a Eurocentric moral vision, Judeo-Christian ethos, traditional values, fables, legends, and "sociological themes free from politics" (wa Thiong'o 1986a, p.69). Similarly, Emmanuel Chiwome (1998, p.2) laments the censorship of the first chapter of Solomon Mutsvairo's (1957) chiShona novel, *Feso*, by the Literature Bureau, as it narrated the colonial onslaught and land dispossession was deemed inflammatory. The post-independent government also inherited these repressive laws and gatekeeping traditions to further constrain aspiring writers from becoming publicly visible figures.[12] The Board of Censors, publishers, and editors acted as gatekeepers, rejecting manuscripts and banning books on the grounds that they dealt with controversial plots and themes, thereby forcing writers to either conform or practice authorial excision.[13] Writers who resisted self-censorship faced various forms of repression. They were often hounded, detained, and forced into exile. Others were compelled to use pseudonyms, a common practice in print magazines and online publications. Some sought alternative avenues by submitting their work to international publishers or turning to self-

[9] Patrick Chakaipa's Shona manuscript won in the 1957 competition and Barbara Makhalisa's manuscript for the novel *Qilindini* won the first prize at a Ndebele writing contest in 1974 that was sponsored by the Literature Bureau.

[10] The Sedition Act was enacted in 1936 to prohibit and control the printing, publishing, distributing and importation of books, magazines and material considered subversive. The Sedition Act was repealed under the Law and Order Maintenance Act of 1960 but was later abrogated in 1967 as The Censorship and Entertainment Control Act enforced by the then Ministry of Internal Affairs, now Home Affairs, which appoints a partisan Board of Censors.

[11] Mutsvairo's novel, *Feso* (1957), was approved as a set reader in schools.

[12] Many artists in the arts industry such as musicians, cartoonist, sculptors, and visual artists had their work banned by the Board of Censors but I have restricted my analysis to focus on creative writing.

[13] Charles Mungoshi's short story "The Accident," featured in the anthology *Coming of the Dry Season*, which was published by Oxford University Press in 1972, led to the entire collection being banned and prohibited from importation in1974. The story's controversial content was deemed threatening to the established order, prompting authorities to take such drastic measures against the entire anthology. The Sedition Act made it difficult to access foreign-printed literature by local and exiled writers in Southern Rhodesia.

publishing (Harris 2019).[14] The state's ability to arbitrarily decide which works were deemed 'acceptable' highlights the deeply political nature of literary censorship. The colonial regime's heavy-handed approach to literary production also impacted publishers, who feared losing their ability to publish textbooks, forcing them to reject manuscripts that posed potential risks. Such developments raise important questions about the relationship between colonial power and indigenous knowledge production. Censorship laws enacted before Zimbabwe's independence were designed to enforce the political and cultural preferences of the colonial government. However, these restrictions also exposed the resilience of marginalised voices, who used their work as a protest tool in the fight for cultural recognition and autonomy.

Analysing everyday practices in postcolonial short stories is pertinent to understanding how colonial histories continue to shape daily life. The lingering effects of colonialism render the quotidian a site of resistance, where cultural traditions, language, and localised practices challenge and subvert the homogenising forces of colonial dominance. The short stories I analyse foreground informal economies, familial interactions, and rural-urban migration, exposing the creative and adaptive strategies characters employ to navigate and survive systemic inequalities. Maggie Awadalla and Paul March-Russell (2012) contend that postcolonial short stories also serve as a powerful medium for writers to assert their agency by reimagining (hi)stories, reclaiming silenced narratives, and challenging entrenched ideologies. The act of writing itself functions as an act of defiance and agency, enabling the marginalised to reclaim authorship and carve out spaces for representation, thereby actively contesting hegemonic discourses.

The post-independence era marked a significant shift towards more diverse literary representation. Veit-Wild (1992a) asserts that Zimbabwe's independence in 1980 brought substantial improvements for black writers, especially those previously marginalised. One of the most notable developments during this period was the increasing recognition of black women in the literary scene, a group that had been severely underrepresented before independence. Barbara Makhalisa, for instance, broke new ground by publishing the first single-authored short story

[14] Cont Mhlanga, a playwright was arrested and briefly detained in 2006 for writing *The Good President*, a political satirical play that was regarded to be treasonous and defamed the character of Robert Mugabe. Consequently, the Board of Censors banned the play. Ironically, these banned works ended up gaining international attention and won awards and prizes for example Cont Mhlanga was the recipient of the Artventure Freedom to Create Prize in 2008. Mhlanga and Raisedon Baya jointly wrote and directed *The Crocodile of Zambezi* which also won the Oxfam Novib/PEN Award for Freedom of Expression. Chenjerai Hove's *Palaver Finish* (2002), a collection of essays was banned, and he eventually fled the country after receiving death threats and his house was raided by the police in 2001.

anthology in English, *The Underdog and Other Stories* (1984). This period also witnessed the emergence of new publishing houses such as Zimbabwe Publishing House and Baobab Books, which, along with existing publishers, became more inclusive and accessible to black writers. These institutions played a vital role in reshaping the Zimbabwean literary sphere by providing black authors greater opportunities to publish their works. Zimbabwe Publishing House, established in 1981, initially focused on reprinting books that had been banned under colonial rule and licensing titles from international publishers, thereby ensuring that previously silenced voices could now be heard.

Moreover, many black writers who had achieved recognition before independence assumed key editorial positions in the post-independence publishing industry, further contributing to the diversification of literary producton. For example, Charles Mungoshi, who had served as an editor at the Literature Bureau from 1975 to 1980, became the Literary Director at Zimbabwe Publishing House in 1981. Barbara Makhalisa made history by becoming Longman Zimbabwe's first black female editor, a position she held from 1981 to 1991. Similarly, Chenjerai Hove served as a literary editor at Mambo Press from 1985 to 1991 and later at Zimbabwe Publishing House from 1985 to 1987, while Stanley Nyamufukudza took on the role of Managing Editor at College Press. The increased representation of previously marginalised voices, particularly black women, and the rise of black literary figures in editorial positions contributed to a multifaceted portrayal of Zimbabwean society.

The post-independence literary scene in Zimbabwe became a vital space for redefining national identity and shaping the cultural narrative. Ranka Primorac (2007, p.438) contends that during the post-independence era, there was a significant expansion of the local publishing industry, which coincided with major improvements in state-funded education. Such developments created a reading public eager for a wide variety of printed material. However, Irene Staunton (1997) argues that the first five or six years after independence saw little meaningful literary output from Zimbabwean authors writing in English. Staunton (1997) claims that much of the literature merely celebrated the anti-colonial struggle rather than reflecting the challenges of socio-political realities. While important, Staunton's (1997) critique overlooks a fundamental aspect of the fiction from this period. Dismissing this body of work as lacking literary value disregards the profound social, historical, and cultural insights embedded within these texts. Far from being mere celebratory narratives, the literature of this era often engaged with the notions of postcolonial life,

subtly exposing the contradictions, tensions, and disillusionment that accompanied the unfulfilled promises of independence (Muponde and Primorac 2005). In essence, to overlook their contributions is to undervalue the role of literature in chronicling everyday life and transitional challenges faced in the newly independent Zimbabwe.

It is worth noting, however, that the difficulties experienced by writers during the colonial period did not vanish with independence. Despite the advancements in literary representation, many authors still grappled with significant barriers to publishing. The legacy of restrictive publishing practices and limited access to publishing opportunities continued to constrain new voices. Veit-Wild (1992) observes how the privileged position of established writer-editors and publishers, who commonly leveraged their influence to prioritise their own works, led to the marginalisation of emerging talents. This self-serving behaviour created a challenging environment for budding writers, who frequently faced sexism, tribalism and censorship. Many of these emerging authors reported that their manuscripts were dismissed, only for their ideas to be appropriated by more established figures, who then published them to gain greater respect and recognition (Veit-Wild, 1992, p. 102). Such practices not only stifled the creative potential of new writers but also entrenched a cycle of favouritism and exclusion in the literary community. Several writing and reading groups were established in response to these systemic barriers, including the Zimbabwe Writers Union, Zimbabwe Women Writers, Mthwakazi Actors and Writers Association, and the Budding Writers Association. These organisations played a pivotal role in fostering new talent and providing a platform for emerging voices.

However, censorship and banning books went beyond merely stifling creative expression. These practices repeatedly reinforced existing hierarchies within the literary establishment. Established literary figures, leveraging their influence, frequently endorsed the suppression of texts that either questioned their authority or defied dominant cultural norms. Quite tellingly, Dambudzo Marechera's second experimental novel, *Black Sunlight* (1980), was officially banned by the Censorship Board in 1981 for using obscene language and perceived violations of Christian morality (Veit-Wild 1992b, pp. 290-292).[15] This censorship exemplifies the broader suppression of artistic freedom under the guise of protecting public morality in post-independent Zimbabwe. For instance, the rejection of Marechera's manuscripts by editors such as Nyamufukudza and

[15] Following an appeal by Musa Zimunya, with the backing of Anthony Chennells and Aaron Hodza, the ban was subsequently overturned on 23 February 1982.

Hove, who deemed them derogatory and inaccessible to readers, highlights the pervasive influence of these conservative norms on the literary community (Veit-Wild 1992, p.350). The challenges avant-garde writers like Marechera faced in publishing locally were compounded by both state and peer censorship, which stifled innovative and critical voices. The subtle and insidious ways state ideologies in postcolonial Zimbabwe shape and constrain creative work led to self-censorship and a narrowing of the scope of permissible topics.

Tsitsi Dangarembga encountered similar challenges when her manuscript for *Nervous Conditions* was rejected by Zimbabwean publishers (Dangarembga 2022). It was ultimately published by the Women's Press in London nearly four years after its completion. This rejection mirrors the experiences of earlier black writers in Rhodesia, such as Ndabaningi Sithole, Lawrence Vambe, and Charles Mungoshi, whose works in English were similarly dismissed by local publishers. As a result, these authors had to seek publication opportunities outside Rhodesia. Post-independent Zimbabwe faces its challenges, including economic constraints, censorship, and a lack of infrastructure that echo the difficulties of the colonial era. The historical patterns of control and marginalisation have adapted rather than disappeared, affecting the ability of writers to reach audiences and secure their place in the literary canon. Thus, the persistence of these struggles underscores the need for systemic change to address both historical and contemporary barriers in Zimbabwean publishing. This necessity is particularly relevant when considering new viewpoints on popular culture, short fiction, and the dynamics of everyday life.

Emerging perspectives on popular culture, short fiction and everyday life

This section begins by defining key concepts such as popular culture, short fiction, and everyday life. The recent debates concerning the intersection of everyday life and popular culture have given rise to textual and theoretical discussions that focus on the nexus between these two domains (Musila, 2022; Edensor, 2020). At the centre of these debates lies a fundamental exploration of how everyday life notions intertwine with popular culture's diverse expressions. Recognising and acknowledging the inherent difficulty in formulating clear-cut and working definitions of these two key concepts is equally important. Katie Milestone and Anneke Meyer (2020, p.1) contribute to this discourse by defining popular culture as a contested and broad concept that encompasses an enormous range of cultural texts and practices, ranging from cinema films, newspaper articles, magazines, literary works, rock art, paintings, music, to cyberspace. Similarly, Tony Bennet (2023)

gives an abstract description of popular culture as a site that is constantly changing and variable in its constitution. This perspective acknowledges the temporal and dynamic nature of what is popular, challenging a simplistic understanding of popular culture. In the broad field of popular culture, increasing emphasis has been placed on understanding its nature and function. Karin Barber's (2013, p.xviii) "Foreword" in *Popular Culture in Africa: The Episteme of Everyday Life* notes that popular culture is a site in which people comprehend themselves "as part of a global order which, nonetheless, in significant ways, operates to marginalise them and their 'local experience." Therefore, popular culture reflects and shapes everyday culture, particularly how people live and behave.

Although popular culture is broad, this study will narrow its focus to popular short fiction that deals with everyday life. Short fiction is an expansive term for various prose forms such as novellas, short stories, vignettes, flash fiction and fables, characterised by inherent brevity. Doseline Kiguru (2016, p.11) contends that the burgeoning presence of popular short fiction as a genre in Africa is closely linked to the changes and developments in the publishing industry. Additionally, Kiguru (2016; 2020) astutely places short fiction within a historical continuum, recognising the influential roles played by oral traditions and traditional media platforms such as radio and print publications like newspapers and magazines, as well as the internet, in shaping and advancing this literary genre. Hence, the succinct nature of short fiction and its adaptability enable it to align with the demands of a transforming publishing industry seamlessly.

Critical studies on how popular print newspapers and magazines contributed to the growth of popular literature in Africa have been done by Frederiksen (1991), Odhiambo (2008), Ogola (2017), Ouma and Krishnan (2021) and Harris (2024). These studies observe that popular newspapers and magazines from Nigeria, Kenya and South Africa, such as *Viva*, *Playboy*, *True Love*, *Joe Magazine*, *The West African Review* and *Drum*, were a vehicle of enablement for a community of writers. George Ogola (2017, p.58) further underscores that popular newspapers and magazines function as valuable platforms for apprenticeship, especially for emerging writers whose fictional work is initially published in serial format. Nonetheless, it should be underlined that this tradition of serialising short fiction was not uniquely African but was a phenomenon borrowed from other cultures, especially from Europe. Bodil Frederiksen's (1991, p.135) analysis of *Joe*, a popular Kenyan magazine, hints at how the publication was central in mapping the everyday life of the majority of the population. An example of this mapping is shown by how

characters depicted in popular short fiction constantly negotiate ethnicity, gender and class in urban and rural spaces. Similarly, Bernth Lindfors (1974) posits that a glossy magazine such as *The West African Review* was an experimental medium for Nigerian authors like Cyprian Ekwensi, Kunle Akinsemoyin and Timothy Aluko and enabled them to find publishing outlets for their short stories. South Africa's *Drum* magazine also ran regular short story competitions and provided writers like Es'kia Mphahlele, Alex La Guma, and Lewis Nkosi with the opportunity to write and publish short fiction that covered a myriad of themes, mostly about urban and everyday experiences (Ogola 2017). Within this broader literary context, contemporary Zimbabwean popular short fiction now takes up the mantle and provides rich representations of everyday life that reflect ongoing social and cultural struggles.

Given this historical context, it becomes clear that contemporary Zimbabwean short fiction is more than just a continuation of past literary efforts; it is a vital genre that reflects ongoing socio-cultural dynamics. As such, Ian Reid (2017) argues that short fiction deserves much more attention than it usually has. Tinashe Mushakavanhu, in his introduction to "Locating a Genre: Is Zimbabwe a short story country?" asserts that:

> Critics and commentators in the Zimbabwean literary discourse have paid scant attention to the short story and have treated it as a footnote to the novel, some kind of practice ground for the more serious business of writing novels. And yet the short story engenders vital issues that have contemporary relevance. The development of the short story in Zimbabwe as a separate, concentrated short form of literature reveals remarkable vitality, and it holds up in a natural manner as an effective mirror to the Zimbabwean society. The intensity of the form comes from its subjective points of view, pervasive imagery, controlled tone and ellipsis, and as a matter of fact, the Zimbabwean short story presents human experience in its most distilled essence. (2013, p.127)

Here, Mushakavanhu (2013) succinctly outlines the unique attributes of short fiction, emphasising its adaptability and audacity to explore controversial themes in a concise format. As Asante Mtenje (2016, p.227) notes, short fiction has the capacity to resonate with "contemporary sensibilities and experiences" which provides a dynamic exploration of societal issues. Clare Hanson (1989, pp. 5-6) argues that the formal features of short stories, such as "disjunction," "inconclusiveness," and "obliquity," distinguish them from longer forms like novels. Despite these distinctive merits, a biased preference for longer narratives persists. John Mepham (1991, p. 59) underscores how

scholars usually prioritise quantity over quality, which undermines the value of shorter texts. As Edgar Allan Poe (1999) observes, this bias leads to a misguided evaluation of literary works based on length rather than intrinsic merit. Again, Poe (1999) questions the validity of assessing the worth of a literary piece solely based on its length, challenging the tendency to essentialise the short story as an incomplete or inferior form. Nicole Ward Jouve (1989, p.38) strengthens this argument by highlighting the short story's ability to challenge the "tyranny of the whole book," rejecting the assumption that literary value is dependent on a unified, complete narrative. Jouve (1989) further asserts that the fluidity inherent in the short story form should not be limited by traditional book formats, urging a reassessment of the criteria used to evaluate literary merit. The ongoing dominance of print as the primary mode of literary validation reinforces a hierarchical relationship between print and digital forms.

As purveyors of literary standards, publishing houses play a pivotal role in shaping the hierarchies that privilege print-based textuality and longer narratives, reinforcing the idea that literary value is tied to materiality and the physical form of books. Their influence perpetuates cultural conservatism, as they tend to uphold traditional standards of completeness, unity, and narrative length as key markers of literary merit. The gatekeeping practices of editors and publishing houses underscore James Yékú's (2020) critique of how digital texts frequently defer to the authority of print culture, revealing a persistent hierarchy within literary production. Both Jouve (1989) and Yékú (2020) challenge these biases, advocating for a reconsideration of literary evaluation standards that unfairly privilege print and longer narratives. Adhering to these established conventions further marginalises forms like short stories and digital literature but also limits the recognition of emerging, more fluid literary forms. The consequence of this stance is that lesser-known short fiction authors end up overshadowed by published writers, generating a perception that creative works by budding writers are inferior and cannot be taken seriously. Poe (1999) further contends that the short story short story form is a unique area of literary activity that is immensely popular with readers because it can be read in one sitting. The question, then, is how do we gauge the quality of a literary work based on its length and readability? Poe's argument is supported by Hanson (1989, p.5), who regards the short story as "a vehicle for different kinds of knowledge which may be in some way at odds with the 'story' of the dominant culture"; hence, the form may be used to express something repressed in mainstream literature. This capacity of the short story to challenge dominant narratives is particularly significant when examined through

the conventional binary terminologies that classify African literature as either ‘official’ or ‘unofficial’ (Barber 1997; 2018). ‘Official’ literature is typically linked to institutional approval and values that align with the perspectives of the elite or the state. In contrast, unofficial’ literature, which emerges through oral traditions, self-publishing and digital platforms, resists these hegemonic structures. It provides a space for marginalised voices and alternative knowledge systems that disrupt the homogenising tendencies of official narratives.

The short story form, by its very nature, is well-suited to straddle and interrogate this binary. As a compact and flexible genre, it allows for experimentation and the articulation of subversive ideas that may not fit the expectations of official literature. For instance, short stories written in indigenous languages or published in grassroots magazines and digital platforms act as a counterpoint to the dominant literary canon, opening a window into the lived experiences, communal histories, and socio-political critiques that are excluded or suppressed in official accounts. In this sense, the short story form becomes a site for bridging the divide between ‘official’ and ‘unofficial’ literature while redefining the boundaries of what constitutes legitimate cultural expression.

However, the inordinate privileging of short fiction is commonly subjective, it is important to recognise that some novels can be superior to short stories and vice versa. This preference reflects individual tastes rather than objective standards. Both short-form and novel-length Zimbabwean literature distinctly engage with themes of survival and the daily struggles of ordinary people, presenting these issues in a manner that is accessible and relatable to diverse audiences. This focus is particularly pronounced, though not limited to, post-2000 publications. Ashleigh Harris (2019), p.3) astutely observes that emerging literary forms use “multimodal technologies to open up new formal possibilities beyond that of the printed word.” Given this understanding, it is imperative to note the uniqueness of short fiction as a versatile literary medium that can be quickly published in various formats, including popular print magazines and digital platforms, which enable it to circumvent censorship. In Zimbabwe, the Censorship and Entertainment Control Act forces the established publishing houses not to publish literary works that contain what Asante Mtenje (2016, p.227) consider “taboo issues”. Mtenje’s (2016) observations on short fiction led to my contention that short popular fiction from Zimbabwe is a literary and cultural trend that warrants critical interrogation. Therefore, we need to recognise and understand short fiction as a genre in its historical context equally.

The resilience of short fiction, as a genre, cannot understated if we are to consider its ability to respond to the evolving ways in which it is disseminated and consumed. Drawing on Newell and Okome's (2013) theorisation of everyday experience, I analyse popular Zimbabwean short stories to uncover how emerging writers reflect and engage with the lived realities of ordinary Zimbabweans. According to Newell and Okome (2013, p.4-5), the episteme of everyday life is a product of self-invention that is evasive and intermittently at odds with hegemonic power. Examining representations of everyday life in popular short fiction constitutes the main focus of this study. This approach aims to demonstrate how the selected short stories can be understood as creative sites for articulating thematic and ideological concerns of everyday life. I contend that popular short fiction provides a platform for marginalised writers to express themselves directly in response to social, political, and economic issues. In other words, these short stories remain elusive, unpredictable and beyond the control of gatekeepers such as mainstream publishers and the government. Barber (2018) observes that representations of everyday life have been undervalued in African literature. However, recent research by Simone Murray (2015), Lynda Spencer, Dina Ligaga, Grace A. Musila (2018), Tim Edensor (2020), Stephanie Bosch Santana (2021), and Grace A. Musila (2022) highlights a fundamental shift in the study of popular literature and digital platforms in Africa, positioning popular fiction as a vital area of inquiry. This growing body of work challenges traditional literary hierarchies and foregrounds the significance of popular narratives in understanding the ways in which popular fiction illuminates broader societal issues and reflects the lived experiences of marginalised communities. Joke Hermes (2008, p.11) advances that popular fiction is important because it depicts everyday life and its ability to provide space for the voices of emerging writers traditionally left out of critical analysis. Further to this, an approach to everyday life is vividly captured in the work of Michel De Certeau (1984), who emphasises the peculiar tenacity of unrecognised writers in the face of censorship by editors, publishers and the government.[16] One key observation of the study pertains to how these stories articulate the tensions, aspirations, and struggles inherent in daily life. Such an exploration seeks

[16] De Certeau's (1984) conception of everyday life is informed by ideas from Henri Lefebvre and Michel Foucault. See Lefebvre's, (2014) *Critique of Everyday Life* and Foucault's, (1998) *The History of Sexuality: The Will to Knowledge.* De Certeau (1984) engages with Lefebvre's focus on everyday life and the spatial dimension of social practices, as well as Foucault's ideas about power, resistance, and discourse. De Certeau's (1984) work reflects a synthesis of these influences, providing a unique perspective on the agency of individuals within broader socio-cultural structures.

to illustrate how short stories can be considered a marginal arena for counter practices, including the subversive use of colloquialism, taboo topics and the fearless embrace of self-publishing.

As a literary form, short fiction functions as a conduit for counter practices that enable marginalised voices to reshape and redefine their creative agency. Simon During (1999, p.7) cogently observes that marginalised authors with the least power "practically develop their own readings of, and uses for, cultural products – in fun, in resistance, or to articulate their ideas, thoughts and identity." Similarly, De Certeau (1984, p.84) argues that everyday life practices reveal the diverse and dispersed operations of the "arts of the weak." In other words, these subtle and commonly overlooked practices promote a form of resistance embedded within the mundane. De Certeau's (1984) insistence on the power of the disadvantaged and alienated aligns with Newell and Okome's (2013) theorisation of everyday life and advocates for all literary voices to be heard. I argue that the material and ideological dominance of particular groups opposes the competing desires and demands of the subordinated organised power. De Certeau (1984) views everyday life as a vital arena for reproducing and negotiating social meanings. De Certeau (1984, p.23) further maintains that the formality of everyday practices constitutes a repertory of tactics, including the ability to manoeuvre and evade authority. These clever tactics enable the weak to overcome limitations imposed by the dominant, securing victories despite their disadvantaged position. In essence, De Certeau's (1984) concept of 'tactics' reflects this interest in the micro-level strategies of the marginalised against the dominant.

According to De Certeau (1984), tactics refer to the multitude of minor moments and points of resistance practised by everyday people in the context of their lives. These tactics are highlighted by the creative and calculated ways of "making do" used by the powerless to combat their subjection, jam the operations of power and help to restore some measure of value in the lives of the marginalised (De Certeau, 1984 p.40). Similarly, James Scott's (1985, p.4) concept of "the hidden transcript" alludes to the arts of resistance by the weak, a discourse occurring beyond direct observation by powerholders or gatekeepers such as publishers, editors, and governmental control.[17] Scott's (1985) concept of 'the hidden transcript' can also be employed to interrogate representations of everyday life.

[17] Barber (2007, p.220) notes that copyright laws, educational and cultural establishment acts as gatekeepers to filter and select certain texts and authors for the category "literature" while consigning the rest to"entertainment".

I am particularly interested in the literary activism of writers and the artful agency of their characters, especially in how they construct imaginative pathways to navigate and make sense of everyday life while challenging and traversing established boundaries. Such a focus highlights the writers' deliberate engagement in challenging systemic constraints and asserting their agency through creative expression. Simultaneously, their characters serve as potent symbols of resistance and adaptability, actively navigating and subverting oppressive socio-political structures. I argue that there is an inherent connection between form and content, between the text and the world, and between the writer and the audience. In the short stories I analyse, this dynamic becomes especially evident as they engage with the quotidian experiences of everyday life from the perspective of the lower strata.

From the foregoing, it is apparent that representations of everyday life also contribute to bringing the literary activity of less popular writers to visibility. Ben Highmore (2002) affirms that everyday life is a vague and problematic phrase because it brings to the fore what is hidden and the lives of those who have been sidelined by dominant accounts of social life. In addition, Highmore (2002, p.1) states that generalising the everyday as "readily accessible" obscures the diversity and complexity of lived experiences, privileging certain perspectives while marginalising others. Specifically, the everyday spaces of everyday life are typified by familiarity, which Fran Martin (2003, p.2) calls "default spaces" of our daily lives. For instance, digital platforms such as *blogs*, *WhatsApp*, *Facebook*, *TikTok*, *Instagram*, *X* and *YouTube* have become the most sought-after and regular places to connect with friends and people with similar interests. Therefore, everyday life pays attention to what is commonly sidelined but should not be considered a transparent realm of representation.

The fictionalisation of everyday life is a potent literary tool that critiques and reshapes our understanding of the tension between personal experiences and oppressive power structures. It captures the subtle ways in which ordinary people either cope with, resist, or become complicit in these dynamics. Arthur Berger (1997) outlines the differences between fiction and everyday life. Berger (1997, p. 163) notes that fiction operates as a deliberately constructed narrative that abstracts and reimagines the complexities of daily existence to achieve artistic, ideological, or didactic goals. Unlike the unstructured, spontaneous, and generally chaotic nature of everyday life, fiction is intentionally curated, with a deliberate sequence of events designed to provoke specific emotional or intellectual responses. While everyday life unfolds within fixed temporal and spatial

dimensions, fiction manipulates these elements to create alternative realities, foregrounding its artificial and interpretive nature. This distinction raises pertinent questions about fiction's role in reflecting or distorting reality. For instance, genres like satire, dystopian fiction, and magical realism draw on the foundations of everyday life but intentionally deviate to critique dominant ideologies and reveal systemic contradictions. Such deviations are not shortcomings but deliberate rhetorical strategies that amplify or simplify aspects of life to expose moral dilemmas, systemic failures, or hidden truths.

Simultaneously, everyday life shapes the text by grounding its characters, actions, and themes in the lived realities of the societies depicted. Thus, the short story as a literary form, though fictional, becomes a site where the real and the imagined converge. The short story form provides insight into the conditions that structure the everyday lives of its characters but also invites readers to reflect on their own lived experiences. Here, it is essential to recognise and reiterate that thematic concerns of everyday life are not confined to popular short fiction but are also deeply embedded in conventional fictional texts. My analysis seeks to highlight how the mundane routines of characters both reflect and critique the ongoing social inequality, state repression, and economic decay that have plagued Zimbabwe for decades. I argue that through this narrative strategy, post-2000 fiction published in print magazines and on digital platforms creates a space for imagining new futures and potential alternatives. For Henri Lefebvre (1991, p.97), everyday life is defined by "what is left over" and what lies outside (the common) disciplines of knowledge. Comparably, Martin (2003) advances that everyday life is riddled with paradoxes because it is repetitive, cyclical, and unpredictable. Looking at it this way, everyday life is generally considered mundane, hence consigned to the background. Looking at it this way, everyday life is generally considered mundane, hence consigned to the background. However, it is noteworthy that the post-2000 short stories I analyse largely gloss over significant real-life issues and postcolonial tensions such as electoral violence, the post-2000 land reform programme, constitutional amendments, and Operation Murambatsvina, the 2005 urban slum clearance process.[18] While such topics were

[18] Murambatsvina, widely known as Operation Restore Order, was a large-scale campaign by the Zimbabwean government to forcibly demolish slums in urban areas nationwide. The programme also targeted individuals who had extended their homes without official approval from urban councils. These demolitions were politically motivated, aiming to dismantle the growing support for opposition parties like the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). This suggests that the government's actions were less about urban renewal and more about curbing political dissent in opposition strongholds. See Vambe's *The Hidden Dimensions of Operation Murambatsvina* (2008).

tackled in single-authored and collective short story anthologies, novels and non-fiction works published by College Press, Weaver Press and amaBooks, they were noticeably absent in short fiction appearing in popular magazines and on digital platforms.[19] This omission may partly be attributed to the editorial control and censorship exercised in magazines, where sensitive political themes were likely suppressed in favour of safer, less contentious narratives. This shortcoming is partly attributed to the editorial control and censorship exercised in magazines, where sensitive political themes were likely suppressed in favour of safer and less contentious narratives. In contrast, the decision to sidestep these weighty issues on digital platforms may not have been imposed externally but rather a conscious choice by the writers themselves. These authors chose to focus on trivial or everyday concerns, which may have been taken for granted amidst the larger socio-political crises of the time. While digital spaces afford more creative freedom and bypass traditional gatekeeping mechanisms, the content reflects a tendency toward escapism or a reluctance to engage with the harsher political realities. This divergence in thematic focus prompts evaluative questions about the role of short stories as both reflections and critiques of society. Short fiction's capacity to distort or exaggerate the ordinary highlights its unique power to interrogate and reframe reality, going beyond mere reflection to provide incisive commentary on societal norms and contradictions. The popularity of short fiction in magazines and on digital platforms arises from its focus on the mundane aspects of everyday life. These stories often reflect familiar experiences, resonating with readers by addressing common struggles, relationships and social dynamics. This focus on the quotidian makes the narratives highly relatable, drawing readers into the characters' worlds. However, this very appeal can also foster the perception that such stories lack depth, quality, and ambition. John Fiske (2013, p.38) highlights that popular texts are "completed only when taken up by people and inserted into their everyday culture." This observation underscores the close relationship between popular texts and everyday life. It also suggests that what is considered 'popular' remains open to interpretation. Consequently, my study challenges and seeks to redefine the popularity of a text as a contested subject that is not merely a reflection of relatability. Barber (1997) and Newell (2002) concur that the term 'popular' is an ill-defined term widely used in African fiction studies. Popular art forms, such as Onitsha Market

[19] For a more comprehensive exploration of post-2000 Zimbabwean print literature that questions established norms and highlights the shifting economic and political contexts, see Sibanda (2020), Chidora (2017), and Nyambi (2013).

Literature in Nigeria and tabloid newspapers (in Zimbabwe like *H-Metro* and *Kwayedza*, are controversial) and thus never fail to generate debate amongst readers on moral, political and behavioural issues (Newell 2002, p.5). As such, the term 'popular' can never designate a clearly bounded category because it is open-ended (Barber, 1997, p.4). A text's popularity is not solely determined by its intrinsic literary merits but is equally shaped by external factors such as the platforms on which it is published, its reach, and the demographic of its audience. Its classification as 'popular' hinges not just on its internal qualities, but on the broader dynamics of how and to whom it is made accessible. Importantly, Bernth Lindfors (1991, p.1) notes that the 'popularity' of a literary text may be as much a function of such random circumstances as geography, economics, politics and education as it manifests a particular group's aesthetic performances. I argue that the definitions and classifications of popular literature are not static but evolve over time, particularly when we account for its inherent ephemerality. While popular literature is commonly characterised by its accessibility and affordability, this assumption is complicated by texts that, as in this case, demand specialised skills to locate and recover from fragmented print or digital archives. These archives are generally inaccessible to the broader public, challenging the notion that popular literature is universally available and easy to engage with.

The conditions of production, circulation, and preservation fundamentally reshape the parameters of what constitutes popular literature. Shola Adenakan (2021) contends that the perceived popularity of literary works is heavily influenced by the reputation of the publishing house and that of the author. It is important to emphasise that these factors are prescriptive rather than exhaustive, raising significant questions about the mechanisms underlying the construction of literary value and cultural legitimacy. For example, Doris Lessing's experiment with pseudonymous novels provides a poignant critique of the literary industry's biases and the struggles faced by emerging writers. By adopting the pseudonym Jane Somers when she wrote *The Diary of a Good Neighbour* (1983) and *If the Old Could* (1984), Lessing sought to expose the prejudices that pervade the book publishing industry, typically dominated by established names and commercial considerations. In the preface of *The Diaries of Jane Somers* (1984), Doris Lessing argues that if the two novels had been published under her real name, they would likely have received significant attention and praise.[20] Instead, they garnered little recognition and modest

[20] Both novels written under the nom de plume Jane Somers were republished in a single volume, under Doris Lessing's real name.

sales. This disparity highlights the disproportionate emphasis placed on an author's established reputation rather than the quality of the content. Thus, Lessing's experiment challenges the simplistic assumption that popularity is a straightforward reflection of inherent literary merit or reader demand. Given this context, it is essential to focus on genres that appeal to diverse audiences but are usually overlooked in discussions of the traditional literary canon.

One of the contributions of recent popular imaginaries of Africa has been to recover literary forms that have been sidelined at the expense of other genres. Accordingly, this study seeks to bring to prominence the other sets of imaginaries and ignored everyday experiences. In her groundbreaking essay on popular arts in Africa, Barber (1987, p.13) traces expressive forms of popular culture in Africa to recover the voices of traditional artists such as griots and sculptors who were historically not considered part of the elite. Barber (1987) focuses on traditional artists whose work dates back as far as the 17th century and represents a counterpoint to the conventional Eurocentric histories of African culture. Barber (2018, p.20) further claims that the voices of these traditional artists are worth retrieving because they created genres to satirise their superiors or affirm the value of their own experience. Nonetheless, Barber's (2018) ethnographic study tends to focus only on particular historical moments and sites of emergent popular genres that were interesting and well-documented. Elsewhere, Barber (1997) notes that many critics seem unaware of flourishing popular literature that does not fit mainstream cultural productions. Essentially, there is a need to re-evaluate the meaning of popularity. Doing so allows us to consider the cultural expressions that persist beyond the confines of elite analysis. Hence, an inclusive and democratic understanding of what is deemed popular recognises the resilience and significance of cultural forms that endure in people's everyday lives.

Many studies on Zimbabwean literature, especially those focusing on the period around or before the country's independence in 1980, tend to concentrate predominantly on prominent black authors, consistently placing them within the 'African' novelistic canon'.[21] This narrow focus results in a biased categorisation of literary works, portraying them as representative of the nation's entire literary output while overlooking the significant contributions of white Zimbabweans, Asians, and Coloureds. Such an exclusionary approach marginalises diverse voices and

[21] See for instance, Krog (1974), Kahari (1980), Zimunya (1982), Veit-Wild (1993), Gaidzanwa (1985), Zhuwarara (2001).

perpetuates a narrow, homogenised view of Zimbabwean literature.[22] Texts authored by white writers are repeatedly labelled as "Rhodesian literature" or "white writings," while works by black authors are typically categorised as "Zimbabwean literature" (Tagwirei 2016). Such use of racial nomenclature is divisive and elicited criticism from Robert Muponde and Ranka Primorac (2005), who discredit the prescriptive evaluation and demarcation of Zimbabwean literature based on language, race, gender and length, hence their call for plurality and inclusiveness. Similarly, Pascale Casanova (2004) critiques the tendency of critics to isolate texts from one another, arguing that this practice obscures the broader configuration to which all texts belong. This, in turn, paints an incomplete picture of what is Zimbabwean literature. For instance, Kahari's (1980, pp. 6-10) study claims to give a comprehensive analysis of 'Zimbabwean literature' but does not include Mungoshi's *Coming of the Dry Season* (1972) and Marechera's *House of Hunger* (1978) because they are profiled as short fiction. In essence, Kahari (1980) focuses on what Ranka Primorac (2006, p.30) calls "key novels" at the expense of other literary forms, such as short fiction. Kahari's (1980) logic demonstrates a notable lack of reflexivity that is needed when approaching Zimbabwean literature. The omission is also symptomatic of the shortcomings that are prevalent in the critique of Zimbabwean short fiction.

Barber (2007, p.32) notes that the study of genre and literary criticism usually confines itself to textual forms canonised as 'literature,' a hierarchical and classificatory system that she finds problematic. Barber (2007, p.vii) further stresses the importance of respecting the diversity and otherness of textual forms. Veit-Wild (1992) also challenges the notion of a singular national literature in Zimbabwe, arguing instead for recognising the specific national history of literature shaped by common experiences and the distinct social and political backgrounds of black and white authors. Veit-Wild (1992a) demonstrates that these two literatures were analysed separately due to the distinct social and political backgrounds of the two races (black and white).[23] Anthony Chennells (1982) critiques the focus on prominent writers at the expense of lesser-known authors

[22] Primorac and Muponde (2005) argue that many studies which analyse literary works by whites and blacks separately promote 'versions' of Zimbabwean literature. An in-depth analysis of the polarised and hierarchical representation of black and white literary spaces and identities in Zimbabwean writings is found in Primorac's (2006) *The Place of Tears: The Novel and Politics in Modern Zimbabwe* and is referred to as a Rhodesian Chronotope.

[23] *Tsotso*, a literary magazine that was established in 1989 deliberately aimed to dismantle the entrenched divisions between black and white writing, as well as between oral and print poetry. The magazine promoted diverse voices, literary forms, and challenged the traditional boundaries and hierarchies that often marginalised certain narratives. The magazine's inclusive approach argued for a more integrated and representative literary landscape, refusing to uphold the arbitrary distinctions that perpetuated cultural and racial biases in literature.

in the study of Southern Rhodesian novels by whites. The prescriptive standards and boundaries set by scholars of Zimbabwean literature have led to exceptionalism, particularism, and the supremacy of certain texts over others. Cultural nationalism in Zimbabwe has consistently relegated white authors to peripheral positions, as noted by Tagwirei (2016). An interesting example of this is demonstrated in *TheTabex Encyclopedia Zimbabwe* (1987), edited by Katherine Sayce, Arthur Shearly Cripps, and Doris Lessing, who are the only white authors included in the Zimbabwean literary canon due to their liberal worldviews and sharp criticism of Rhodesian authorities and racial policies. This reductionist approach and configuration of a divided literary space mirrors forms of literary domination. Such an organicist interpretation of Zimbabwean literature reinforces a nativist canonisation of literary works, privileging indigenous narratives while marginalising alternative voices. The analysis of Zimbabwean literature needs to go beyond the static couplet of Rhodesia/Zimbabwe, black/white, past/present, Shona/Ndebele, insider/outsider, patriotic/ sellout national/diasporan and continuities/discontinuities. Hence, there is a need for a multiplicity of approaches to explore the varied constructions of Zimbabwean literature.

This study intends to shift the focus from established and canonised writers to those glossed over. Mushakavanhu (2013) contends that the history of the short story in Zimbabwe can be traced back to three representative writers: Dambudzo Marechera, Charles Mungoshi, and Stanley Nyamfukudza. Mushakavanhu (2013, p.127) further regards these writers as "the fore-bearers" of the short story genre in Zimbabwean fiction in English." This narrow focus not only overlooks the foundational role played by popular and student magazines in nurturing the talents of emerging writers but also diminishes our understanding of the broader context of literary development in Zimbabwe.[24] However, what is particularly relevant here is that Mungoshi is hailed as the first known black writer to publish a single-authored short story collection, *Coming of the Dry Season* (1972), which was the first literary text to be on the national syllabus for examination in English at Ordinary Level in 1991. Mushakavanhu (2013), similar to Zimunya (1982), predominantly concentrates on cult figures who published short fiction at the dawn of Zimbabwe's independence, yet they overlook earlier contributors. For example, Doris Lessing published short stories as early

[24] See Veit-Wild's *Survey of Zimbabwean Writers: Educational and Literary Careers* (1992), which highlights early publications in notable platforms such as *St Augustine's School Magazine*, *Goromonzi School Magazine*, *Fletcher High School Magazine*, and university publications like *Opus* and *Student's Eye* from the University of Rhodesia now University of Zimbabwe.

as 1943 in *Rafters* magazine, and Lawrence Vambe in 1949 in the short-lived *NB*, a progressive monthly journal. Moreover, influential writers such as Paul Chidyausiku, William Bill Saidi, and Geoffrey Ndhlala also contributed short stories to various magazines, including *African Parade*, *Popular Post*, *Prize*, and *Advance* (Veit-Wild 1992a). [25] This selective focus marginalises the broader and more diverse literary output that shaped Zimbabwe's literary canon.

In stark contrast, Tim McLoughlin (1990, p.79) acknowledges Vambe's short stories as the "prototype" of fiction by black Zimbabwean writers. Significantly, Zimbabwe's literary history is deeply rooted in its early emergence within popular and student magazines, a foundational development that has been largely neglected by scholars. This oversight has obscured the role of these publications in shaping the nation's literary trajectory.[26] Notably, Shereck Mbwera's (2016) study on the implications of the canonisation of the Zimbabwean story-telling tradition neglects to trace the link between the short-story genre and its publication in colonial newspapers and popular print magazines. Such glaring gaps weaken the understanding of how short stories have navigated and adapted to shifting mediums over time. This is why Ogola (2017, p. viii) finds "the generic frames" that characterise the reading of African popular literature problematic, arguing that they should be revised. Moreover, these 'generic frames' marginalise significant voices and themes within African literature, particularly those that emerge from popular culture. Following Ogola (2017), my study moves beyond the domain of merely revising these 'generic frames'. A premise of my study is that Zimbabwean popular literature should be taken as a literary polysystem, which Itamar Even-Zohar" (1979, p. 290) theorises as a "system of various systems which intersect with each other and partly overlap yet functioning as one." Similarly, Preben Kaarsholm (1991, p.39) observes that the Rhodesian Literary circuit of production, distribution and readership was, in fact, a sub-system within the much larger worlds of literature of the Republic of South Africa, the Commonwealth and Great Britain. This coalescing of genres allows us to reconceptualise Zimbabwean popular short fiction from print magazines and digital platforms as a major exponent of the national literary system.

[25] It is important to note that Charles Mungoshi's first story, "Cain's Medal," was published in *African Parade* under the pseudonym Carl Manhize in 1965 while still a student at St. Augustine.

[26] While a detailed discussion of poetry-focused magazines falls beyond the scope of this study, it is worth noting the significance of publications such as *Two Tone*, established in 1954 by Phillippa Berlyn and Olive Robertson, and *Chirimo*, founded in 1968 by Colin and O-lan Style. These magazines played a pivotal role in promoting black poets, yet they remained closely tied to Rhodesia's cultural and academic elite.

The transition from print magazines to digital platforms

In the early and late 2000s, Zimbabwe faced worsening economic conditions and a declining publishing industry. The economic downturn and the publishing industry's struggles led to reduced print runs, limited distribution, and less promotional support for books, particularly those by local authors (Zell 2013). Faced with financial constraints, publishers such as Baobab Books (before its closure in 1998), College Press, Weaver Press (before its closure in 2023), and AmaBooks turned to short story and poetry anthologies as a cost-cutting strategy. This strategy allowed publishers and editors to capitalise on the established literary success of familiar authors while only including a few emerging writers to attract readership. The role of Weaver Press, AmaBooks, and College Press in producing single-authored collections of short stories and anthologies is pivotal in the development of contemporary Zimbabwean literature. These publishers have made significant contributions to the visibility and dissemination of Zimbabwean short fiction. Clement Chihota and Robert Muponde have edited *No More Plastic Balls: New Voices in the Zimbabwean Short Story* (2000) which was published by College Press. Jane Morris, the editor of AmaBooks, has been particularly instrumental in overseeing the publication of anthologies such as *Short Writings from Bulawayo I* (2003), *Short Writings from Bulawayo II* (2005), *Short Writings from Bulawayo III* (2006) and *Where to Now? Short Stories from Zimbabwe*. Similarly, Irene Staunton, the editor of Weaver Press, has edited *Writing Still: New Stories from Zimbabwe* (2003), *Laughing Now* (2007), *Women Writing Zimbabwe* (2008), and *Writing Mystery and Mayhem* (2015) which have contributed substantially to the canon of Zimbabwean short fiction.

In addition to the anthologies, several notable individual short story collections have emerged from local and international publishers, including Lawrence Hoba's *The Trek and Other Stories* (2009), Julius Chingono's *Not Another Day* (2006), Kawengo Samachai's *The Job that Never Was and Other Stories* (2005), Christopher Mlalazi's *Dancing with Life: Tales from the Township* (2008), and Petina Gappah's *An Elegy for Easterly* (2009), among others. Moreover, several of these writers have gone on to become editors and founders of independent presses, furthering the sustainability of Zimbabwean literature. Notable examples include Aleck Kaposa,Tendai Rinos Mwanaka, and Samantha Rumbidzai Vazhure, who now operate small presses that continue to champion the voices of emerging writers. This shift from traditional publishing houses to independent presses signals emerging changes in the production and distribution of contemporary Zimbabwean literature.

Emerging writers who could not publish their work persistently submitted their short stories to the limited magazines available, seeking to carve out a space for their voices amidst the prevailing challenges. Tawana Kupe's (1997) doctoral thesis interrogates how popular print magazines in Zimbabwe acted as platforms for the voiceless. However, it falls short by only cursorily addressing the short fiction columns in these magazines, neglecting a thorough examination of their significance. This oversight diminishes the understanding of how these columns played a crucial role in amplifying marginalised narratives during a tumultuous period. *Parade*, *Moto* and *The Sunday Mail Magazine* gave voice to emerging writers who competed in short story competitions, honed their creative writing skills, and ended up being published.[27]

As a result of declining book sales and significantly low royalties, established writers such as Lilian Masitera, Virginia Phiri, Claude Maredza, Charles Mungoshi, and Raisedon Baya turned to self-publishing as a viable alternative. Undeterred by their challenges, these authors took control of their own literary destinies by self-publishing their works. This move allowed them to maintain creative freedom, bypass traditional publishers, and retain a larger share of the profits from book sales, which was crucial in a struggling economy. Despite initial perceptions that self-published works might lack the quality assurance of traditionally published books, many gained recognition within academic circles (Staunton 2016). For example, Mungoshi's self-published novel *Branching Streams Flow in the Dark* (2013) won the National Arts Merit Award in 2014 for outstanding fiction. The canonisation of self-published works signifies a broader shift in which the distinctions between self-published and traditionally published books have become increasingly blurred. Nevertheless, this does not imply that all writers who chose this mode of publishing achieved success. I argue that the move toward self-publishing among Zimbabwean authors during this period represents a form of resistance against the marginalisation of local voices in the global literary market.

The struggles faced by budding writers differed significantly from those of established writers. When *Horizon* magazine closed in 1999, followed by *Tsotso*, a low-cost low-budget literary magazine, in 2001, the available platforms for emerging Zimbabwean writers were significantly reduced.[28] In response to this contraction, budding writers began submitting their

[27] The Annual Intwasa Short Story Competition, formerly known as the Yvonne Vera Award, is one of the longest-running literary competitions in Zimbabwe.

[28] *Tsotso*, which was published quarterly, promoted poetry and prose in English and chiShona, as well as in isiNdebele, Tonga, and Shangani, by previously unpublished writers. Andrew Moyse, a former editor of *Parade*,

work to transnational literary magazines like *Chimurenga*, *Kwani?* and *African Writer Magazine* (formerly AfricanWriter.com). The shift from local print magazines to transnational spaces underscores the increasing reliance on broader, international platforms as local opportunities dwindled amidst domestic constraints. The lack of homegrown literary magazines in Zimbabwe led Ivor Hartmann to launch the *StoryTime* blog, a literary magazine, in 2007. Similarly, Tinashe Mushakavanhu founded the *MAZWI Literary Journal*.[29] The scarcity of local literary platforms spurred established writers to utilise personal blogs to promote emerging authors and their work.[30] For instance, Cathy Buckle, the first writer to establish a blog in Zimbabwe, launched L*etters from Zimbabwe* in 2000 at the height of the Fast Track Land Reform Program (FTLRP), a period marked by violent land invasions.[31] Buckle's initiative was not just a personal endeavour but a bold act of resistance and an urgent call to the international community to recognise and respond to the unfolding crisis (Manase 2016). Buckle utilised her blog to document and disseminate the harsh realities on the ground, directly challenging the dominant narratives and censorship imposed by the state. In doing so, she asserted the power of digital platforms as essential tools for advocacy and truth-telling in a repressive environment. Emmanuel Sigauke began *Wealth of Ideas* in 2007, followed by Memory Chirere and Petina Gappah in 2009, and Lawrence Hoba and Ignatius Mabasa in 2011. This transition to digital platforms represents a significant shift that enabled greater accessibility and visibility for Zimbabwean literature. The first digital platform, an all-in-one content marketplace that allowed local writers to publish their work electronically as ebooks, was launched in 2013. It was initially called the *Openbook* and later renamed *Mazwi*, which loosely translates to words. Mazwi started as an education-based platform but underwent a series of changes. It became the first website that gave writers and publishers new tools to digitise, sell, and distribute their books while protecting copyrights and controlling access. Unfortunately, the

launched *Horizon*.

[29] *Mazwi Literary Journal* is now defunct and used to be available at www.mazwi.net

[30] Many print newspapers transitioned to digital platforms, and entertainment blogs were launched during this period. For instance, *Zimbablog*, established in 2008, focused on entertainment news and featured some of Lawrence Hoba's short stories before he began his blog.

[31] The Fast Track Land Reform Program (FTLRP) in Zimbabwe, initiated in 2000, was marked by violent land invasions aimed at redistributing land from white commercial farmers to black Zimbabweans. This controversial policy sought to address historical land imbalances dating back to the colonial era but was implemented in a chaotic and often brutal manner. The FTLRP led to widespread upheaval, economic decline, and significant international condemnation, as it disrupted agricultural production and contributed to food insecurity in the country. The period was also marked by political violence and human rights abuses, further exacerbating Zimbabwe's socio-economic challenges. For a detailed discussion, see Pilossof (2012) and Mkodzongi (2020a)

website is now defunct.[32] Domain registration and website hosting remain prohibitively expensive, which compels many writers to rely on free platforms such as *Blogger*, *WordPress*, and *Facebook*. This reliance underscores the economic barriers to independent content creation and digital self-publishing. While these free platforms provide accessible avenues for writers to share their work, they also come with significant limitations, such as restricted creative control, advertising constraints, and potential censorship. This raises key questions about the inequities in digital access and the long-term sustainability of creative autonomy in an increasingly commodified online space.

Studies related to my research include those by Tatenda Gora (2018) and Earl Ashley Dube (2023). Gora's (2018) examination of the visibility and virality of Zimbabwean novels on platforms like *Facebook* and *WhatsApp* is informative but limited in its scope. Gora's (2018) work overlooks the constraints and opportunities within the Zimbabwean publishing industry, where access to digital platforms is uneven, and print media remains dominant. Adenekan (2021) observes that digital platforms are deeply embedded in the structures of global capitalism, which further marginalises those who cannot afford to be online. Dube's (2023) analysis of the reception of novels published on *Facebook*, such as Catherine Phiri's *Never Mine*, highlights the growing demand for ephemeral literature but fails to address the role of traditional print media adequately. Dube's (2023) study does not explore the complex interplay between digital and print platforms, nor does it consider how both platforms shape literary consumption and production. In contrast, my study aims to examine how Zimbabwean short fiction navigates both digital and print media environments.

Another platform, *Reading Zimbabwe*, was launched in 2016 to address the inconsistencies in the categorisation of works by Zimbabwean writers. *Reading Zimbabwe* seeks to create a more structured and comprehensive archive of Zimbabwean literature. This digital archive is particularly valuable because it compiles metadata on books published in Zimbabwe, making it an essential resource for accessing information on out-of-print works. A notable limitation is the digital archive's omission of content accessible through digital platforms. Moreover, the archive recognises only a limited selection of popular texts and self-published literary works as canonical, thereby reinforcing the marginalisation of genres such as pulp fiction, comic books, and

[32] See www.mazwi.com.

speculative fiction. Likewise, popular magazines are deemed to belong to a subset of commercial fiction that is dismissed as not literary and hence considered paraliterature. Rosalind Krauss (1980, p.37) contends that paraliterature consists of texts that invoke debate and betray structural unity, coherence and resolution. The urgent need to analyse fictional representations of everyday life in Zimbabwe cannot be overstated, as the short story operates at the intersection of high and low culture. Hence, the short story form disrupts traditional hierarchies of literary value and blurs the boundaries between what is typically regarded as 'serious' literature and more accessible popular forms. My work takes a step in that direction, attempting to situate popular fiction within the Zimbabwean canon. The above literature review has shown how hegemonic discourse influences and shapes fictional representations of everyday life.

Methodology

This study employs a close reading of short stories that grapple with struggles for survival in Zimbabwe, struggles exacerbated by the country's post-2000 economic and social crises. To analyse the texts, this research employs a close reading methodology informed by Newell and Okome's (2013) episteme of everyday life, alongside De Certeau's (1984) typology of tactics. This reading strategy involves paying close attention to how the texts represent the mundane and generally overlooked aspects of survival. Such an approach provided a systematic means for categorising the texts into key themes centred on survival, including circular migration, hustling, occult economies, and transactional sex. These themes, far from being incidental, are deliberately foregrounded to interrogate how characters navigate precarious socio-economic conditions. By situating these narratives within the broader ambit of survival, the methodology underscores the ways in which the selected texts grapple with structural inequalities, gendered vulnerabilities, and resource scarcities.

The relationship between fictional worlds and readers' lived realities illuminates how literature both reflects and shapes social experience. Furthermore, the reading method is enriched by integrating a dialogic approach that considers the interplay between the text, its production context, and its reception. Such an approach necessitates understanding the text not merely as an isolated artistic creation but as a product of and a sociological commentary on the socio-economic, cultural, and historical conditions that shape its production and reception. The thesis also strategically refers to Bhabha's (2012) postcolonial theories, such as hybridity, liminality and Third Space, to interrogate how factors such as globalisation, postcolonial tensions, systemic

poverty, censorship, and escalating youth unemployment profoundly influenced the production, dissemination, and reception of contemporary literature in Zimbabwe. These conditions shaped the thematic preoccupations of writers while simultaneously constraining traditional publishing practices, limiting access to and circulation of literary works. Consequently, the study highlights how these constraints contributed to the growing significance of short fiction on digital platforms, which emerged as alternative spaces for writers to engage with readers and reflect on pressing socio-political concerns. This intersection of content, form, and context underscores the role of short fiction in addressing and reimagining the complexities of Zimbabwe's contemporary realities. The study's thematic categorisation highlights how globalisation, postcolonial tensions, systemic poverty, censorship, and rising youth unemployment have profoundly shaped the production, dissemination, and reception of literature in contemporary Zimbabwe. These structural conditions profoundly influenced the thematic concerns of writers while simultaneously disrupting traditional publishing practices, thereby restricting access to and circulation of literary works.

The collection of short stories for this research involved a methodologically rigorous archival search across both physical and digital repositories. The physical archival search targeted key institutions, including the National Archives of Zimbabwe in Harare, Herald House in Harare and Mambo Press in Gweru. This meticulous process not only reflected the dispersed and fragmented nature of Zimbabwe's literary archive but also highlighted the structural barriers that complicate access to marginalised forms of literary production. While the collected short stories provided valuable insights into everyday life in post-2000 Zimbabwe, they simultaneously produced an uneven dataset that exposed the fragmented and unstable trajectory of the country's publishing history. This unevenness also exposed the structural inequalities that determined which texts were preserved and which were rendered invisible within the broader literary archive. A central methodological challenge arose from the ephemerality inherent in both print magazines and digital archives. Print magazines produced in limited quantities with low-cost, fragile materials are susceptible to degradation over time. Compounding this issue is the fact that many of these texts remain uncatalogued and under-digitised, creating significant barriers to access and long-term preservation. These obstacles were further exacerbated by institutional limitations within the repositories themselves. Poor preservation practices, chronic underfunding, and the politicisation of archiving processes hinder both private and state-funded archives. Politically sensitive materials, especially those challenging the status quo, are frequently removed or censored, leaving

researchers with incomplete or biased collections (Khumalo, 2019). These structural and material constraints necessitated reliance on the few remaining copies that were in usable condition, a methodological limitation that significantly influenced the scope of this study. Consequently, the analysis of short stories from these magazines was confined to a single chapter, a decision dictated by the scarcity and fragility of ephemeral texts. However, the precariousness of these materials is not merely a logistical hurdle but a reflection of broader socio-political and economic forces shaping Zimbabwe's cultural production. This methodological reflection highlights the intertwined challenges of working with ephemeral texts and the implications for scholarly inquiry. The limited availability of these materials is not a neutral circumstance but a consequence of systemic neglect, political censorship, and the marginalisation of certain literary forms.

Additionally, digital archives on platforms like *Ztorie Bhuku* and *Facebook* were explored to ensure a comprehensive representation of short stories. The research also employed text data mining techniques to recover information when the *Ztorie Bhuku* blog was deleted during the course of the study. While text data mining is a broad field, information extraction was used as the primary technique to retrieve and process relevant data (Hegarty 2022). Two key tools facilitated the recovery process: the Internet Archive Wayback Machine and HTTrack Website Copier Software. I used the Internet Archive Wayback Machine as the initial tool for locating and recovering content from the defunct *Ztorie Bhuku* blog. It provided historical snapshots of the blog when it was still active. However, a limitation of the Internet Archive Wayback Machine is that it primarily stored partial snapshots and static images of web pages. Hence, not all blog content was retrievable in text form. This limitation significantly restricted the scope of the data that could be mined from this source alone. To address this, the Internet Archive Wayback Machine was complemented with HTTrack Website Copier Software, an open-source offline browser that mirrors and downloads cached copies of websites for offline use. Although the blog was no longer live, HTTrack allowed for retrieving a more comprehensive archive of the blog's structure, including text-based content from cached or stored locations. HTTrack was invaluable for obtaining embedded links, metadata, and textual content inaccessible through the Internet Archive Wayback Machine. The ephemerality of the short stories analysed in this thesis underscores the challenges of accessibility and preservation, exposing the precarious nature of digital literary production. Their inaccessibility to a wider audience not only highlights the fragility of online archives but also exposes the power dynamics that regulate control over literary texts and their

circulation. Nonetheless, the deliberate exclusion of the archived and recovered short stories from this publication, while a necessary measure to uphold the intellectual property rights of the original authors and publishers, underscores the unresolved tensions between digital dissemination and ownership.

Chapter Delineation

This thesis consists of five chapters, with the organisation of three core chapters dedicated to analysing texts based on the availability of short stories that align with the thematic scope of everyday life. Chapter one begins with a literature synthesis, shedding light on the significant contribution of short fiction, particularly those portraying everyday life, as active contributors to the construction and representation of reality. The chapter argues that experiences of everyday life shape and influence these literary representations. It further contends that, despite their ephemeral nature, short fiction published in popular print magazines and digital platforms calls for serious consideration. This analysis traces both continuities and discontinuities within the genre and highlights the historical developments of print and archival cultures over time.

The second chapter examines the interplay between everyday life and migration circuits, specifically exploring the representation of intra-rural, peri-rural to urban, and urban-rural movements in post-2000 short stories sourced from prominent Zimbabwean publications such as *The Sunday Mail Magazine*, *Moto,* and *Parade*. It conducts a close reading of "I Only Managed to Escape with My Son's Bike" (Clemence, 2000), "My Cold and Rigid Wife" (Nhamo Muchagumisa, 2002), "All for the Belly" (Lukungwe, 2003), "The Perfect Solution" (Maburutse, 2004), "The Party" (Maburutse, 2007), and "If You Were in My Shoes" (Mareva, 2007). The chapter uses the concepts of "translocalism" and "Weekend Commuting" to underscore the complexities of circular migration within Zimbabwe. In this dynamic, characters continuously form connections and interactions with diverse environments and communities. As they move, they position themselves and are positioned by others in hierarchical structures based on factors such as socio-economic status, cultural background, and personal experiences. The chapter also extends its analysis of circular migration to include how writers shift their work from one magazine to another, highlighting the cyclical nature of these short stories. In this context, the short stories analysed open a window into the characters' motivations, struggles, and the intricate web of relationships shaped by their journeys.

The third chapter examines how short fiction, disseminated through digital platforms like *Ztorie Bhuku*, actively contributes to the archival process of everyday life, particularly given the ephemeral nature of such online spaces. It analyses six short stories: "Locked Gates and Tall Grass" (2017), "Birth" and "Death" (2013) by Leroy Mthulisi Ndlovu, "Death on Wheels" and "Sex, Shebeen, Orgasms, and Beer" by Lenni Mdawini Sibanda (2013), "Beloved" by Noluthando Frost (2013), and "How Juju Can Get Back Your Lost Lover" by Sozah Ruzario (2013). The chapter underscores that the economic challenges in post-2000 Zimbabwe compel characters to explore alternative avenues for sustaining themselves, using any means necessary to make a living. It introduces and advocates for a conceptual survival model in Zimbabwe, termed "kukiya-kiya," which encapsulates the strategies and adaptive measures characters employ to cope with challenging economic circumstances. This model serves as a lens through which the chapter analyses the stories presented on the *Ztorie Bhuku* blog, revealing how these narratives capture and reflect the lived experiences, survival tactics, and resilience within the post-2000 Zimbabwean context.

Chapter four focuses on the textual analysis of short fiction shared on *Facebook*, focusing on works such as "Ambition Prevails" by Banabas Karuma (2021), "Hell Hath No Fury Like a Woman" by Isdore Guvamombe (2021), and "Bloodbath" Part One and Two by Vine Ziwane (2022). The chapter discusses narratives that explore get-rich-quick schemes and addresses questions surrounding non-normative methods of satisfying one's desires, which characters employ when conventional avenues are exhausted. This exploration challenges societal norms and expectations, depicting characters resorting to practices like gold panning and occult rituals in their quest for fulfilment. Through these narratives, the chapter aims to shed light on the complex dynamics of desire and survival in contemporary Zimbabwean society.

Chapter five marks the culmination of the thesis by synthesising the core arguments advanced throughout the study. It consolidates the discussions generated from the preceding chapters and provides a comprehensive appraisal of how these findings contribute to broader debates on Zimbabwean digital short fiction. The chapter highlights the significance of digital platforms in reshaping narrative forms and contesting dominant socio-cultural discourses while pointing to the persistent silences and exclusions that continue to characterise Zimbabwean literary landscapes. Additionally, it proposes potential directions for future research, anticipating the evolving relationship between everyday life and short fiction.

Chapter 2: Searching for comfort: The rhetoric and reality of circular migration in selected popular print magazines.

Introduction

The previous chapter provided an overview of the origins of the first significant tradition of writing short fiction in Zimbabwe, primarily found in newspaper columns, popular magazines, and school magazines. This history and development of literary traditions in Zimbabwe provide valuable insights into how short fiction reflects everyday life. The chapter also introduced this study, focusing on the history of short fiction in Zimbabwe from the colonial era to the post-independence era. In addition, the chapter included a comprehensive review of existing literary criticism on Zimbabwean short fiction and outlined the research methodology and theoretical framework that will be employed in this study.

In this chapter, I examine the influence of everyday life on circuits of migration, concentrating on post-2000 short stories featured in three prominent Zimbabwean magazines: *The Sunday Mail Magazine*, *Moto,* and *Parade*. Through an analysis of selected narratives, namely Tashaya Clemence's "I Only Managed to Escape with My Son's Bike" (2000), Nhamo Muchagumisa's "My Cold and Rigid Wife" (2002), Mathias Lukungwe's "All for the Belly" (2003), Munyaradzi Maburutse's "The Perfect Solution" (2004), Munyaradzi Maburutse's "The Party" (2007), and Rugare Mareva's"If You Were in My Shoes" (2007) I will argue that various forms of mobility play a pivotal role in shaping the characters' lives. The exploration of both literal and metaphorical mobility demonstrates that movement is not merely a reaction to socioeconomic pressures but a deliberate strategy for survival and a means of asserting social agency. The focal point of this analysis centres on intra-rural, peri-rural to urban, and urban-rural mobility, interrogating how these movements actively shape and redefine the characters' lived experiences and socio-economic trajectories. Specifically, the chapter scrutinises the significance of comfort and discomfort within these mobility patterns. The selected short stories reveal characters navigating diverse geographical spaces to pursue improved conditions and experiences through circular migration. The characters utilise these mobilities to escape hardships in their original settings, seeking physical and emotional solace in new environments that promise improved living conditions, economic opportunities, and social advancement, while resisting spatial fixity. In addition, the chapter explores the role of these settings in generating socio-spatial relations,

translocalism, and notions of belonging and escape. However, my focus on circular migration within the nation's borders moves beyond the conventional rural-urban dynamic, exploring diverse geographical imaginaries and trajectories that link specific localities.[33] Moreover, the chapter explores the role of these settings in generating socio-spatial relations, translocalism, and notions of belonging and escape. Shifting the emphasis to circular migration, the analysis challenges the conventional rural-urban dynamic, uncovering diverse geographical imaginaries and trajectories that connect specific localities. The chapter is structured into three sections. The first section gives a brief background of the selected popular magazines' publishing history and provides paratextual interpretations of these post-2000 short stories. This section aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the context and reception of these short stories. The last three sections involve a close reading of short stories that interrogate the significance of comfort and discomfort due to mobility patterns. This division allows for a systematic exploration of migration and its relationship with comfort, mobility, and identity.

This chapter traces historical shifts in Zimbabwean migratory experiences as depicted in post-2000 fiction published in popular magazines. By examining circular migration as both a lived experience and thematic focus, it reveals how characters navigate and shape socio-economic realities. The analysis highlights their active negotiation and construction of identities, illuminating the complexities and ambiguities of their interactions with hybrid spaces. The intersection between circular migration and everyday life provides an imaginative representation of how migration impacts characters and communities. According to Deborah Potts (2010), circular migration entails the back-and-forth movement within and between rural and urban areas. Potts (2010, p.8) further observes that the pattern of circular migration is repetitive and is characterised by a series of either premeditated or spontaneous short and long-distance movements that allow people to alternate their stay in the city and their rural homes. Put simply, circular migration enables a nomadic lifestyle. Migratory experiences and mobilities have undergone changes in Zimbabwe over time. Notably, the salient hallmarks of circular migration in Zimbabwe, whether voluntary/forced, temporary/permanent and irregular/clandestine, are dialectical and thus cannot be problematised

[33] The desire for better healthcare, educational, and employment opportunities has been a consistent theme in both pre- and post-2000 Zimbabwean novels and short fiction, particularly in narratives focusing on cross-border migration to neighbouring countries like South Africa, Botswana, and Zambia. See, for example, anthologies such as *Women Writing Zimbabwe* (2008) edited by Irene Staunton and Lawrence Hoba's *The Trek and Other Stories* (2009), which provides insights into transnational experiences that highlight how migration functions as both an escape from economic hardship and a quest for social mobility.

in isolation. De Certeau (1984, p.115) observes that "[e]very story is a travel story," this statement highlights how stories are shaped by the spatial context in which they occur and highlights that storytelling itself is a way of navigating and making sense of everyday life. It also suggests the interconnectedness between storytelling, travel, and the spatial aspects of human experience.

I contend that these writers effectively use the short story form to explore circular migration. Despite its compressed structure and linear arc, the short story is well-suited to capturing fragmented, episodic experiences. Circular migration, with its cyclical movements and recurring departures and returns, aligns with the short story's ability to distil moments of transition, dislocation, and adaptation into concise narratives. Furthermore, the short story form accommodates the contradictions of circular migration: the pull of home versus the push of economic necessity and the desire for rootedness versus the inevitability of mobility. Likewise, I maintain that circular migration is not only limited to people but also extends to textual cultures, particularly regarding how writers migrate from one platform to another and re/publish their short stories.

Reading popular magazines as a literary text

This section focuses on the origins of publishing history, patterns of production, and reception of the popular print magazine form in Zimbabwe. The selected magazines provide different ideological stances and positions that inform and determine their production and reception. Gerlinde Mautner (2008) avers that social, economic, and political factors influence the production and reception of print media, such as newspapers and magazines. According to Tawana Kupe (2003), magazines in Zimbabwe's print media face minimal competition in entertainment coverage because the entertainment sections of newspapers are small and weak. Additionally, technological advancements and the reader's interests also affect the development and sustainability of magazines. Mautner (2008, p.33) further notes that the vagaries of publishing magazines are impacted by the institutional and legal environment in which the print medium is produced, the demographics and lifestyles of the audience (in terms of age, education, social class, preferred leisure activities), and the audience's literacy practices. After Zimbabwe gained independence in 1980, there was an increase in printing and transportation options. The expansion of resources has resulted in a widened literary market. The selected magazines under discussion have provided limited space for creative writing and freelance contributions because they are products of Zimbabwe's material, social, and economic conditions. Kupe (1997) observes that magazines, as

a culture industry in Zimbabwe, are increasingly popular and generate more revenue each year due to their impressive readership. The profitability and aesthetic currency of magazines are affected by various challenges, such as changes in reader preferences, fluctuations in the economy, and shifts in the print media landscape, including digitisation. Nonetheless, I contend that popular magazines provide an important form of literary expression that allows writers to explore complex themes and characters concisely and engagingly.

Building on the importance of popular magazines in Zimbabwe, it is my contention that short fiction in magazines slightly differs from that published in anthologies and other platforms in several aspects, especially related to their periodical nature, editorial direction, thematic variety, readership, and broader distribution channels. In contrast, anthologies and specialised platforms present short fiction in a curated manner guided by a focused thematic approach, catering to readers seeking a deeper exploration of specific literary niches. Notably, it is crucial to recognise that these popular magazines are not entirely dedicated to fiction; instead, they incorporate short stories as a distinctive break from their conventional newsworthy content. The fiction segment in popular magazines functions as a designated space that offers readers an alternative mode of engagement, distinct from the relentless flow of news coverage, political analyses, and factual reporting on current events. Additionally, popular magazines provide a sense of community and connection between writers and readers with similar interests or experiences. Christopher Ouma and Madhu Krishnan (2021, p.193) discuss the role of small magazines in Africa as "living archives of these less visible modes of social production" and "corridors of storytelling." Ouma and Krishnan (2021) further note that small magazines promote literary diversity and provide a platform for emerging writers to share their work. *The Sunday Mail Magazine* is a supplement that used to come with the weekly, *The Sunday Mail* newspaper, founded in 1935.[34] Even after independence, *The Sunday Mail* has remained the biggest state-owned newspaper in Zimbabwe, with a vast readership, high circulation, and pagination. Zimbabwe Newspapers Private Limited, the oldest newspaper publisher and commercial printer, previously known as the Argus Group, owned several state-run newspapers, including the *Rhodesia Herald*, *Bulawayo Chronicle,* and *African Daily News* (Dombo 2017). According to Kupe (2003), *African Parade,* founded in 1953, was the most widely circulated commercially driven popular magazine in Zimbabwe, targeting a mass consumer

[34] In 2002, *The Sunday Mail Magazine*, which was previously published as a newspaper insert or preprint, was compressed into the 'Sunday Leisure' section of *The Sunday Mail Newspaper*.

readership. Over time, the magazine underwent significant transformations, including changes in ownership and the deliberate removal of 'African' from its title. Conversely, Sylvester Dombo (2017) argues that despite the magazine's claim in its inaugural issue of being published by black people, the editorial policy was still controlled by the benefactors of African Newspapers. In 1961, Roy Thomson acquired controlling shares of African Newspapers Limited, making Parade an independent publication under Thomson Publications. [35] This transition marked a significant shift in the magazine's editorial and managerial direction. In 2002, *Parade*, along with other company publications, was bought by Mark Chavunduka, then editor of *The Standard* newspaper. Despite this change in ownership, *Parade* faced severe financial challenges, which caused a bi-monthly reduction in its publication frequency, culminating in only two issues being released that year (*The Standard* 2004). The magazine's reduced frequency reflects a critical juncture in its history, highlighting the fragility of traditional print media in the face of economic adversity and shifting market dynamics. In 2012, Zimbabwe Publishing House and Kenako Media became embroiled in a trademark dispute when they both wanted to relaunch the magazine using the same name (The Herald 2013). But, Kenako Media emerged victorious in the trademark dispute, and one could argue that if Zimbabwe Publishing House had won, the magazine would have continued to publish short fiction. Unfortunately, Kenako Media chose to digitise the magazine and shift its focus solely to lifestyle news, completely abandoning literature.

Moto magazine, initially established in 1959 by the Catholic Church as a monthly tabloid community newspaper and a Christian socio-economic journal, was published by a group of Swiss Catholic missionaries in Gwelo (now Gweru).[36] Despite facing challenges and a subsequent ban by the colonial regime in 1974, it had a significant impact. The magazine's unwavering political stance in favour of social justice, human rights, and political freedom contributed to its banning, yet it managed to maintain a wide distribution network that reached both urban and rural Catholic parishes due to its central location. Andrew Morrison and Alison Love (1996) observed that privately owned publications, such as *Moto* alongside *Parade*, shared a common goal of

[35] The same business model was adopted by Allan Francis Munn, who owned *Prize*, *Look and Listen*/*Radio Post*, *Mahogany* magazines during the 1970s and early 1980s. While these magazines provided a variety of topics, the editorial decisions were often shaped by the interests and sensibilities of their white owners.

[36] The Swiss Missionaries belonged to the Order of the Bethlem Mission Society (SMB) and included a group of Nuns under the Roman Catholic Diocese of the then Gwelo township. Its initial name was the Catholic African Association which was printed by the Catholic Mission Press (now known as Mambo Press). See Creary (1999).

advocating for popular development and holding the government accountable. These publications presented an alternative perspective compared to the state-controlled *Sunday Mail Magazine*, thus promoting good living standards and providing critical analysis. Although privately owned magazines in Zimbabwe typically embrace a focus on popular development and maintain a critical stance, an underlying issue of self-censorship persists among their writers. Self-censorship is likely a response to the political climate and the potential consequences of openly expressing dissenting views. Zimbabwean writers struggle to find a delicate equilibrium between their aspiration to criticise social issues and the imperative to protect themselves. In this context, satire emerges as a powerful tool for writers to convey their frustrations while masking their true sentiments.

Contemporary writers use satire to subtly critique and highlight societal challenges without directly confronting authorities or risking repercussions. Ephraim Vhutuza (2017) contends that the creative utilisation of satire allows writers to effectively traverse the precarious tightrope between criticism and self-preservation, particularly in environments where dissenting voices are frequently met with suppression. Satire allows them to address sensitive topics and challenge prevailing narratives while minimising the risk of direct reprisal. Thus, satire is a powerful tool for writers to express dissent and engage in social commentary while safeguarding their well-being in oppressive or restrictive environments. The challenges Zimbabwean writers face reflect the complexities and limitations within the publishing industry, where the realities of political pressures and potential consequences temper the need to convey important messages. Despite the orientation towards popular development and critical engagement within privately owned magazines, self-censorship and reliance on satire underscore Zimbabwean writers' complicated path to express their frustrations and contribute to public discourse. As a result, the publishing industry in Zimbabwe faced significant challenges during the post-2000 era, marked by the industry's collapse due to nativist politics, market-driven economic structural adjustment policies and hyperinflation.[37]

[37] Nativist politics refers to a political ideology or movement characterised by a strong emphasis on protecting and promoting the interests of the native inhabitants of a country, often to the detriment of perceived outsiders or immigrants. Since independence, the government of Zimbabwe has had many economic stabilisation reforms, indigenous policies and redistributive programmes that were characterised by some controversies, gains and reversals hence reflected the ideological stance of the ruling ZANU-PF party. While these reforms and policies were modelled along the axis of interventionism, neoliberalism and nativism. Their overall effectiveness has been limited, and their implementation has been inconsistent. (For a detailed discussion, see Mlambo (1997); Bond and Manyanya (2002); Moyo (2008) and Musanga (2022).

These economic woes resulted in the closure of numerous publishing companies, forcing the remaining operational ones to make difficult choices. For example, creative writing spaces were frequently removed or truncated, and the focus shifted towards publishing newsworthy content and paid advertisements. During this period, *Moto*, *The Sunday Mail Magazine* and *Parade* faced similar challenges in prioritising short fiction columns. The prevailing circumstances and economic constraints led to a shift away from including creative writing in these publications. In this chapter, I argue that short stories in colonial/post-colonial popular magazines merit in-depth analysis because they represent marginalised voices and portray the looming crisis with a mixture of naivety, buoyancy and humour. In constructing this argument, I underscore the necessity of a more comprehensive understanding of the influence of print cultures. One other thing the chapter does is spotlight the constant challenges faced by emerging writers in Zimbabwe who struggle to access literary avenues and gain a wider readership. Since a limited publishing infrastructure exists, only a few short stories are published. Authors need a polished, relatable, witty, and innovative approach. The broad spectrum of themes and styles in these stories reflects everyday life and underscores the significance of the experiences of marginalised writers and the impact of print cultures.

Textual circles: Borrowings and intertextuality in popular magazines

In this section, I shed light on the migratory nature of stories, particularly how they traverse in a circular fashion, actively seeking out readers and adapting to new cultural milieus. Short stories undergo a metamorphosis throughout this migration process, enabling them to adjust and establish meaningful bonds with readers, contributing to cultural imaginaries and fostering cross-cultural exchange. According to Akinwumi Adesokan (2023), popular literature exhibits distinct characteristics through appropriating and deconstructing familiar elements. This creative approach, characterised by aesthetic disobedience, involves borrowing, sampling, and remixing material from various sources, enabling writers to challenge conventional narratives and generate fresh perspectives. The examined short stories embody a subversive approach that reflects dynamic and evolving literary traditions embracing experimentation, intertextuality, and cultural hybridity. The intertextual borrowings observed in Tashaya Clemence's "I Only Managed to Escape with My Son's Bike" (2000), Mathias Lukungwe's "All for the Belly" (2003), and Munyaradzi Maburutse's "The Party" (2007) indicate modernist tendencies.

I argue that the appropriation and deconstruction of familiar plots, themes, and characterisations work at two levels. Firstly, they enable upcoming writers to create unique and hybrid literary works. Secondly, they reflect a conscious effort by contemporary Zimbabwean writers to engage with the disillusionment of their era, mirroring the motivations that fuelled modernist writers. Simon Gikandi (2006) contends that a correlation exists between the rise of postcolonial creativity and the incorporation of modernism into the literary canon. Gikandi (2006, p.422) further stresses that the explicit emulation of modernist writers by postcolonial writers not only shaped the "language and structure" of their works but also contributed to a departure from traditional literary forms and new and innovative storytelling. Similarly, Mushakavanhu (2020) advances that various Zimbabwean writings contain elements that reincarnate Marechera's experimental style, themes and ideals, paying homage to his artistic vision while exploring similar trajectories. Maburutse (2007) deliberately deconstructs the figure of Marechera, placing him in a rural setting and challenging the stereotype of a "village writer", as noted by Onai Mushava (2021 para. 2). Incorporating Marechera's themes, symbols, and persona in their short stories, Lukungwe (2003) and Maburutse (2007) not only honour his legacy but also contribute to the ongoing exploration of similar themes in contemporary Zimbabwean literature.

Lukungwe subtly alludes to the metaphor of the "house of hunger" (p.24), while Maburutse reappropriates the image of a dreadlocked writer equipped with a typewriter (p.18).[38] This portrayal aligns with Marechera's rebellious spirit, as it challenges conservative norms. Nevertheless, Mushakavanhu (2020) criticises the prevailing representation of Marechera as a homeless wanderer and vagabond, always accompanied by his typewriter. Maburutse's (2007) intentional deconstruction and placement of Marechera in a rural setting challenge the stereotype of a 'village writer' propagated by Marechera himself. Lukungwe's (2003) and Maburutse's (2007) stories reflect the enduring influence of Marechera and allow for a reimagining and reinterpretation of his artistic vision within different contexts. In contrast, Clemence (2000) reappropriates the plot of Alan Paton's (1961) short story, "The Waste Land," featuring an unnamed protagonist with his weekly wages hounded by young thugs after missing the bus. Paton's (1961) short story alludes to the title of Thomas Stearns Eliot's renowned 1922 poem,

[38] This image parallels how Dambudzo Marechera was known for walking around Africa Unity Square in Harare's central business district with his typewriter. See Veit-Wild's (1992) *Dambudzo Marechera: A Source Book on His Life and Work.*

"The Waste Land." It is worth noting that Eliot, Paton, and Marechera wrote during societal upheavals and disillusionment. For Eliot, it was the aftermath of the First World War, Paton in the colonial era, and Marechera was writing before Zimbabwe's independence. The borrowing and remixing of popular modernist texts allow upcoming writers to create unique narratives that challenge established norms. This intentional engagement with modernist literary styles enhances the depth and complexity of their narratives, making them both a continuation of a literary legacy and a unique reflection of contemporary challenges and uncertainties. In essence, the writers in popular magazines seem to be inspired by modernist literature to construct narratives that grapple with societal disillusionment, the rejection of traditional styles, and a quest to capture the fluidity and relativity of contemporary life. Their intertextual borrowings and reimagination of elements from writers such as Marechera, Paton, and Eliot contribute to a dynamic literary tradition that both reflects and reshapes the socio-political realities of the time. Contemporary Zimbabwean writers strategically employ modernist techniques as a creative tool to challenge and subvert readers' expectations and preconceived notions.

Translocal encounters and the pursuit of the good life: Negotiating comfort across geographical boundaries

This section focuses on three short stories: "I Only Managed to Escape with My Son's Bike" (2000) by Tashaya Clemence, "All for the Belly" (2003) by Mathias Lukungwe, and "The Party" (2007) by Munyaradzi Maburutse. These short stories were published in *The Sunday Mail*, *Parade* and *Moto* magazines. Through evocative imagery and universal familiarity, the three writers use sensational titles that provide unique entry points into human nature's physical and primal aspects. The titles of the short stories hint at a central theme related to desire and hunger, symbolising the pursuit of good life, pleasure, sustenance, fulfilment and even comfort. In this section, I explore how characters seek comfort and a sense of belonging in familiar and unfamiliar environments. It examines how these characters negotiate their everyday interactions and connections with people and places from different localities, underlining the negotiation between different sources of comfort and the challenges of adapting to old and new surroundings. Arjun Appadurai's (1996) concept of translocality provides valuable insights when examining the complexities of mobile identities. Translocality, as defined by Appadurai (1996), involves people moving across different geographical locations, which in turn shapes communities and identities beyond the confines of a

single place. The concept recognises the fluidity of identities and how people's experiences and interactions in diverse contexts contribute to their understanding of who they are. Put simply, people's experiences and identities are influenced by their translocal encounters. Through an examination of how characters navigate the challenges of translocal subjectivity, I interrogate the complexities of circular migration and everyday life in peri-rural, rural, and urban areas. Such considerations shed light on how their experiences are assembled, negotiated, and shaped by the places they inhabit and the people they encounter. The concept of translocal subjectivity sheds light on the transformative nature of identity and belonging. Shanthi Robertson (2018, p.542) posits that translocal subjectivity contributes to an enriched understanding of oneself and one's identity. This self-awareness is derived from the experiences of living in diverse places and cultures. In contrast, Conradson and McKay (2007) define translocal subjectivities as multifaceted identities influenced by geographic mobility and ongoing connections to specific places. In other words, translocal identities are informed by a combination of their movements and their continued attachments to particular sites. The concept of translocal subjectivity highlights how globalisation and mobility transform the nature of identity and belonging in the contemporary world. The short stories I analyse here depict how exposure to diverse environments and cultures fosters a deeper self-awareness and a more nuanced perception of one's identity. Through the constant process of engaging with different places and cultures, characters develop a greater appreciation for the complexities and fluidity of their identities, expanding beyond a singular, fixed notion of self.

"All for the Belly" (2003) is set in an unnamed peri-rural area, and Mathias Lukungwe intentionally omits to name the setting to emphasise the ambiguity and ambivalence that characterises liminal spaces. The peri-rural setting is inextricably linked to the concept of liminal spaces, which will be further explored to investigate how peri-urban and peri-rural areas act as transitional zones that serve as spatial and geographical boundaries between rural and urban areas. Homi Bhabha (2012, p.2) views transitional areas as comprising "the sum of the 'parts' of a difference", which facilitates the emergence of alternative social bonds and identities between established categories. Characterised by their liminal nature, these transitional spaces allow individuals and communities to explore and create new social connections and identities that challenge traditional binaries and boundaries. These transitional spaces function as dynamic arenas where hybridity, fluidity, and the negotiation of cultural meanings occur, fostering innovative and transformative social dynamics. Transitional zones operate as a matrix of spatial entanglement,

facilitating the recognition of marginalised subjectivities, identities, and places. The idea of a clear-cut rural-urban divide has been challenged by William Hanna and Judith Hanna (2017), who observe that living in-between, neither entirely in the countryside nor the city, blurs this division. Generally, peri-urban areas can be more or less the same as urban areas, while peri-rural areas are not yet fully urbanised but not entirely rural. This brings to the fore issues of belonging, displacement, alienation, dis/comfort, deprivation and transformation in peri-urban and peri-rural spaces.

One problem with a dualistic and undifferentiated view of space and place is that it can blur and subvert boundaries. This blurring of boundaries between peri-urban and peri-rural spaces calls into question the configuration and typologies used to understand them. David Morley and Kevin Robins (1995, p.75) point to the dynamic relationship between space and boundary, stressing "the complex interplay of deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation." In this context, the placement of boundaries is influenced by various factors such as legal regulations, cultural norms, and personal expectations. Social constructs shape these boundaries, which evolve. Therefore, I argue for a rethinking of space and place in relation to peri-urban and peri-rural areas. Instead of viewing peri-urban and peri-rural areas as transitional zones, they should be recognised as unique spaces with distinct characteristics and complexities. This necessitates a meticulous approach to spatial analysis that acknowledges the fluidity of boundaries and the diverse experiences of their inhabitants.

Lukungwe (2003) intentionally omits the specific setting in "All for the Belly" to create a more universal narrative, thereby enhancing its relevance to a broader audience. It also allows the reader to focus more on the characters and their experiences rather than getting distracted by the details of a specific location. Importantly, the unspecified setting of the story plays a decisive role in shaping the plot and themes. This peri-rural area in Lukungwe's "All for the Belly" (2003) creates a sense of uncertainty and tension, further reinforced by the protagonist's struggle to overcome hardships and limitations to narrate what happens in the urban spaces. Peri-rural areas are located on the outskirts of urban areas, typically consisting of informal settlements, agricultural and industrial land, and undergoing rapid and unplanned urbanisation. Building on Michael Foucault's (1971) theorisation of spaces that are out of place, I argue that, when unspecified and not clearly identified, peri-rural areas can be considered heterotopias. This classification arises from their existence outside the dominant urban space, endowed with distinct features and

regulations. Comparably, Tashaya Clemence's short story, "I Only Managed to Escape with My Son's Bike" (2000), depicts the daily commute of an unnamed protagonist, a farm labourer from Mubaira village. The protagonist begins his daily commute by walking seven kilometres to Mubaira Growth Point in Mhondoro, a peri-rural area, where they board a farm lorry to reach Gwangwadza Farm for work.[39] The protagonist's reliance on a farm lorry for transportation reflects the limited options available for commuting between peri-rural and urban areas. This should be seen as a consequence of limited infrastructure and transportation services in peri-rural and rural areas, forcing characters to rely on alternative means of transportation, such as farm lorries. Although these short stories explore the theme of migration, they deliberately choose not to address the profound displacement caused by electoral violence and the chaotic land seizures after 2000.[40] Such an omission is significant because it misses the full extent of the disruptions and hardships experienced by those affected. I argue that glossing over these important issues provides an incomplete portrayal of the migration experience and neglects the broader socio-political context that has profoundly shaped it.

Munyaradzi Maburutse's (2007) narrative, "The Party", unfolds as a sarcastic tale centred on the funeral of Mr. Moyo, a city dweller who had arranged to be buried in his rural village. The narrative sheds light on the funeral proceedings where mourners treat the occasion as a celebratory event akin to a party instead of adhering to traditional funeral rites and solemnity. The story captures the absurdity in the mourners' behaviour, illustrating their focus on food and comfort and their apparent disregard for the customary rituals associated with such solemn occasions. The satirical tone of the narrative serves to critique the inversion of the expected funeral decorum into a festivity, creating a thought-provoking commentary on cultural dynamics, societal expectations, and the intersection of urban and rural influences.

Peri-rural and peri-urban areas are transitory and invaginated spaces that can also be considered outliers because they do not fit neatly into urban or rural categories. Yet, they have the potential to develop further and bridge the gap between rural and urban areas, ultimately becoming fully integrated into urban areas due to the multifunctionality of land use. It is in peri-urban and

[39] According to Nhede (2013), the notion of "growth points" in Zimbabwe encapsulates settlements, regardless of their rural or urban classification, that exhibits both obscurity and potential. As small service centres, they lay the foundation for commercial growth, with the possibility of expanding into larger towns and even evolving into cities.

[40] These themes are powerfully depicted in Christopher Mlalazi's *Dancing with Life: Tales from the Township* (2008) and Lawrence Hoba's *The Trek and Other Stories* (2009).

peri-rural areas where informal and formal land uses coexist. The chapter also considers peri-urban and peri-rural areas as hybridised spaces located on the outskirts of the city and the countryside. Frantz Fanon (1968, p.227) designates hybridised spaces as a "zone of occult instability where people dwell," enhancing our understanding of perceptions and experiences of lived spaces and temporalities that undergird individual subject positionalities. The zone of occult instability was used by Fanon (1968) as a metaphor for discordant development. I use this concept to highlight how the peri-urban/peri-rural areas develop simultaneously in different directions and intervals. Muchaparara Musemwa (2006) opines that open spaces near the city were converted into peri-urban areas. Therefore, peri-urban and peri-rural areas are semi-developed areas that possess a transformative potential and lie at the crossroads between centre and periphery, cities and rural areas and collective and individual migratory practices and experiences.

In "I Only Managed to Escape with My Son's Bike" (2000), the growth point serves as a focal point for highlighting the significance of peri-rural areas in articulating everyday struggles, development imbalances, and identity formations. The narrative specifically centres on the protagonist's experience during the month of November when he misses the farm lorry and is forced to take the last evening bus, exposing him to vulnerabilities and risks associated with commuting (p.10). During his journey back home, the protagonist faces a notorious group of young thugs known as "butchers" (p.10). These 'butchers' gained notoriety for their involvement in ritual killings and the illicit trade of body parts to urban businessmen, who used these body parts to attract customers. I will explore this further in Chapter 4 to demonstrate how such rituals are connected to occult practices. "I Only Managed to Escape with My Son's Bike" suggests that this encounter with the four young thugs highlights the alarming depths of criminal activities in these interstitial spaces. The presence of such criminal elements serves as a reminder of the vulnerabilities and potential violence that can be present in these translocal encounters. "I Only Managed to Escape with My Son's Bike" effectively portrays the grim reality of people living or moving between peri-rural and urban areas. This translocal encounter with the young thugs accentuates the potential dangers people face while travelling between urban areas and peri-rural or rural areas. It sheds light on the risks of crime and violence that farm labourers and villagers confront along the transit route.

"I Only Managed to Escape with My Son's Bike" intertwines the concept of translocal encounters and the pursuit of comfort, providing a thought-provoking exploration of the

protagonist's journey. In his pursuit of comfort, the protagonist's actions hold profound meaning. It is noteworthy that the protagonist, despite lacking a bank account, had requested the bank manager to withhold some of his wages over 24 months (p.10). Lloyd Sachikonye (2005) asserts that farm workers in Zimbabwe occupy the lowest rung of the socio-economic hierarchy. This marginalised position subjects them to various disadvantages, including restricted access to essential resources, diminished bargaining power, and generally meagre wages. The protagonist's decision to purchase a BMX bicycle for his son, Paidamoyo, and his diligent efforts in shopping for groceries exemplify his unwavering commitment to providing for his family and improving their living conditions (p.10). The decision to purchase a bicycle for his son goes beyond acquiring a material possession. Instead, it encapsulates the principles of modern parenting, placing a premium on comfort and opportunities for personal growth in children. Through the provision of a bicycle, the protagonist seeks to improve his son's comfort and mobility and elevate their overall quality of life. It should also be understood as part of a larger spatial continuum where interactions and influences occur in multiple directions.

The protagonist embraces modernity and its values, creating an environment that supports the well-being and development of his family. This further highlights the precariousness of his situation and the immense challenges he encounters in striving to support his family. The narrative takes a dramatic turn when the protagonist arrives at his bus stop late in the evening and is ensnared in a perilous situation. The protagonist finds himself running and seeking refuge in a gully that serves as a grisly dumping ground for the 'butchers,' where skulls and other remains of their victims lay scattered. (p.10). Utilising the newly acquired BMX bicycle, he bravely confronts the thugs, wielding it as a weapon to defend himself. Amidst the chaos, the protagonist tragically loses his weekly wages and the groceries, further highlighting his challenges and the vulnerability of his circumstances.

Like the previous story, the lack of specificity in the setting allows the story not to be tied to a particular place or time. In Lukungwe's short story "All for the Belly" (2003), the theme of vulnerability is prominently explored. The narrative opens with the introspective musings of the fourteen-year-old narrator, who vividly recalls the act of "dragging the recent past by the collar into the limelight" (p.24). Lukungwe (2003) underscores the pivotal role of memory in shaping the narrator's perception of self and the surrounding world by personifying the past, thereby actively constructing reality. As a literary device, personification stresses the interconnectedness

of time and personal growth. Using the first-person perspective enables the reader to gain insight into the thoughts and experiences of a young boy living in a peri-rural setting. Gregory Currie (2010, p.123) notes that "character-focused narration" provides a basis for understanding characterisation, plot development, and the author's intentions. Similarly, Lukungwe's short story can be seen as a character-centred narration intentionally crafted to expose the hardships of growing up in a peri-rural area where poverty and limited opportunities are the norm. The boy narrator laments how boredom and abject poverty drove his sister, Creatia, to engage in affairs with older men from an unidentified city. This seems to suggest that poverty and despair can push characters to take desperate measures to survive, but these measures have dire consequences. The story's themes of poverty, desperation, and the search for a better life are universal and relatable to readers from various backgrounds. Lukungwe's (2003) use of personification, setting, and themes makes the story a thought-provoking and engaging read.

In "All for the Belly", Lukungwe (2003) employs a deliberate technique of omitting the characters' names, except for the narrator's sister, Creatia. This technique not only centralises the narrative around Creatia's actions but also serves as a literary device to convey the impact of her actions on the family. Using a nameless narrator and characters adds an element of innocence, vulnerability, and mystery and reinforces the impact of poverty on the most vulnerable members of society. The style of using nameless characters and a child's point of view was also employed by Charles Mungoshi in his 1972 short story anthology, *Coming of the Dry Season*, to register familial conflict. Through narrated monologues, the reader is given insight into Creatia's character, describing her as "peacock brilliant yet mischievously intelligent," who was expelled from school due to her juvenile inclination for romantic dalliances. The depiction of Creatia's behaviour as "immature tastes for flirtatious adventures" (p.24) highlights societal expectations of proper behaviour and decorum. The expositional quality of the story arouses the reader's interest as the young narrator conveys his disappointment with his sister's expulsion and her numerous boyfriends. The family's disappointment in her is seen as a reflection of their own sense of shame and failure. The shame felt by the family is further compounded by the disparaging remarks of neighbours and close relatives, a clear indication of how societal norms and expectations shape one's perception of self-worth. Both stories depict characters in rural and peri-rural areas who possess a strong sense of community and enjoy close-knit relationships with their neighbours.

"All for the Belly" (2003) portrays the impact of Creatia's actions on family dynamics and the consequences of living in peri-rural spaces where the community closely scrutinises one's actions. Even though Creatia is no longer interested in school, the young narrator wishes she could live up to her potential by relentlessly striving to escape the gnawing pangs of hunger and poverty through education. Education is seen as a way out that is both enabling and ennobling. Creatia's internalised freedom, choices, and early sexual experimentation as a schoolgirl affected the family to the extent that they could not muster enough strength and courage to reprimand her. Using a child narrator provides a unique perspective, capturing the innocence of youth and the confusion that comes with witnessing familial conflict. The discomfort of the narrator recounting his sister's sexual escapades and the family's poverty is a recurring theme in the story. The childnarrator struggles to come to terms with the harsh realities of life in the peri-rural area, where poverty and societal expectations weigh heavily on the family's well-being. This is evident when he expresses his disappointment in Creatia's actions, which he perceives as disgracing the family (p.24). At the same time, he is also acutely aware of his vulnerability and dependence on the adults around him. The author's use of a child narrator allows him to explore the impact of poverty and societal expectations on the younger generation. The child narrator's innocence and naivety give a unique perspective on the hardships faced by the family while pointing out the role of education and social mobility in breaking the cycle of poverty.

Through the child narrator's eyes, "All for the Belly" (2003) portrays the interplay between individual agency and social structures, stressing the challenges faced by those caught in between. As part of this exploration, following Appadurai (1996, p.204). I also consider how these in-between spaces signify sites of place-making and create "situated communities" that are adaptive and have "potential for social reproduction." When deconstructed, these 'situated communities' can be taken as products of a dis/continuum of comfort. Jeanette Manjengwa, Sara Feresu and Admos Chimhowu (2012) use terms such as well-being and poverty to discuss the discomfort-comfort continuum. Again, Manjengwa, Feresu and Chimhowu (2012, p.1) observe that "[w]ellbeing and poverty are closely linked, as illustrated by the chiShona saying: rugare tange nhamo, which means that prosperity only comes after hardships." The discomfort of narrating such hardships is also evident in the narrator's reluctance to share his own dreams and aspirations for fear of being judged or ridiculed (p.24). The narration of the family's struggles underscores poverty, discomfort, and societal expectations in the peri-rural setting. Therefore, the notion of

comfort is transient and operates on multiple levels that encompass the temporal, spatial, physical, emotional and mental aspects.

The young narrator's family were full of high hopes and exalted opinion that Creatia's success in education would either alleviate or end their poverty. Instead, their hopes are dashed, leading to the fulfilment of their deepest fears, as revealed by the tenor of the narrator's musings:

> You became the jigsaw that never fitted their puzzle. The authorities finally threw you out. My heart sank never to rise again. The book, Creatia. The book as the only gate to success for us of the hoe and woe heritage. I was still thinking about books, you know. Books. I wanted you to read so as to flee from that house of hunger. To read and escape the glaring poverty that was the living proof our daily tribulations. (p.24)

Disillusionment is also another theme that is explored through the narrator's perspective. The above passage illustrates the family's desperation and belief in education as a way out of poverty. The child narrator's use of figurative language, such as "jigsaw that never fitted their puzzle," amplifies the sense of hopelessness and frustration that the family feels (p.24). The excerpt also highlights the role of education in breaking the cycle of poverty. The narrator's desire for Creatia to read and escape poverty through education underscores the family's belief in the transformative power of education.[41] But Creatia's expulsion from school shatters their hopes and leaves them in despair. The extract also reveals the themes of poverty, education, family dynamics and societal expectations. The child narrator and his family's aspirations for a better life through education are palpable. The term "hoe and woe heritage" underscores the generational poverty that has plagued the family (p.24). The reader sees that education is viewed as a means to overcome the limitations of poverty and the hopelessness it engenders.

The arrival of Creatia with groceries from the city provides temporary relief from the family's poverty and famine. The young narrator could not question the decisions of his parents and did not want to disrupt their fantasy of upward mobility:

> Father and mother would say nothing. Your new friends were their saints-but from hell! Otherwise I had no designs on your choices, on your virtues. His senses numbed by the incessant

[41] The theme of education as a form of empowerment is also discussed in many Zimbabwen novels. See for exampleTsitsi Dangarembga's novel *Nervous Conditions* (1988)

> flow of beer, her verbal sallies pacified by the regular flow of dollars, mother and father said nothing. They had developed an ostrich mentality. (p.24)

The narrator's parents' 'ostrich mentality' is driven by their desire for comfort, even at the cost of their values and principles. Besides, the young narrator's parents are depicted as numbed by beer and pacified by the regular flow of dollars, suggesting that their quest for comfort has blinded them to the reality of their daughter's actions. The young narrator laments how poverty compels people to make desperate decisions in dire circumstances, exposing the moral implications and the resulting moral decay. His reluctance to question his parents' decisions reflects a broader cultural tendency to respect authority figures, particularly within the family structure. This reluctance is compounded by his desire not to disrupt his parents' fantasy of upward mobility, a common aspiration among impoverished families. The fact that Creatia can provide groceries and other luxuries for the family after engaging in transactional sex is seen as more important than the moral implications of her actions.[42]

"All for the Belly" (2003) provides a vivid portrayal of poverty and its impact on familial relationships, gender roles, and cultural norms. The young narrator's indignation towards his parents' behaviour reveals his own values and principles. He is critical of their complacency to turn a blind eye to Creatia's behaviour, as he sees it as compromising their family's moral standing. The young narrator's desire for upward mobility is different from his sister's, as he believes education is the key to escaping poverty rather than resorting to transactional sex. His judgment of his sister's behaviour reflects his moral compass, contrasting with his parents' willingness to compromise their values for material gain. The child narrator's resentment towards his parents' silence and tacit approval of Creatia's behaviour reflects the larger societal attitudes towards transactional sex and the desperation caused by poverty. The narrator's frustration is exemplified when he states:

[42] I use the term, transactional sex to refer to a sexual exchange or activity where one party provides sexual services in return for material goods, money, favours and other forms of compensation. It involves a transactional element where the exchange of sex is linked to obtaining something of value, creating a power dynamic that may have implications for the well-being and agency of the individuals involved. However, Suzanne Leclerc-Madlala (2003) argues that not all forms of transactional sex are engaged in for either straight commercial or survival reasons.

> It was not until the shame became too much for her to bear that she decided to leave. It was the height of folly for her to leave like that, but it was not surprising. There was nothing left for her at home." (p.25)

The narrator's tone suggests that Creatia's departure was not just a result of her own actions but also a consequence of the family's failure to address the root cause of their poverty. It can also be interpreted as a reflection of the difficult economic circumstances many families face in Zimbabwe. The role of the narrator's parents in the story is important, even though they are not central characters. Despite their peripheral role in the story, the child narrator's parents exert a significant influence through his musings on their poverty and the impact of Creatia's actions on the family's reputation. The parents are depicted as being trapped in a cycle of poverty, and their hopes and dreams for their children are tied to the pursuit of education to escape their circumstances. The parents' inability to control Creatia's behaviour indicates their powerlessness in the face of their own circumstances. Thus, their silence in the story highlights the cyclical nature of poverty and how it can limit opportunities, control lives and demonstrate submission and marginalisation.

The silence also conveys emotions that are too difficult to express in words. It also highlights the power dynamics between characters, as silence can be a way of exerting control or demonstrating submission. Building upon Foucault's (1972, p.110) assertion that the unsaid holds the potential to challenge the said, it becomes evident that silence can be a powerful tool for resistance and subversion. When discussing the theorisation of silences, Bakhtin (1987, p.341) introduces the concept of "heteroglossia," which sheds light on how texts convey their "speech acts" in various ways. Bakhtin (1987) identifies three perspectives that shape the meaning of a text: the author's speech, the characters' speech, and the narrator's speech. These perspectives collectively contribute to the interpretation and understanding of the text. Similarly, Nordstrom (1997, p.84) highlights the protective nature of silence, allowing people to safeguard their identities and well-being. Silence can serve as a means of self-protection, enabling characters to withhold information or refrain from speaking about sensitive or potentially harmful topics. Acknowledging the power dynamics within silence, I see its potential as a powerful form of resistance that can challenge cultural norms. The 'unsaid', with its ability to question and disrupt established truths, prompts us to interrogate the limitations of language and explore how silence

can be harnessed as a form of agency. The young narrator's indignation at his parents' silence reflects a conflict between traditional values and the economic realities of life.

Additionally, the deliberate use of silence in literature can draw the reader's attention to the gaps or absences in the text, prompting them to fill in the missing pieces with their own interpretations and meanings. This conflict highlights the ethical and moral issues that arise in situations of extreme poverty and scarcity, where people are forced to make difficult choices to survive. What is particularly troubling is the vulnerability and exploitation that generally accompanies transactional relationships, especially for young women in peri-rural and rural areas. The precarious financial situation of Creatia's parents has pushed them to seek support from the strange visitors, a condition which Judith Butler (2004, p.xii) describes as "fundamental dependency on anonymous others." This dependency underscores how economic vulnerability can constrain one's agency, leading characters to rely on strangers and outsiders to secure their most basic needs. In her research on everyday forms of conviviality, Tina Steiner (2021, p.19) insightfully notes that a communitarian understanding of how people willingly trade their comfort when they receive guests is shaped by "everyday practices of kindness, hospitality, courtesy, and respect." The inclination to sacrifice their comfort for the sake of hosting guests highlights how social norms and cultural values shape how people negotiate the challenges that arise from unexpected translocal encounters. The vulnerability and exploitation that underpin the practices of transactional sex among young rural women are glaringly evident in the case of Creatia's parents, who, through their silence and complicity, enable their daughter's sexual exploitation. Their passive acceptance of Creatia using their bedroom not only reflects a disturbing tacit endorsement of her exploitation but also positions them not as bystanders but as more predatory than the men with whom Creatia engages in sexual relations. Their failure to intervene or challenge the situation further entrenches the cycle of abuse and exploitation within their own household.

"All for the Belly" (2003) raises existential questions about the meaning of life and the harsh realities the marginalised face. The child narrator contemplates life's purpose, as expressed through the ending and the rhetorical question, "Is this then all there is to it? To life? All for the Belly?" (p.24). The rhetorical question evokes a profound sense of disillusionment, prompting a contemplation of meaning in the face of overwhelming suffering. In comparison, "The Party" (2007) portrays the imminent hunger caused by a drought, wherein funeral attendees suppress their frustration towards the minister and instead prioritise indulging in the free food, habitually

resorting to second helpings or secretly storing food for later consumption. For this reason, it is important to acknowledge that silence can have both empowering and disempowering effects. On one hand, silence can operate as a protective barrier, shielding vulnerable people from potential harm or reprisals. It can create a sense of safety, allowing marginalised people to navigate their daily lives without drawing attention to themselves or their vulnerabilities. This silence, in a way, becomes a tool for self-preservation. On the other hand, silence can perpetuate power imbalances and contribute to the suppression of marginalised voices. It can reinforce existing inequalities and hinder progress towards social justice. Marginalised people feel compelled to remain silent due to fear of repercussions or the belief that their voices will not be heard or valued. This silence, enforced or imposed upon them, limits their agency and stifles their ability to express themselves and advocate for their rights.

The first-person narration in "All for the Belly" immerses the reader in the narrator's emotional state and provides a personal perspective on poverty. The narrator's thoughts and feelings reflect not only their everyday experiences but also a representation of the struggles faced by many families living in poverty. For example, Lukungwe's (2003) use of imagery and symbolism, such as the "house of hunger" (p.24), underscores the physical and emotional toll that poverty takes on individuals and families. The reader is left with a sense of the profound impact that poverty has on the narrator's family and the challenges they face in trying to overcome it. The narrator's musings reveal a deep-seated fear of remaining trapped in poverty and a hope for escape through education. The child narrator vividly recounts how Creatia would frequently be absent from their peri-rural home, returning at odd hours accompanied by strangers in luxury cars (p.24). The description of one of the strangers as a "fat elderly one" driving a BMW highlights a clear contrast in social and economic status. Fascinated by comfort and luxury, Creatia turns to engaging in transactional sex with sugar daddies from the city to escape poverty. Barthelemy Kuate-Defo's (2004) discussion of transactional sex in rural areas calls attention to the power imbalances based on age, male economic power, and social status. Rural girls are commonly targeted by older and wealthier men from urban areas who entice them with gifts, money and favours in return for engaging in sexual relationships.

The issues surrounding transactional sex, power dynamics and peri-rural-urban migration highlight how poverty contributes to these situations. Potts (2010) asserts that circular migration between rural and urban areas in Zimbabwe remains indispensable and adaptable as a response to

adverse livelihood changes. Peri-rural-urban migration reveals how interpretations of comfort are influenced. The young narrator depicts how everything would leap alive with her sister's arrival from the city (p.24). Elizabeth Tutton and Kate Seers (2003) observe that the interpretations of comfort change over time, place and from person to person. In other words, the meanings of comfort are subjective and vary accordingly. Notably, the pursuit of comfort is motivated by an intrinsic and extrinsic ascending need for a suitable livelihood, freedom, physical and mental satisfaction, and a sense of contentment. For instance, Creatia returned with "some meat, soap and cooking oil" (p.24). The parents were compelled not to say anything because Creatia was saving the whole family from the slough of pauperism and starvation. The spotlighting of poverty and its impact on family dynamics in Zimbabwean literature is not unique to Lukungwe's (2003) work, as it reflects the broader socio-economic issues that have plagued the country for decades. "All for the Belly" (2003) shows the dynamics of poverty and survival strategies, particularly in the context of circular migration between peri-rural and urban areas in Zimbabwe.

The vulnerability of rural and peri-rural girls stems from a lack of adequate access to education and economic opportunities, leaving young girls with limited options for improving their circumstances. Economic disadvantage makes young girls susceptible to the allure of financial support provided by older, wealthier men. Secondly, rural communities tend to have stronger traditional and cultural norms, which can perpetuate gender inequalities and reinforce power imbalances. These imbalances make it easier for older men to exert control over young girls and manipulate them into engaging in transactional sex. Additionally, the lack of comprehensive sex education and limited awareness about reproductive health in rural areas further compounds the vulnerability of adolescent girls, leaving them ill-equipped to negotiate safe and consensual relationships. Tsitsi Masvawure (2010, p.858) contends that transactional sex involves exchanges beyond a simple sex-for-money arrangement, requiring a deeper understanding beyond the dichotomy of sex and money. In comparison, Ann Swidler and Susan Watkins (2007) fail to address the power dynamics and potential exploitation present in transactional sex, particularly in rural areas where girls and young women are at greater risk due to their lower social status and economic power. I argue that Creatia can be read as a "good time girl" open to casual relationships, socialising and having a good time without committing to serious or long-term romantic involvements. Dina Ligaga (2020, p.122) offers a critique of the portrayal of the "good time girl" figure in African popular culture, that it is exploited as a cautionary tale rather than addressing the

physical harm experienced by young women and the systemic issues of poverty, inequality, and limited opportunities. Ligaga's (2020) critique highlights the need to shift the narrative and focus on the underlying structural challenges that contribute to the vulnerability of these women.

The foregoing discussion highlights that the focus on the cautionary tale surrounding transactional sex tends to disempower and marginalise young women. Transactional relationships generally involve imbalanced power dynamics, with older and wealthier people exerting control over the young and economically disadvantaged (Leclerc-Madlala, 2003; Ligaga, 2020). Similarly, Oliver Nyambi (2014) highlights that women face amplified vulnerability due to gender-based factors as a result of the social, economic, and political challenges during the post-2000 period. The intergenerational and class dynamic is starkly illustrated when the fat elderly man abandons Creatia after becoming pregnant. In response, she resorts to smashing the windscreen of his BMW, further exacerbating the situation. The consequences of this act are brutal, as the narrator and their family endure physical attacks from Creatia's lover. The father suffers visual impairment, and the mother tragically succumbs to internal injuries (p.24). The callousness displayed by those responsible for the narrator's condition is evident in how the child narrator and his parents are left for dead by the roadside. To compound their suffering, the magistrate forces the family to auction off their assets, including a cow, three goats, four chickens, and an old bicycle, to cover the cost of repairing the windscreen.

Munyaradzi Maburutse's (2007) short story "The Party" provides a compelling glimpse into a funeral portrayed as a grand occasion in a rural village, highlighting the intersection of tradition and social performance. Through its depiction of the funeral, the story explores various themes such as social dynamics, human behaviour, the influence of modernity, and the contrast between appearances and reality. The narrative viewpoint in the story is observational and reinforces the stark contrast between the "carnival" atmosphere of the funeral and the underlying hunger and starvation (p.18). The narrator observes the extravagant preparations for the funeral, such as "the tents", "food", and "drinks", and the presence of a catering team (p.18). The detached viewpoint allows readers to view the events objectively, enabling them to see the situation's ironic and sometimes absurd aspects and the attendees' behaviour. The Moyo family's decision to bury their loved one in a rural village is a deeply personal and culturally influenced choice that holds profound significance. Despite associating urban areas with modernity, convenience, and a fast-

paced lifestyle, it piques curiosity and invites further understanding of the motivations behind their choice.

The preference for rural burials can be attributed to several factors, including a desire to honour ancestral roots, cultural beliefs, the availability of space, and the need for peace and privacy during the grieving process. Beacon Mbiba (2010: p.156) highlights the challenges faced by many city dwellers in Zimbabwe who struggle to find suitable burial spaces in overcrowded urban cemeteries. Similarly, Terence Ranger (2004, p.112) aptly describes urban and generic burial spaces managed by local authorities or municipalities as standardised, impersonal and "soulless", stressing the potential loss of cultural identity associated with such locations. In contrast, rural villages hold a special place in the cultural fabric of communities, where funerals and burials assume heightened significance. Although the Moyo family would make infrequent visits throughout the year, the funeral became a compelling reason for them to reconnect with their rural community and fulfil their father's dying wish. Being buried among one's people carries both emotional and symbolic importance. It signifies a continuation of the bond with family and ancestors, fostering a sense of unity and continuity across generations. The idyllic return to one's place of birth and ancestral homeland is considered significant to one's identity. Ranka Primorac (2006, p.128) states that returning to the "spatio-temporal point of origin" allows people to reconnect with their original cultural, geographical, or temporal roots. The underlying assumption is that by returning to their rural homelands, people can reclaim a sense of connection that has been lost or compromised due to the impacts of modernity, cultural assimilation, and globalisation. Again, it is important to note that when people choose to be buried in rural areas, concerns arise regarding their children's ability to tend to their graves and maintain a connection to their ancestral heritage. Despite these concerns, the concept of translocality highlights that characters are influenced by multiple cultures, spaces, and times, illustrating the fluid nature of human experiences and identities.

The physical and temporal location associated with one's cultural or personal heritage can alleviate some grief and provide a sense of calm and comfort during a challenging time. Jennifer Beningfield (2006) demonstrates that land, rather than being possessed or controlled by people, wields a dominant influence over people due to its environmental or cultural significance. Beningfield's (2006) perspective implies that the power dynamics between humans and land are asymmetrical. Rather than humans controlling the land, the land exerts control over them. The

inversion of the relationship between land and people challenges the traditional concept of land ownership and accentuates the influential power of land based on its location or characteristics. How land shapes human lives, both in practical and symbolic terms, can be understood as shaping their identities and determining their actions and behaviours. Mbiba (2010) notes that many Zimbabweans living in the city maintain a strong attachment to rural localities as a place where they belong. Rural land holds deep cultural, historical, or spiritual significance, and people feel a strong attachment or sense of belonging (Mbiba, 2010). Rural areas are considered sacred or ideal locations for the final resting place of a loved one.

The Moyo family finds solace and a sense of fulfilment by upholding their cultural beliefs and customs, which include honouring their traditions and meeting their cultural obligations. Lawrence Vambe's quasi-autobiography, *From Rhodesia to Zimbabwe* (1976), depicts the profound significance of Chishawasha, a rural homeland within his community. The Chishawasha area is a sacred burial ground for his ancestors, who assume a vital role as guardians in the lives of the present generation (Vambe,1976). Supporting this perspective, Rino Zhuwarara (2001, p.12) highlights that the land is regarded as the dwelling place of ancestral spirits among African societies, particularly the Shona people. This belief signifies that the Shona people consider their ancestors' spirits to reside within the land. Similarly, Angeline Madongonda and Enna Gudhlanga (2019) assert that the Shona people share a profound connection with the land, symbolised by the burial of the umbilical cord in the ground shortly after a child's birth. Thabisani Ndlovu (2010) presents a cogent argument, asserting that the inclination towards burying deceased people in rural homes serves to fulfil a cycle of belonging that commences with the burial of the child's umbilical cord. Additionally, Ndlovu (2010) astutely observes that even in urban areas, people persist in the tradition of transporting a child's umbilical cord to their rural home for burial. This practice signifies a profound connection to ancestral roots and demonstrates a timeless sense of belonging that transcends the confines of contemporary life.

The reciprocal relationship between people and their land signifies the physical attachment between them and their spiritual and cultural heritage. The symbolism associated with being laid to rest where one's ancestors resided fosters a sense of belonging and allows the spirits of the deceased to find peace and continue to watch over their descendants in a familiar and sacred environment (Gombe 2010; Elsener and Kollbrunner 2001). Beningfield (2006, p.4) echoes this sentiment and asserts that death represents a reclamation of the body, returning it to its rightful

place in the natural cycle of life. When a person passes away, their physical body returns to its place of origin, reaffirming the significance of being laid to rest in one's ancestral land. Therefore, the cultural significance of a rural burial can further reinforce the subservient relationship between people and land, as it becomes intertwined with their personal and collective identities.

The extravagant event, with its abundance of food, drinks, and entertainment, provides comfort for both the Moyo family and the attendees. The observation made by the dreadlocked young man that this particular funeral was deemed "proper" compared to the typical burials witnessed in the village holds a poignant meaning (p.18). The comment carries significance as it implies a noticeable difference between this funeral and the usual burials experienced in the village. Even so, the story also implies that the reasons for attending the event are not solely celebratory. It is noteworthy that a funeral, whether in an urban or rural setting, provides an opportunity for translocal encounters, where people from different backgrounds and social classes come together to pay their last respects. Umali Saidi (2017) contends that death is a shared and communal experience that unifies people in the face of a common fate. The different reasons for attending the funeral highlight the dynamics of rural-rural and urban-rural migration and the potential motivations behind attending such gatherings. Some attendees were there for different agendas, taking advantage of the free food provided due to the ravaging drought.

Excessive drinking and celebratory behaviour are depicted as attempts to find solace and escape from the harsh realities of life (p.18). Nevertheless, this search for comfort is presented with irony and critique, as it becomes a spectacle rather than a genuine source of solace. Through its portrayal of behaviour and cultural dynamics, Maburutse's story raises questions about the way people handle grief and find comfort. The underlying challenges faced by the community provide a commentary on the societal dynamics of communal gatherings. The funeral provided a source of comfort and solace for the Moyo family which allowed them an opportunity to provide a meaningful send-off for their father (p.18). The family desires a large gathering where they can come together to mourn and share in the grieving process. On the other hand, the villagers do not even know the deceased and are drawn to the funeral primarily due to the prospect of food. The contrast between the motivations of the family and the villagers introduces a unique dynamic within the narrative. This duality in motivations adds depth to the portrayal of the funeral, reinforcing the intersecting elements of grief, communal dynamics, and the characters' socio-

economic realities. Therefore, the funeral becomes a focal point where various needs and desires converge.

Maburutse's "The Party" (2007) utilises a straightforward plot structure, which primarily explores the themes of modernity and tradition. According to Ranger (2004, p.111), the urban-rural dichotomy is characterised by the belief that the countryside is rich in cultural traditions, while townships lack tradition and exhibit a sense of disconnection. Again, the interplay between modernity and tradition prompts inquiries regarding the advantages and disadvantages associated with each. Hence, why Maburutse chooses to focus more on the extravagant party-like atmosphere rather than the mourning process. One interesting aspect that highlights the theme is the description of women from towns sitting in their cars and reapplying their makeup, suggesting a desire to present themselves in a polished and glamorous manner (p.18). It reveals the pressure and expectation for women to conform to societal beauty standards, even in informal settings. Similarly, the image of husbands adjusting their neckties and tapping their legs to soft music from their car radios reflects the expectations and behaviours associated with city life (p.18). The focus on outward appearance for both men and women can be seen as an expression of the importance placed on appearance and social status despite being at a rural funeral. It also demonstrates that men and women from the city share a desire to be comfortable, sophisticated and well-groomed.

In rural areas, expressing grief through wailing, singing of dirges, and other forms of lamentation is common. These rituals are believed to honour the deceased and guide their spirit to the afterlife (Zhuwarara, 2001). This highlights a clash between modern and traditional mourning practices. The subdued reactions by the villagers, who observed people from the city "sniffing in a most civilised manner" (p.18), suggest a departure from traditional expressions of grief. In essence, Maburutse crafts a narrative where the characters' behaviours and reactions indicate the tension between evolving modern values and the traditional customs ingrained in village culture. The clash is palpable in the juxtaposition of expressions of grief, and societal norms, contributing to a thought-provoking exploration of cultural dynamics.

"The Party" also explores the theme of power and authority, shedding light on the esteemed position of the Moyo family and their ability to forge meaningful connections with people from diverse backgrounds. The story unfolds with the arrival of a government minister flanked by a news crew equipped with television cameras, sparking excitement and frenzy among the attendees (p. 18). In their eagerness to greet the minister and capture the cameras' attention, people scramble

and showcase signs of affluence and influence despite the looming drought and soaring inflation. For instance, the attendance by the minister and the significant number of urban guests underscores the Moyo family's influential network. The minister's presence could be another reason for the abundance of food and alcohol at the funeral. The family might have also needed to flaunt their wealth to avoid embarrassment. The minister's glowing speech and the absence of loud weeping and wailing create an atmosphere of detachment from the authentic mourning process (p.18). Additionally, the focus on superficial appearances, particularly how women are dabbing their eyes with handkerchiefs to avoid smudging their makeup while men remain unmoved with bloodshot eyes hidden behind dark sunglasses, further reinforces this sense of detachment (p.18). The villagers, observing this behaviour, are impressed by the perceived propriety of the funeral. The stark contrast in cultural practices, norms and societal expectations raises pertinent questions regarding the performative nature of mourning and the pressure to conform to certain behaviours and appearances.

The three stories analysed in this section powerfully illustrate the convergence of translocal encounters and the pursuit of comfort. They highlight the harsh realities faced by characters who stay and travel between peri-rural/rural and urban areas, capturing their struggles, risks, and sacrifices in their quest for a better life. The characters in these stories experience different losses due to the fragility of their circumstances. At the same time, their experiences also showcase their resilience and determination in adversity. These characters demonstrate the strength and drive to overcome challenges and pursue a better life, illustrating the transformative power of translocal encounters.

Embracing urban ties: Weekend commuting as an escape from rurality

The short stories "My Cold and Rigid Wife" by Nhamo Muchagumisa (2002), "The Perfect Solution" by Munyaradzi Maburutse (2004), and "If You Were in My Shoes" (2007) by Rugare Mareva, published in *Moto*, *The Sunday Mail Magazine* and *Parade* magazines, revolve around the experiences of secondary school teachers employed in rural schools who associate living in rural areas with backwardness and a static lifestyle. Such stereotypes typically project rural communities as isolated, traditional and resistant to change, while urban areas are seen as dynamic and progressive. This depiction of rurality aligns with a long-standing stereotype in Zimbabwean

popular literature (Pfalzgraf 2021).[43] Admittedly, such stereotypes oversimplify the complex migratory experiences within rural areas and fail to acknowledge the interconnectedness of urban and rural dynamics. Likewise, Blair Rutherford (2016) challenges the simplistic and binary perspective commonly used to understand the relationship between urban and rural areas. Rutherford (2001, p.3) further notes that rural Zimbabwe has been conceptualised as a "dualistic space" characterised by dividing land into commercial farms and communal lands. Similarly, Samuel Ravengai (2013, p.381) critiques how the reimagined and dichotomised urban/rural space is portrayed as "making inroads into the rural terrain and the rural hinterland is encroaching into the city." Such a reductive and dualistic representation of rural and urban spaces overlooks their multidimensional nature. A deeper understanding of their relationship can be achieved by recognising the interactions and interdependencies between urban and rural areas.

Representations of rurality have their roots in historical discriminatory policies implemented by the colonial government. To begin with, an exploration of the historical context provides a foundation for comprehending the historical context and structural mechanisms that shaped the lives of black Rhodesians (hereafter black Zimbabweans) in urban and rural areas.[44] During the colonial era, the government implemented policies that systematically marginalised black Zimbabweans and enforced racial segregation.[45] These colonial policies of land settlement included the forced removal of black populations from fertile lands, concentrating them in designated rural areas while reserving more developed urban areas for the white minority.[46] In his analysis, Kadmiel Wekwete (1994) examines the ramifications of these colonial policies and asserts that their effects were extensive, shaping urbanisation and migration patterns and profoundly influencing the socio-economic dynamics of post-colonial Zimbabwe. Wekwete (1994, p.125) further maintains that black Zimbabweans were forced to "maintain a dual existence" with

[43] See Musaemura Zimunya's poetry anthology, *Country Dawns and City Lights* (1985), which constructs and contrasts Zimbabwean rural and urban landscapes and identities.

[44] Muzondidya (2007) observes that studies on colonial labour migration in Zimbabwe tend to overlook the variegated experiences of the 'invisible minorities' who include but are not limited to Coloureds and descendants of immigrants from neighbouring countries such as Malawi, Zambia and Mozambique.

[45] Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2009) asserts that the construction of a unified 'Zimbabwean' identity is a complex and contested process shaped by diverse historical, social, and cultural factors and continues to change over time.

[46] The consequences of exclusionary colonial policies, including the Land Apportionment Act of the 1930, the Land Husbandry Act of 1951, the Land Tenure Act of 1968, Vagrancy Act of 1968, and the Areas Accommodation Act of 1972 led to the unequal distribution and ownership of land. These policies favoured the minority white population individuals, granting them privileged access to own vast, fertile, commercially viable lands and urban properties, while simultaneously relegating black Zimbabweans to less desirable semi-arid Tribal Trust Lands/ African Purchase Areas which symbolise rural areas.

the rural home and the urban one based on impermanence. The colonial government systematically deprived black Zimbabweans of their right to establish permanent homes and communities in urban areas, thus effectively relegating them to a transient status.[47] To cope with this challenging 'dual existence,' circular migration emerged as a prevalent practice, necessitating frequent relocations between rural and urban settings.

The transient status of the black population highlights their struggle to cultivate a genuine sense of belonging within the urban landscape. According to De Certeau (1984, p.117), the concept of 'belonging' develops over time through utilising spaces and everyday life activities. Yet, black Zimbabweans faced challenges in establishing a sense of belonging in urban spaces due to the constant surveillance and control exerted by colonial authorities over their daily activities and use of these spaces. To exacerbate this situation further, the colonial government predominantly provided temporary housing for black male workers in urban areas, with the expectation that they would return to their rural homes during their time off, periods of unemployment, or after retirement (Matshakayile-Ndlovu, 2006 p.139). By doing so, the colonial authorities ensured that the presence of black Zimbabweans in urban spaces remained transitory and conditional. This effectively reinforced gendered power dynamics and perpetuated the subordinate position of black women in society.

Scholars such as Pilossof (2022), Bhatasara (2021), Potts (2011), and Barnes (1997) have analysed how black women in colonial Zimbabwe were subjected to a highly regulated, patriarchal, and bureaucratic system that severely restricted their mobility and agency. They state that black women required an invitation from their husbands and a permit from city authorities to visit their husbands in single-room accommodations in the townships (Bhatasara, 2021; Barnes, 1997). To limit the presence of black women in urban areas, the colonial government primarily targeted employing black single males. Consequently, the creation of townships acted as a deliberate strategy to exert control over the black population and confine them to specific areas within the urban environment. The establishment of townships exemplified the physical and spatial manifestation of carceral spaces, which were geographically defined. In this context, the concept of "spatial incarceration" proposed by Sang Kook Lee (2012, p.266) becomes a relevant

[47] Such 'divided' lives recall a colonial legacy reminiscent of South Africa's 'Homeland' system and Native American 'Reserves,' both of which were designed to segregate and control indigenous populations. These systems, which enforced artificial boundaries and restricted mobility, sought to erase cultural identities and impose external notions of governance.

framework for understanding the restricted mobility and limited access to urban spaces experienced by black people as a result of colonial policies.

The experiences of colonised and marginalised black Zimbabweans are marked by constant tension, conflict and fragmentation as they grapple with the psychological and cultural consequences of colonialism and racial discrimination. Fanon (1952, p.90) explores the notion of "two systems of reference," which elucidates the fragmented sense of self encountered by people living in racially divided societies.[48] This duality bears resemblance to what William Edward Burghardt Du Bois (1976, p.2) referred to as "two-ness" within the context of black Americans. Both Fanon (1952) and Du Bois (1976) highlight the profound impact of systemic oppression on the psyche and identity formation among marginalised groups. Building upon these perspectives, Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin (2013, p. 10) introduce the concept of the doubling and splitting of identity, shedding light on the politics of belonging and the fluid nature of identity. In the case of black Zimbabweans, they were confronted with the simultaneous struggle of reconciling their identities within the socio-political context of Rhodesia while striving to find a harmonious equilibrium between their rural and urban experiences. Accordingly, this dual challenge engendered a dynamic interplay between these two distinct realms, ultimately shaping the lived experiences of the black population. Consequently, the enforced pattern of circular migration, driven by the colonial government, created significant disruptions to both individual and community life.

The spatial segregation policies implemented during the colonial era had far-reaching and detrimental socio-economic consequences, perpetuating cycles of poverty and impeding the progress of black Zimbabweans. This argument is supported by the findings of Sandra Bhatasara (2021, p.210), who highlights the impact of colonial urban control policies in creating a distinction between those with limited access and agency in urban spaces (outsiders) and those who enjoyed greater privileges and opportunities (insiders). In addition to spatial segregation, the colonial government implemented various policies that further restricted black Zimbabweans' access to essential services and economic opportunities in rural areas. Scholars such as Edward Shizha and Michael Kariwo (2011) and Glen Ncube (2012) have highlighted the implications of these policies,

[48] In his autobiography, *A Bitter Harvest: The Great Betrayal and the Dreadful Aftermath*, Ian Smith (1997, p.25), the former Prime Minister of Rhodesia, characterises the population of Rhodesia as consisting of both "Rhodesians" and "our blacks," thus perpetuating a divisive us-versus-them dichotomy.

which made rural areas characterised by limited resources, inadequate infrastructure, unfertile land and lack of economic opportunities prospects in rural areas. By restricting access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities in rural regions, the colonial regime effectively marginalised and disempowered black Zimbabweans. This deliberate exclusion and neglect created a stark contrast between urban areas, which provided greater possibilities for advancement, and rural areas, which were trapped in a cycle of deprivation and limited potential. In fact, these imposed restrictions on the black population's access to urban opportunities severely curtailed their ability to break free from the confines of unproductive territories. The denial of the means to cultivate productive land and the limited access to urban employment opportunities reinforced the economic constraints imposed on black Zimbabweans, trapping them in a cycle of poverty and hindering their socio-economic progress.

The deliberate neglect and underdevelopment of rural areas have reinforced the image of rurality as synonymous with poverty, limited opportunities, and backwardness. The enduring impact of exclusionary colonial policies continues to have long-lasting effects on urban and rural migration dynamics, as noted by Godfrey Kanyenze (2004, p.10):

> At independence in 1980, Zimbabwe inherited an economy that can best be described as dual (uneven, separate development) and enclave (isolated). A relatively well-developed and sophisticated formal economy co-existed with a relatively underdeveloped and backward rural communal economy, yielding a highly dualistic economy.

The presence of such disparities can be attributed to historical factors and patterns of development that favoured urban areas over rural ones. Similarly, Munzwa and Wellington (2010) and Matamanda (2020) have provided valuable insights into the influence of colonial policies on representations of urban and rural migration, urban planning, and rural development. Their research highlights the need for a holistic approach to address the historical legacies perpetuating stereotypes of rurality and socio-economic disparities between urban and rural areas. Responding to the stereotypes of rurality and socio-economic disparities between urban and rural areas, this study aims to examine these issues from a literary and cultural studies perspective. Specifically, it zooms in on the experiences of teachers caught in a cycle of constant movement and the challenges they face in balancing their families' needs in urban areas with their work in rural areas. The scarcity of employment opportunities in urban areas significantly drives more people to seek work

and stay in rural areas. This phenomenon contributes to the prevalence of circular migration, particularly among teachers embarking on repeated journeys between rural and peri/urban areas to escape rurality and maintain connections with their families.

In this section, I analyse three short stories that utilise the journey motif to capture the essence of circular migration and portray characters who struggle to break free from the limitations of rurality. The repetitive nature of their journeys mirrors the cycles of life and highlights the continuous process of adaptation, learning, and self-discovery that comes with circular migration. Ben in "The Perfect Solution" (2004) and Gombo in "My Cold and Rigid Wife" (2002) view rural areas through the lens of 'spatial incarceration,' as shown by their discontentment with the inequalities between rural and urban areas. These stories draw attention to the larger issues teachers face in rural areas. The protagonists' experiences reflect a sense of being trapped and constrained within their immediate rural environments, where access to resources, services, and opportunities is limited compared to urban areas. Therefore, it is also essential to recognise the potential for growth and development in rural areas.

Ben in "The Perfect Solution" (2004) and Gombo in "My Cold and Rigid Wife" (2002) are portrayed as having parallel lives that bear resemblance to the experiences of black male workers during the colonial era. Ben and Gombo travel home every Friday after school to the city, where they have a primary home. During the week, they stay at the school cottage. Their weekend commuting sheds light on the nature of contemporary work-life arrangements and coping strategies rural teachers employ to manage the physical distance between their workplace and residence. The connection between rural and urban areas, facilitated by circular migration, enables teachers who commute every weekend to strike a balance between their professional responsibilities and personal and familial obligations. This practice of travelling every weekend aligns with the strategies discussed by Nico Stawarz, Heiko Rüger and Thomas Skora (2021), who highlight the use of second homes and weekend commuting as means to manage long distances between work and residence, particularly when relocating the family home is not financially feasible. The concept of "weekending" put forward by Achille Mbembe (2008) is pertinent to understanding this phenomenon. Mbembe (2008, p.246), speaking about the South African experience, observes that black people who recently moved to formerly white suburbs would return to their township homes on weekends to engage in social activities and maintain connections with their community. Expanding on the concept of 'weekending' allows me to demonstrate how

characters working or residing in rural or peri-rural areas frequently spend their weekends in urban areas to connect with their loved ones and support networks. This movement between locations allows characters to develop new perspectives on their sense of self and establish different facets of their identity. These novel forms of subjectivity and identity construction are mutually reinforcing, with each influencing and shaping the other in significant ways. Additionally, the constant back-and-forth between two locations can contribute to a sense of dislocation and disrupt the establishment of strong community ties and social networks in either location. In essence, the decision to commute on weekends is subjective and influenced by personal choices.

Muchagumisa's protagonist, Ben, is a young bachelor teaching in a rural school in Gokwe, and he openly expresses his dissatisfaction with the scorching afternoon lessons (p.23). Ben's discomfort serves as both a personal reflection and a critique of the expectations imposed on teachers. The narrative paints a vivid picture of his discomfort:

> Ben felt his shirt stick onto his back. The classroom felt like an oven. He loosened his tie. He mused that whoever decided that neckties were mandatory for teachers had an air-conditioned office and had never been to Gokwe in October. It would be worse in the evening when mosquitoes tormented them as they quenched their insatiable thirst for blood (p.23).

Ben questions the mandatory nature of wearing neckties and suggests that these expectations do not align with the realities of teaching in a rural area with extreme temperatures. The sweltering heat within the classroom serves as a tangible example of the numerous difficulties faced by teachers and residents in rural communities. Similarly, the previous section also touched on the clash of modern expectations in peri-rural settings where mourners from the city had to wear ties and women had to wear lipstick during Moyo's funeral. The oppressive heat exemplifies the physical challenges of extreme temperatures and highlights the practical obstacles that can significantly impede daily activities, including effective teaching. In Ben's case, the intense heat made some students sleep while others "slumped on their desks like zombies" (p.23). Consequently, Ben had to halt his teaching due to the adverse effects of the heat on the students' ability to remain engaged and focused. Therefore, the persistent nature of the mosquito problem in Gokwe adds to the difficulties and discomforts of rural life. This makes the urban environment a respite from these issues.

In Nhamo Muchagumisa's "My Cold and Rigid Wife" (2002), the protagonist Gombo provides a slightly parallel perspective as he longs for a deeper connection with his family. Unlike Ben, Gombo embraces the idea of residing in rural areas with his wife and daughter while he awaits a teaching post in town. This desire reflects his willingness to prioritise their togetherness over any urban conveniences. At the same time, Gombo feels regretful for allowing his wife to pursue further education, which has resulted in their physical separation. While Gombo's wife works as a bank teller in town, she resides with their daughter in their home in Masvingo. Gombo believes her studies have contributed to her unavailability and lack of responsiveness to his sexual advances. This notion reinforces traditional gender roles and expectations, perpetuating the view that a woman's primary role is to be submissive and sexually available. Gombo, as a man, expects his teaching career to take precedence over his wife's job, reflecting long-standing gender norms and assumptions that prioritise men's professional aspirations and downplay the importance of women's careers. The structural concentration of specific jobs in either urban or rural areas has far-reaching implications that can disrupt traditional family structures and dynamics. This physical distance strains familial bonds, impacting the emotional and psychological well-being of both the migrant workers and their families left behind. Therefore, the gendered nature of job opportunities in urban areas further exacerbates existing gender disparities.

In Muchagumisa's "My Cold and Rigid Wife" (2002), readers are provided with a captivating glimpse into the dynamics of relationships and the profound sense of dissatisfaction experienced by the protagonist. The narrative skillfully unravels the protagonist's inner turmoil and emotional struggles, shedding light on the depths of human longing and the consequences of unmet expectations. During Gombo's visits to his wife, he anticipates her energy and affection, hoping for a fulfilling, intimate connection. For instance, his expectations are consistently disappointed, as she is depicted as a lifeless entity described as a "heap of cold, tired meat" (p.14). This dehumanising metaphor portrays Gombo's wife as devoid of warmth and passion, intensifying his frustration and dissatisfaction. Despite Gombo's regular weekend trips back home, the emotional gap caused by his wife's perceived frigidity and lack of attention to his desires remains unbridged. This behaviour takes a toll on Gombo's mental well-being, causing significant distress and impacting his overall psychological state. The constant nightmares he experiences further exacerbate his emotional turmoil, vividly depicting his wife engaging in an affair. These unsettling dreams intensify Gombo's paranoia, solidifying his belief in his wife's infidelity. The

relentless fear and suspicion consume him, leading to incessant nightmares where he repeatedly catches his wife red-handed with a lover. The intensity of these nightmares culminates in a climactic moment, where Gombo, consumed by a mix of rage and desperation, tragically envisions himself taking drastic actions and killing the perceived lover in his dreams. The exploration of unfulfilled desires becomes a central motif within the story, connecting with readers on a universal level. The combined effect of the accompanying illustration of Muchagumisa's short story (2002), which depicts the wife lying under the covers on a bed while the husband sits upright, and the use of the word "rigid' instead of the arguably more fitting term frigid, generates a strong impression that this is a narrative about spousal murder (p.14). The term rigid, evocative of lifelessness, combined with stark visual imagery and the recounting of a haunting nightmare, amplifies the sense of foreboding, reinforcing an atmosphere of inescapable tension and dread. This deliberate interplay of visual and textual elements masterfully creates suspense, prompting readers to question the reliability of the narrator and anticipate a macabre twist.

The protagonist's yearning for a stronger connection with his wife and daughter creates the dissonance between his desires and reality. This unfulfilled yearning permeates the narrative, evoking a sense of empathy and introspection in the readers. Anne Green, Terence Hogarth and Ernest Shackleton (1999) have extensively discussed the problems associated with maintaining two residences in different locations, particularly in cases where work commitments necessitate it. They espouse that such an arrangement leads to the subsequent need for people to commute long distances regularly. In addition, the theme of regret weaves its way through the story, leaving a poignant mark on the character's lives. The weight of missed opportunities and choices made in the past looms over the protagonist, intensifying his feelings of dissatisfaction. Through exploring regret, Muchagumisa prompts readers to reflect on the role of human emotions and their profound impact on unfulfilled desires. The wife is presented as constantly tired, repeatedly stating, "I am very tired tonight" (p.14). This reinforces the idea that she cannot meet Gombo's desires and needs. It is worth noting the contrast between his expectations of an intimate and fulfilling relationship and the reality of his wife's exhaustion, which leaves him feeling neglected and unsatisfied. The wife's response reflects a power imbalance within the relationship, with Gombo expecting his wife to fulfil his desires without considering her needs, aspirations, or agency. It portrays a patriarchal view that diminishes the value of women's education and positions them solely as objects of male desire. Through close reading, we can discern underlying themes of unfulfilled desires, gender

expectations, and regret. “My Cold and Rigid Wife” (2002) illustrates the dynamics of the marital relationship in the story and foregrounds the tensions and frustrations that arise when societal norms clash with personal aspirations and desires.

In stark contrast, Mareva’s (2007) unnamed narrator and his wife decide to move from the city to rural areas to enjoy anonymity and privacy. This echoes the experience of the fat elderly man in “All for the Belly” (2003), who sought refuge in peri-rural areas to escape the constant surveillance of his wife and relatives in the city. The unnamed narrator and his wife were motivated to relocate due to their unsuccessful attempts to have a child, which subjected them to constant pressure from their parents, who desired a grandchild. The unnamed narrator is depicted as having more control over his personal space and can create a private and secluded life for himself (p.27). He embraces the notion of a simpler, more connected lifestyle devoid of the urban hustle and bustle. For this reason, it is essential to acknowledge that the level of anonymity and privacy achievable in peri-rural and rural areas varies depending on a specific location, local culture, community norms, and property size. The unnamed narrator, along with other teachers like Mr Chingota in Muchagumisa’s story (2002) and Gumbo in Maburutse’s story (2004), chose to relocate with their families to rural areas due to the unavailability of teaching positions in town. This highlights the practical considerations individuals and families face when dealing with the challenges of long-distance commuting. This strategy allows teachers to reduce the burden of daily commuting over long distances.

In “The Perfect Solution” (2004), Gumbo, a senior teacher at the same school, frequently refers to Ben and other unmarried teachers as “town bred-youngsters” because they regularly travel to the city on weekends (p.23). This descriptive term implies that these young and unmarried teachers have become accustomed to urban life and its conveniences, unlike married teachers who have chosen to settle in rural areas. Gumbo’s perception of singleness is based on the understanding derived from a well-known chiShona proverb, musha mukadzi, which means a home consists of a woman. The significance of women in creating a harmonious and functional home environment is further exemplified by Gumbo, who struggles to comprehend why Ben chooses to spend his weekends in the city. This view is corroborated by Molly Manyonganise, Ezra Chitando and Sophia Chirongoma (2023, p.23), who examine how chiShona and isiNdebele proverbs praise the role of women in shaping and defining the concept of ‘home’ in these cultures. Gumbo insinuates that Ben should feel at home in Gokwe since he spends more time there. Thus,

Ben is perceived as lacking a genuine home and merely possessing a house. This perception reflects the societal belief that women are essential in establishing a nurturing and cohesive domestic space. There are broader social connections in defining one's sense of belonging and home. Rosemary George (1996, p.9) views the concept of home as not "neutral" but extending beyond the physical boundaries of a single dwelling to encompass the broader community and social connections that people form. The concept of home is subject to individual interpretation and can vary across different cultures and contexts. For Gumbo, home is strongly tied to a specific geographical location. At the same time, for Ben and Gombo, it can be more fluid, rooted in the relationships and sense of comfort they cultivate with loved ones, regardless of the physical space. Thus, the role of marital status in shaping a character's choices regarding their living arrangements and commuting patterns should not be overstated.

Maburutse's (2004) story fails to explain the reasons behind Ben's weekend commuting. Nevertheless, his unmarried status affords him and other young teachers the flexibility to engage in such movements and enjoy the amenities and social opportunities available in the city. Ben's preferences prompt him to travel regularly to the city on weekends. Teachers like Gombo, the unnamed narrator in Mareva's story, and Mr Chingota in Muchagumisa's (2002) story have decided to relocate their families, as they have found it increasingly challenging to sustain regular weekend commuting due to the escalating financial costs, time commitments, and logistical challenges involved in managing and maintaining two separate residences. Therefore, the lower cost of living compared to urban areas attracted other teachers to relocate to rural areas permanently. The unnamed narrator, Mr Chingota, and Gombo view the accessible housing cottages as their primary homes, whereas Ben and Gombo consider them second homes. This distinction underscores their contrasting perspectives, as the former group finds a sense of permanence and belonging in their rural dwellings. At the same time, the latter yearns to return to the city once the week is over. To further explore the meanings and experiences associated with primary and second homes, Harvey Perkins and David Thorns (2006) provide an insightful analysis. Their study examines the distinction between these two types of dwellings, aiming to capture the diverse nature of multiple dwelling experiences. Perkins and Thorns (2006) claim that the conventional definitions of primary and second homes fail to fully grasp the undertones of such living arrangements. The multiple meanings attached to these homes by the residents highlight the varied experiences of belonging. In light of this argument, it becomes evident that Ben and

Gombo's weekend commuting, while seemingly advantageous for their desires, must be examined within the broader context of the financial, social, and logistical implications it poses.

Conversely, the contrasting experiences of Gombo and the other teachers provide a compelling perspective to explore the choices and difficulties people face when deciding to maintain separate residences or relocate their families to alleviate the challenges associated with regular commuting. In his critique, Dieter Müller (2011, p.140) challenges societal norms, assumptions, and perceptions that diminish the significance and value of second homes compared to primary residences. Müller's (2011) argument disrupts the prevailing societal hierarchy that assigns greater importance to one's primary residence as the primary indicator of stability, identity, and belonging. This line of inquiry prompts a deeper understanding of how characters engage with and derive meaning from their living spaces. It also necessitates a contemplation of the economic disparities that contribute to the perpetuation of such perceptions. Through such an examination, a more comprehensive understanding of multiple dwellings emerges, shedding light on the socio-cultural, economic, and symbolic dimensions at play.

When Ben and Gombo encountered financial constraints that prevented both from commuting to town on weekends, they found alternative ways to engage in outdoor leisure activities by joining other teachers who had permanently relocated from the town to rural houses provided by the school. For instance, when Ben could not afford to travel, he would gather with his fellow teachers at his house for a braai:

> That weekend, they had a braai at Ben's house. That was one of the advantages of working deep in rural areas. They had formed a beef committee and always had plenty of meat. For more firewood, Ben got an axe and climbed the musasa tree a few metres outside the school fence. It has a dry branch, which he cut down. (p.23)

This example challenges the misguided stereotype that rural living is inferior to urban living by showcasing rural areas' unique advantages. One advantage highlighted by Ben's experience is the strong sense of community fostered in rural areas. The formation of a beef committee among the teachers demonstrates the tight-knit bonds and collective support found in rural communities. The availability of plenty of meat for their gatherings showcases their resourcefulness and illustrates how rural areas can provide opportunities for collaboration and shared resources. Living in rural areas also allows for a closer connection to nature and the environment. Ben's ability to gather

firewood by climbing the musasa tree near the school highlights the simplicity and accessibility of natural resources in rural settings. Proximity to nature provides ample opportunities for Ben and other teachers to enjoy outdoor activities like braaiing and appreciate the natural beauty surrounding them. Likewise, the example of the beef committee also suggests that rural areas can foster entrepreneurship and contribute to their economic viability and sustainability. Interestingly, rural teachers enhanced their economic well-being by organising themselves and actively taking advantage of their available resources. It is essential to recognise that rural areas are not stagnant but adapt and evolve over time in response to economic and social pressures. The notion that rural living is static fails to acknowledge the resilience and ingenuity of rural communities in navigating and overcoming challenges.

Maburutse's (2004) "The Perfect Solution" also critiques the hierarchical perceptions of knowledge that privilege urban sophistication over rural tradition, demonstrating how rural characters, commonly dismissed as backward, possess the agency to manipulate stereotypes and cultural assumptions to navigate power dynamics in their favour. Ben, plagued by recurrent nightmares of dying in a fiery conflagration, experiences heightened anxiety when a villager warns him and his colleagues about the supposed dangers of chopping wood from a lightning-struck Msasa tree (p.23). The villager reinforces this warning by claiming that lightning leaves behind "eggs" that bring repeated calamities unless properly destroyed (p. 23). Rooted in local superstition, this warning compounds Ben's fears and aligns symbolically with his dreams, lending the situation an ominous weight and prompting him and other teachers to seek intervention.

Believing the kraal head to be the authority capable of conducting the necessary cleansing ritual, the teachers approach him, only to find him unavailable. Seizing the moment, the kraal head's teenage son confidently steps in, asserting his ability to perform the ritual in his father's stead. Despite their scepticism, the urban teachers defer to the boy's apparent expertise in rural traditions and agree to pay an exorbitant fee for the ritual. Ironically, the ritual appears successful as Ben's nightmares abruptly cease, reinforcing the teachers' belief in its efficacy. The twist emerges years later when the former teenager confesses that the entire ritual was a fabrication, a clever scheme to exploit the teachers' desperation and ignorance. Although he eventually refunds the money, the episode exposes the urbanites' misplaced assumptions of superiority. Their self-perception as rational and educated people is undermined by their susceptibility to the ingenuity of a young rural boy who capitalised on their fears. This ironic reversal underscores how the

teachers' vulnerability stemmed not from supernatural forces but from their underestimation of rural agency. It challenges simplistic binaries of urban modernity versus rural tradition, revealing the complexities of power and perception in rural-urban interactions. The incident illustrates that so-called "backward" rural communities can exercise significant agency, subverting the hierarchies imposed by urban-centred notions of knowledge and sophistication. In doing so, it reframes the narrative of rural passivity and dependency as one of adaptability and strategic manipulation.

One prominent impediment to the circular movement is the financial constraint experienced by Ben and Gombo. "My Cold and Rigid Wife (2002) and "The Perfect Solution" (2004) reveal instances where the economic realities of life in the city make it challenging for characters to sustain this migratory pattern. High living costs, limited job opportunities, and economic uncertainties in urban settings become obstacles that disrupt the envisioned circular flow between rural and urban spaces. Additionally, the lack of strong social ties with family members in other locations becomes a hindrance. Muchagumisa's (2002) and Maburutse's (2004) short stories depict characters who, despite their initial enthusiasm to maintain connections, find themselves estranged from their families due to prolonged absences. The social fabric that ties them to their hometowns weakens, leading to a sense of alienation and the realisation that the city, despite its allure, does not fulfil the emotional and familial needs as anticipated.

Also exemplary for Muchagumisa (2002) is how Gombo's financial constraints and his inability to be with his partner due to the lack of bus fare underscore the limitations that hinder their relationship. Gombo's bitterness consumed him that he barely noticed that it was Saturday:

> It was when he had finished bathing that he remembered it was Saturday and that he had to spend the weekend away from his cold-blooded partner because he had no money bus fare for the journey to Masvingo. What difference did it make anyway? At least he was free form further frustration. (p.14)

Gombo's belated realisation that it is Saturday reveals a more profound sense of resignation and provides him with a brief respite from the frustrations he encounters in his life. The timing of this realisation, occurring only after he finishes bathing, symbolises the temporary escape he yearns for to alleviate the emotional burdens associated with his relationship. This delayed awareness implies a subconscious effort to distance oneself from the harsh reality of unfulfilled desires. The

phrase “cold-blooded partner” to describe his wife draws attention to the emotional disconnect and lack of warmth in his relationship (p.14). While the idea of temporary relief from further frustration seems appealing, it shows a sense of detachment. Jeremy Jones (2010, p.289) uses the metaphor of paralysis to describe a situation where people experience a state of “frantic stasis.” In this state, people feel trapped and unable to make meaningful progress due to financial hardships and the environment in which they find themselves. The metaphor of paralysis suggests a sense of immobilisation and powerlessness. It implies a state of frustration, anxiety, and desperation as people yearn for improvement but are hindered by external factors beyond their control.

The desperation to find a teaching position in town conveys a sense of urgency, as the protagonists exert significant effort to break free from their situation but remain trapped, nonetheless. To combat his loneliness, Gombo spends his weekend seated on a deck chair on the veranda of his house, finding solace and engaging in relaxation, meditation, and socialising with Lettie, Mr Chingota’s young sister, whom he instantly likes. This further highlights his yearning for tranquillity and respite from his turmoil. Nonetheless, it should be underlined that this seemingly perpetual movement between the peri-rural and urban areas is fraught with visible fault lines and can be unsustainable. Fatigue emerges as another significant factor impeding circular migration. The physical and emotional toll of constantly moving between rural and urban spaces affects the characters. The weariness sets in as the journey becomes more burdensome, challenging the romanticised notion of perpetual mobility. Correspondingly, the narratives subtly challenge the historical representation of the city as the exclusive locus of fulfilment. In the colonial and early postcolonial urban histories, the city was typically portrayed as the ultimate destination for progress and prosperity. In stark contrast, the characters in these stories realise that fulfilment can be sought elsewhere in rural settings, in connection with one’s roots, and alternative ways of life. Again, the situations Ben and Gombo face connect with a broader theme of people encountering financial constraints and the compromises they are obliged to make in their lives. The necessity for them to engage in outdoor leisure activities with other teachers who have permanently relocated due to financial limitations is a stark portrayal of their ‘making-do’ strategy. This aspect of the narrative critiques the socio-economic conditions restricting characters’ ability to pursue their aspirations.

In “The Perfect Solution” (2004), Ben struggles to secure a teaching post in town, and it takes him six years to be transferred to a school in town (p.23). Nevertheless, Gombo’s story

concludes before he can attain a transfer to the city. These instances highlight challenges faced by characters in attaining better opportunities and escaping the financial constraints that bind them. Gombo firmly believes that by staying with his wife, he can prevent her from engaging in extramarital affairs, drawing a parallel to the unfortunate fate of the wife in Mareva's story, "If You Were in My Shoes" (2007). The unnamed narrator in Mareva's tale, a teacher at Mavhiringidze Secondary School, finds himself in a different predicament. He chillingly confesses to brutally murdering his wife with a long knife after being married for five years. The unnamed narrator's decision to remain at the rural school with his wife, Shupikai, is driven by the incessant pressure from his family and relatives concerning their inability to conceive children (p.24). Shupikai's reluctance to socialise with the women in the village after their relocation leads to her being perceived as aloof and snobbish. Unbeknownst to Shupikai, the unnamed narrator has consulted five different physicians who have all confirmed his infertility, leading him to utter the despairing words, "There is no life in my loins. My semen is mere water" (p.25). Influenced by warnings from concerned friends and suspicious of Shupikai's involvement with Madzibaba Mduduzi, a local prophet notorious for his promiscuous behaviour, the protagonist ultimately takes the drastic step of murdering his wife. Madzibaba Mduduzi is described as a "philanderous rogue" who actively engages in secretive "healing" sessions with the narrator's wife in the Chizhou hills (p.25). In response to the crime, the teachers detain the unnamed narrator to prevent his escape. At the same time, the headmaster sends Mudhuva, a member of the neighbourhood watch committee, to cycle to the Chatsworth Police Post and report the incident. However, the closest police station in Chatsworth is more than 15 kilometres from Mavhiringidze Secondary School. By the time Mudhuva returns with the police, the unnamed narrator has consumed a fatal dose of poison from a bottle of rogor mortis. The events surrounding Gombo's perspective and the unnamed narrator's story in Mareva's (2007) tale reveal the profound and tragic consequences that can arise from issues such as infertility, suspicions of infidelity, and the weight of societal expectations.

"My Cold and Rigid Wife" and "If You Were in My Shoes" present an ironic contrast in their depictions of spousal relationships and the consequences of infidelity. In "If You Were in My Shoes," the narrative revolves around an actual spousal murder followed by a suicide, a tragic culmination of infidelity within a couple who had relocated together to the peri-rural areas. This violent resolution starkly contrasts with "My Cold and Rigid Wife", where the suspicion of wifely infidelity, while deeply unsettling, does not lead to any actual act of violence. The contrast is not

merely situational but also thematic, highlighting the destructive potential of mistrust and betrayal when unchecked emotions escalate to fatal outcomes. Although both stories juxtapose the extremes of suspicion and action, critiquing the fragility of trust and the devastating consequences of fractured relationships, "My Cold and Rigid Wife" introduces a layer of complexity through Gombo's unfulfilled sexual desires. The sexually frustrated Gombo, trapped in a strained marriage, sees an opportunity for infidelity in the peri-rural setting, lusting after Lettie, a beautiful young woman. However, his hesitation to confess his feelings to Lettie becomes an obstacle. His delay is not merely a personal failing but a reflection of his deeper insecurities and internal conflict, ultimately leading to missed opportunities. Lettie's sudden disappearance, facilitated by her unexpected receipt of a presidential bursary to study in South Africa, symbolises the fleeting and elusive nature of Gombo's desires. This unresolved tension underscores the story's broader critique of unspoken desires and their power to complicate already fragile relationships.

I will revisit this topic in Chapter 3, where I will discuss gendered perceptions of infidelity and vulnerability. The geographical distance to the nearest police station further exemplifies the challenges rural communities face in accessing essential services and the potential impact on timely intervention and the delivery of justice. These stories explore the tumultuous journeys of the protagonists, foregrounding their desperation to secure teaching posts in urban areas and the devastating repercussions that unfold due to societal expectations, suspicions of infidelity, and the overwhelming pressure to conform. They serve as powerful reflections of the challenges found in human relationships and the profound impact of circular migration.

Conclusion

The chapter argued that short fiction published in private and state-owned magazines is a powerful tool for capturing the nuances of everyday life and exploring the tensions between peri/rural and peri/urban spaces. It exposes the various forces that shape characters' choices and aspirations, prompting us to reflect on the broader implications of circular migration and the need for comprehensive policies and interventions that address its underlying causes and support affected individuals and communities. A close reading of short fiction in popular magazines allows us to understand the mechanisms of translocal encounters and the phenomenon of weekend commuting, shedding light on the broader context of circular migration and everyday life in Zimbabwe. These stories provide a glimpse into the complexities characters face navigating between rural and urban

areas in search of better opportunities and improved livelihoods. Through the characters' experiences and motivations, we witness the challenges and compromises inherent in circular migration, exposing the harsh realities of economic disparities and their profound impact on characters and their relationships. The narratives also highlight the various forms of escaping rurality and poverty, which often prove elusive and become what Caroline Rooney describes as an "escape which escapes" (1995, p.139).

Chapter 3: Kukiya-kiya in the city: 'Making- do' tactics of survival in the *Ztorie Bhuku* blog.

Introduction

The preceding chapter focused on the dialectics of comfort and discomfort within circular forms of mobility, drawing from a carefully curated selection of post-2000 short stories sourced from prominent Zimbabwean popular magazines, including *The Sunday Mail Magazine*, *Moto,* and *Parade*. Through this analysis, the chapter advanced the argument that circular migration within Zimbabwe is a strategic manoeuvre employed by characters seeking respite from spatial constraints and adversities inherent in rural, peri-rural, and peri-urban environments. These characters are depicted as gravitating towards new locales with improved socio-economic opportunities, heightened social interactions, and recreational prospects. This strategic circular migration pattern facilitates physical movement and engenders a tangled web of socio-spatial trajectories and imaginaries within Zimbabwean society.

This chapter examines the theme of survival as an everyday practice in selected post-2000 Zimbabwean short stories published on the now-defunct blogosphere, *Ztorie Bhuku*. In this chapter, I conduct a close reading of Sozah Ruzario's "How Juju Can Get Back Your Lost Lover" (2013), Noluthando Frost's "Beloved", Leroy Mthulisi Ndlovu's "Birth" (2013), "Death" (2013) and "Locked Gates and Tall Grass" (2017), Lenni Mdawini Sibanda's "Death on Wheels" (2013) and "Sex, Shebeen, Orgasms and Beer" (2013). The seven short stories under focus were purposefully selected to reflect how everyday life in cities such as Bulawayo and Harare are circumscribed by either life or death and good or evil. These short stories were selected based on their ability to narrativise and thematise everyday life in an intertextual manner. The intertextual approach involves analysing how the selected short stories speak to each other in a referential manner.

Examining these intertextual connections will illuminate recurring themes and motifs related to survival in post-2000 Zimbabwe. Leroy Mthulisi Ndlovu's "Birth" (2013) and its sequel "Death" (2013) form two parts of a single continuous narrative. The protagonist, initially unnamed in "Birth," is revealed to be named Victor in the sequel. Victor grapples with addiction and loneliness, compounded by the absence of his father, the death of his mother, and the betrayal of his girlfriend, along with discovering that he is HIV positive. These challenges culminate in

Victor's decision to take his own life. Conversely, Noluthando Frost's "Beloved" (2013) adopts a revisionist approach, aiming to provide an alternative perspective on the nature of infidelity. "Beloved" (2013) interrogates Victor's narrative, revealing overlooked aspects and nuances previously glossed over. By doing so, the story exposes the complications of victimhood and vulnerability within the context of infidelity. This approach challenges simplistic interpretations and encourages readers to reconsider their assumptions about the dynamics in such situations. In "Death on Wheels" (2013), Khethani Mlilo, a commuter omnibus driver, is married to Sihle, but due to his infidelity, he is pressured to leave their matrimonial home. Khethani then moves in with his girlfriend, Tracey, who happens to be a commercial sex worker. In addition to his job as a driver, Khethani engages in occasional tasks involving the transportation of rustled cattle carcasses, which he delivers to Sis Khethi, the owner of a butchery in the city. The story ends when Khethani is involved in an accident after being pursued by traffic police for picking up and dropping passengers at undesignated bus stops.

"Sex, Shebeen, Orgasms, and Beer" (2013) centres around the life of Sas Bo, a regular patron of a shebeen in Magwegwe. He is known for his scheming and swindling tactics. Sas Bo frequently poses as a runner, claiming to be able to procure anything people desire. He deceived Ndlovu by promising to acquire a bull for his family's use at his father's funeral in exchange for money. But Sas Bo failed to deliver his promise and became evasive when confronted by Ndlovu, who eventually found him drinking away the money at Sis Do's Shebeen. In a fit of rage, Ndlovu assaulted Sas Bo until he fabricated an excuse, claiming that he could not obtain the bull due to interference from Ministry of Health officials. Sas Bo was only rescued from further harm by his friend, Mzi, who intervened and stopped the fight. These deceitful antics are not exclusive to Sas Bo; Mzi also engages in similar schemes, challenging Sas Bo by asserting his cunningness. "Locked Gates and Tall Grass" (2017) tells the story of Lungile, an unemployed university graduate in a relationship with Samantha, who works at a restaurant in the city centre. The narrative follows Lungile as he moves through the city searching for employment, facing long distances that he cannot afford to cover by taxi. Despite the challenges, Lungile remains hopeful, believing he will secure a job one day.

Sozah Ruzario's "How Juju Can Get Back Your Lost Lover" (2013) presents a vivid portrayal of the exploitation and manipulation perpetuated by a fraudulent traditional healer who deceives a vulnerable woman seeking supernatural remedies for her marital problem. Ironically,

the “love potion” she receives forces her to adopt better hygiene and perform domestic duties like cooking, leading her husband, who had left due to her untidiness, to return home. The deceitful traditional healer exploits her desperation, manipulating her into believing her marital issues are caused by a curse and demonic possession; despite knowing they are likely caused by her dishevelled appearance and laziness. The story ends with the woman being encouraged to continue using the charms to keep her husband.

In this chapter, I argue that the *Ztorie Bhuku* blog portrays the city as a setting defined by instability, uncertainty, and fragmented social structures, which serves as a metaphor for the precariousness of contemporary life. This portrayal enables writers to leverage the narrative affordances the city provides by situating their stories within its confines to explore and interrogate socio-political and economic tensions. In doing so, they craft narratives that deeply resonate with the fractured realities and lived experiences of their characters. The chapter is structured into seven distinct sections that systematically explore the spontaneous and improvisational actions employed by marginalised groups to earn a living. In the initial section, I focus on the history of *Ztorie Bhuku* as a blog, along with its archival practices. The second section analyses how the city emerges as a character, shaping and moulding the experiences of its inhabitants.

Central to my exploration is examining how the cityscape uniquely influences the per/forming and negotiating of personal and collective identities. Against the urban backdrop, characters grapple with profound questions related to self-discovery, infidelity, addiction, unemployment, and poverty. The third and fourth sections tackle the gendered constructions of infidelity, specifically analysing how it affects men and women. By highlighting the divergent experiences and responses to infidelity, these sections reveal contrasting coping mechanisms and the expressions of in/vulnerability that arise. Drawing heavily on intertextual analysis, these sections argue that societal expectations and cultural norms shape and reinforce traditional gender roles and responses. This exploration interrogates how infidelity is both represented and internalised by different genders, exposing the dynamics at play in personal relationships. Such an analysis underscores the unequal emotional and social burdens placed on characters, particularly in how gender dictates the consequences of infidelity.

The fifth section explores the characters’ streetwise strategies while navigating the city’s unwritten rules. These unwritten rules, shaped by economic hardship, social hierarchies, and the necessity of resourcefulness, become essential tools for navigating the difficulties of urban life.

Exploring these strategies also highlights the fluid nature of power in urban settings, where adaptability and street smarts generally outweigh traditional markers of success or authority. The sixth section probes into the dynamics of seduction, sex, and coupling in urban environments, highlighting how the fast-paced and impersonal nature of city life shapes these interactions. It argues that urban sexuality is deeply influenced by the commodification of bodies, where sexual relationships frequently serve as a form of currency, reinforcing existing class and gender hierarchies. In this context, characters are consistently forced to negotiate relationships that blur the boundaries between authentic emotional connections and strategic alliances motivated by social or economic gain. The portrayal of sex and coupling within the urban setting reveals how characters handle their desires amid environments dominated by anonymity, ambition, and competition, reflecting the relationship between personal agency and broader societal forces.

The final section explores the myriad ways characters devise ingenious survival strategies. This involves interrogating the cityscape's role in mediating relationships between characters and their surroundings, particularly how the urban environment influences the trajectories of characters' lives and the unfolding of their stories. Characters navigate city life's unpredictable and harsh realities by adapting to informal survival strategies, as formal regulations prove less influential than the practical knowledge required to thrive in a constantly shifting environment. They either adhere to or manipulate these unwritten rules to assert control over their circumstances, actively challenging formal structures of power that marginalise them. In doing so, they carve out spaces of agency within a system that would otherwise exclude them.

The analysis of this chapter draws on De Certeau's (1984, p.ix) theory of everyday life, particularly "procedures of everyday creativity" or "ways of operating" "within a grid of socio-economic constraints." De Certeau's (1984) theory of everyday life represents a strategic insertion of the voices and practices of marginalised groups into the spaces, traditions, and structures dominated by the mainstream, as articulated by Roberts (2006, p.88). De Certeau's (1984) conception of everyday life underscores the inherent tension between the marginalised and the dominant, wherein the former deploy tactical manoeuvres and creativity to assert their agency and challenge hegemonic norms. De Certeau's (1984) episteme of the everyday informs my use of the term kukiya-kiya to uncover the multiple and diffused workings of creative tactics characters use in the short stories I analyse. I use kukiya-kiya as an operative term and dominant trope to elucidate a myriad of actions and spaces people create for themselves as a coping mechanism. These tactics

consist of debauchery, street vending, moonlighting, swindling, hustling, cattle rustling, transactional sex, cohabiting, and repurposing things and spaces. Foregrounding these everyday practices and experiences challenges and reshapes conventional understandings of life in the city and power dynamics.

The word kukiya-kiya became popular because of present-day Zimbabwe's current political and economic trajectory, which is characterised by high unemployment, poor standards of living, and hyperinflation that left many ordinary people with less disposable incomes. Rugare Mareva (2014, p.182), in his study on the chiShona slang lexicon, traces the origins of the term kukiya-kiya and notes that it is "used to express an action or state of affairs," encompassing adaptive behaviours and solutions employed during economic, social, and emotional challenges. Similarly, Victor Gwande (2017, p.94) defines kukiya-kiya as "multiple forms of survival strategies usually accompanied by desperation." Mareva (2014) and Gwande (2017) do not succinctly state that this wide variety of activities is sometimes entrepreneurial, spontaneous, risky, precarious and unintentional. The term kukiya-kiya has become part of the economic grammar and a fitting metaphor that aptly connotes unlocking hidden opportunities. Jeremy Jones (2010, p.286) poignantly observes that kukiya-kiya suggests "cleverness, dodging, and the exploitation of whatever resources at hand, all with an eye to self-sustenance." Jones (2010, p.94) further argues that it is merely surviving in post-2000 Zimbabwe by whatever means necessary. It is in this vein that Oswelled Ureke (2020, p.152) simply regards kukiya-kiya as "making do strategies" or "making a plan under desperate circumstances." In other words, kukiya-kiya implies stopgap measures citizens use to improvise and manoeuvre within the (in)formal economy.[49] Janet MacGaffey (1983, p.1) contends that unscripted alternative economic activities sometimes exist alongside official ones and become "known variously as informal, underground, parallel, unrecorded or second economies." While the notion of kukiya-kiya has primarily been explored within an economic paradigm, I propose expanding its conceptualisation to encompass its application in everyday situations beyond just economic hardships. Such a broadened

[49] The concept of Kukiya-kiya, akin to Jua Kali in East Africa, epitomises the informal jobs and resourceful activities people engage in to earn a living. See Nyairo (2007, p.147) who observes that a Jua Kali artisan "thrives on the margins of the structured economy in a culture of transgression whose genius lies in his instinctive capacity to appropriate whatever resources are available to him".

interpretation will provide a more nuanced perspective on the term's usage and its implications for people navigating different aspects of life.

Specifically, this chapter focuses on the fictional representation of the urban space as a site of contestation and affirmation of virtue and venality, emblematic of daily survival strategies in the city. I argue that the significance of kukiya-kiya is imbued with nuances of urgency, agency, (in)security, (ab)use, (dis)order, and (dis)honesty, highlighting the redefinition, negotiation, and navigation of urban spaces. The chapter also considers how identity formations and connections that result from living in the city enable characters to adapt to their everyday realities and thrive in an informal economy. Therefore, it transcends the simplistic and reductivist reading of urban spaces as hotspots for crime and violence but, most importantly, reconsiders hustling as a form of resilience and a survival tactic.

Writing and archiving everyday life: The birth and dea(r)th of *Ztorie Bhuku*

This section opens with reconsidering the resurgent interests in authoring and publishing digital short fiction in post-2000 Zimbabwe. Following Barber's (1987, p.1) study of popular arts in Africa, the chapter concurs that an online platform like *Ztorie Bhuku* is ephemeral and can "flourish without encouragement or recognition from official cultural bodies and sometimes in defiance of them." The primary task of this chapter is to recast marginalised authors as active agents who are creating stories and manipulating economic opportunities for themselves. Through carefully analysing the writers' motivations, strategies, and experiences, I seek to uncover the diverse ways in which their writing becomes intertwined with issues of livelihood, sustainability, and socio-economic mobility. I also argue that the stories on the *Ztorie Bhuku* blog were written and edited in a way that conforms to the notion of kukiya-kiya, exemplifying how marginalised writers adapt to challenging circumstances through resourcefulness and resilience. Writing and archiving everyday life is important because it broadens and develops ideas on preserving a medium of expressing emerging digital short stories for posterity. Writing and archiving everyday life on digital platforms is a precarious endeavour that allows budding writers to experiment and gain visibility. The foregoing analysis of *Ztorie Bhuku* will distend the theme of survival to include the ephemeral nature of digital platforms and how digital archives can be restor(y)ed after being taken down on the internet. Given this background, I will centre on marginalised writers and their digital fiction to show how they use their creativity as a conceptual form to contribute knowledge and challenge hegemonic forms of control. *Ztorie Bhuku* was created in the month of December 2012

by Lenni Mdawini Sibanda and Leroy Mthulisi Ndlovu. The eye-catching and unique name *Ztorie Bhuku* was coined using a mix of witty wordplay and vernacularisation. "Ztorie" is a portmanteau of "Zimbabwean Stories," while "Bhuku" is the chiShona word for book. In essence, it is a Zimbabwean storybook. Since its inception, the blog has vowed to publish budding Zimbabwean writers.

Ztorie Bhuku was created and hosted on the free version of WordPress.com, which is easy to use and does not require technical expertise. Even so, a free WordPress website builder has limitations, such as reduced disk space, a subdomain with intrusive pop-up adverts, and restrictions on allowing writers to monetise the blog. The lack of monetisation of content on *Ztorie Bhuku* did not deter writers from using the online platform to publish their work. De Certeau (1984, p.xx) regards the aspect of "producing without capitalising" as a tactic used by the marginalised to control the means of overcoming impediments and taking control of their work. Claire Colebrook (2002, p.697) observes that the internet allows for immaterial labour that enables work to be at one with its product. *Ztorie Bhuku* inspired marginalised writers with an all-absorbing zeal to free the creative process without pressuring them to produce a certain type of work that tackles specific themes.

What makes *Ztorie Bhuku* unique is that it was the 'first' Zimbabwean blog that sought to promote short stories written in English by unpublished authors.[50] The impulse that drives writers to write in English is influenced by the incentive to promote the circulation and reception of their work. Noam Chomsky (1979, p.191) observes that the "questions of language are questions of power." Comparatively, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986b, pp.17-18, original emphasis) asserts that "[f]or whom a writer *writes* is a question which has not been satisfactorily resolved by the writers in a neocolonial state." Such a question invites broader considerations on the use of language in African literature. Barber (1997, p.13) candidly criticises how written literature in the English language was considered a representative of literary and cultural production in Africa at the exclusion of other forms of expression.[51]

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[50] I assert that *Ztorie Bhuku* holds the distinction of being the 'first' Zimbabwean blog to publish short fiction solely by Zimbabwean authors exclusively. While there were other blogs, such as S*toryTim*e, initiated by Ivor Hartmann as an ezine in 2007, which accepted speculative short fiction submissions from African writers, and *Munyori*, a Zimbabwean-American blog edited by Emmanuel Sigauke, which accepted submissions from Africa, Asia and America, both of these blogs, later transformed into literary journals. *StoryTime* ceased publication in 2012.

[51] Writers who choose to write in English may be influenced by the dominance of English-speaking cultures, which have the power to shape global discourse and determine which voices and narratives are privileged or marginalised.

Authorial intention, ideological inclination, literary markets, and linguistic and cultural hegemony influence the power relationships inherent in language choices.[52] Similarly, Pascale Casanova (2004, pp.17-18) contends that language is a "major component of literary capital" because "[c]ertain languages, by virtue of the prestige of the texts written in them, are reputed to be more literary than others, to embody literature." I argue that the choice to write about everyday life in English seems to have come from considering the wider audience, cultural global circuits, and their positionality as a heterogeneous group of young black and middle-class writers who have varying ethnicities and hail from different parts of Zimbabwe.

The blog was marketed with the tagline "Literature from a #Rule_Breaking generation". The tagline highlights the youthful exuberance and a writerly desire to overcome censorship and gatekeeping. In other words, they aimed to dismantle print publishing conventions such as editorial intrusions and soliciting manuscripts from known authors, explaining their exclusion. An important advantage of online publishing is that the intermediation of publishers, editors and literary agents is no longer an essential prerequisite (Van Dijk 2020, p.230). Online publishing allows marginalised writers to be influenced by a self-conscious meritocracy. Van Dijk (2020, p.213) further advances that the lesser-known authors have resorted to self-publishing for several reasons: their economic position (being full-time authors) and lower publishing costs, hence why their work is usually considered deplorable. Therefore, authors do their own editing, and the same text can be re-edited anytime.

Short fiction published on *Ztorie Bhuku* merits attention beyond considerations of literariness and the historical contexts that influenced its creation and reception. Elsewhere, Lynda Spencer (2014) asserts the importance of recognising the diverse forms of reception and recognition as indicators of the influence of fictional works.[53] Furthermore, Spencer (2014, p.492) highlights the inherent challenges in assessing the 'potential impact' of such works without engaging in reader-response research. While this chapter does not provide a detailed discussion of reader responses due to the blog's deletion, it is noteworthy that there is a degree of intimacy

[52] In light of the language question, Abiola Irele (1981, p.59) postulates that "the literary artist will produce his best work in the medium that he most confidently controls."

[53] In 2014, Philani Nyoni, one of the writers on the blog, attended and participated in the Caine Prize Annual Writers Workshop in Zimbabwe, an experience that proved instrumental in shaping his literary career. It was during this workshop that he penned a short story titled "The Sonneteer," which earned inclusion in the prestigious 2014 Caine Prize anthology, *The Gonjon Pin and Other Stories*. This anthology, published by New Internationalist, received further dissemination through seven co-publishers across Africa.

between writers and readers, inherently creating a polyvocal environment. The blog successfully garnered the attention and recognition of seasoned writers, including Emmanuel Sigauke, Lawrence Hoba and Tsitsi Dangarembga.[54] These established literary figures engaged with the blog and acknowledged its influence by encouraging the emerging and aspiring writers associated with it. The capacity to engage with locally grown and diasporic audiences meant that the blog had a glocal and transnational outlook. Arjun Appadurai (1996, p.33) states that the advent of digital networks has created "virtual communities" akin to Anderson's (1983) theorisation of imagined communities, hence becoming a potent site for alternative content creation, contestation and emancipation. Williams Bronwyn and Amy Zenger (2012, p.8) contend that the relationship between the writer, text and audience is a complex mixture of acceptance and resistance. Hence, the audience is not passively reading the text but also interacting with the writer and other readers. Correspondingly, Yékú (2017, pp. 261-263) underscores how online short stories reproduce "traditional modes of cultural representations" that "democratises and decentres authorial space." Lenni Mdawini Sibanda, in an interview posted on the blog during the formative years, comments on the question of why *Ztorie Bhuku* was formed:

> I was tired of waiting for someone to discover me and my work, tired of sending my manuscript to some money hungry Zimbabwean publishers who ignored creative writing favouring school textbooks. So I met up with Leroy Mthulisi Ndlovu, and we decided to get our stories to the people by all means possible. So *Ztorie Bhuku* was formed and we are trying hard to give an opportunity to young writers like us. You see we believe, written stories, must be read. We self-publish in Zimbabwe and We are also penetrating the international market [sic]. (2013)

What is key here is that *Ztorie Bhuku* provided an authorial space that was interactive and democratised and hence had the potential value to foster artistic consciousness. *ZtorieBhuku* emerged in response to the declining emphasis on creative content within print media, particularly

[54] In 2013, Lawrence Hoba took to his Facebook timeline, sharing the link to the blog and urging aspiring writers to submit their work. Concurrently, Emmanuel Sigauke contributed to the discourse by crafting a review article on *Ztorie Bhuku* in the *Munyori Literary Journal*, lauding it for its innovative approach. Tsitsi Dangarembga also commented directly on one of the short stories on the blog and urged the writer to publish a sequel. This endorsement from respected figures in the literary community not only amplified the visibility of *Ztorie Bhuku* but also underscored its significance as a platform for emerging voices. By harnessing the power of social media and established literary channels, Hoba and Sigauke effectively championed the blog, validating its role in fostering literary talents.

amid the closures of numerous magazines. This shift reflected a greater prioritisation of advertorial material over creative works, highlighting the necessity for alternative platforms like *ZtorieBhuku* to provide a space for experimentation and refining their writing skills.

A further dimension for critical engagement with everyday life has been created through blogs such as *Ztorie Bhuku,* which opened new avenues for individual and collective creativity. In other words, publishing on digital platforms enables writers to provide alternative worldviews and representations of everyday issues in a counter-hegemonic manner. I also employ Barber's (1997, p.6) postulations regarding the unique characteristics of popular art in Africa to underscore its profound impact on shaping cultural expression and transcending traditional boundaries and established norms. Similarly, *Ztorie Bhuku* operates outside the confines of publishing houses, affording writers freedom from conformity and gatekeeping to their conventions. Pierre Bourdieu (1996, p. 344) underscores that the collective action of cultural producers to defend "their own interests" is not merely a response to external pressures but a strategic recognition of the systemic challenges they face in asserting their autonomy. This collective mobilisation directly reacts to the structural constraints that limit their agency, highlighting the interplay between individual autonomy and the broader socio-political forces that shape the cultural field. Additionally, such collective efforts may also encounter resistance from entrenched power structures that benefit from maintaining the status quo. Nevertheless, the notion of writers banding together, though it presupposes cohesion, does not always reflect the reality of their fragmented interests and competing agendas in producing and disseminating their work.[55]

The blog promoted writers at the beginning of their literary careers and encouraged them to be true to their individuality. These writers deliberately incorporate colloquial language and taboo themes into their short stories to subvert and reinterpret dominant tropes, intentionally provoking strong reactions from their audience. Another function of the blog was to archive everyday life in the format of short stories. The deliberate choice to archive everyday life through short fiction in Zimbabwe was a conscious decision to use short stories as a powerful tool for social commentary and cultural critique. Through their stories, these writers sought to shed light on the multifaceted

[55] The Zimbabwe Women Writers (ZWW) and the Budding Writers Association of Zimbabwe (BWAZ), formed in 1990, have gradually diminished in prominence, with the latter disappearing from the literary scene entirely. BWAZ also published *The New Voices Magazine,* a quarterly publication from 2002 to 2005. Nevertheless, it should be noted that the economic sustainability of these organisations also proved to be difficult since they were donor funded.

realities of life in Zimbabwe, addressing issues that often remained overlooked or ignored. From economic hardships to social inequalities, from political unrest to cultural tensions, the stories reflected the everyday experiences of Zimbabweans. Rodney Carter (2006, p.216) observes that archival power is witnessed in both acts to allow voices to be distorted, silenced, heard and excluded. Carter (2006, p.230) further notes the ambiguities and politics of archiving stories:

> When […] the group is no longer able to pass on their stories, they die. While this may be a loss to future generations and society at large, it may be the desired outcome for the group who does not fear being forgotten.

Arguably, conflicting interests between the writers led to the deletion of the blog in 2020. Unfortunately, deleting the blog further marginalised some writers who were still on the verge of getting recognition. Contrary to Carter's (2006, p.230) assertion of the "death of stories", I posit that the deletion of the blog does not necessarily signify death per se but a dearth of stories which are no longer published on the blog. Instead, it marks a transition where these narratives may find new life and resonance in alternative forms or platforms. Hence, they can still have an afterlife in another form or platform. For instance, some stories have been republished on other online platforms such as *Booksie, African Writer Magazine* and *Munyori Literary Journal*. Through migration to alternative platforms and adaptation to new formats, these short stories transcend the confines of the original host. Despite moving to new platforms and being presented in different formats, the core content of these stories remains unchanged. The themes, characters, and narratives retain their integrity, ensuring that the essence and meaning of the stories are preserved. Thus, while the mode of delivery may evolve, the stories themselves continue to convey the same messages and emotions as they did in their original form.

When *Ztorie Bhuku* was taken down, I tried to access the deleted blog as a cached version that was indexed by Google but only found a few stories that were incomplete. I then tried to use the Internet Archive Wayback Machine, which takes snapshots of live web pages and archives them on a digital repository. [56]The only problem with internet archives is that they duplicate and

[56] For example, visit https://web.archive.org/.In the search bar, enter the dead link https://ztoriebhuku.wordpress.com/. You will see that the site was archived 12 times between August 18, 2013, and September 16, 2019. The calendar view displays the dates on which the Internet ArchiveWayback Machine crawled and saved the snapshots of the blog.

store digital footprints of most frequented live web pages. As such, Anat Ben-David and Adam Amram (2018, p. 180) problematised the efficacy of using the Internet Archive Wayback Machine as an archive and argued that it helps trace dead links of no longer existing web pages, but there will be glaring gaps in the recovered webpages since they are snapshots.[57] Accordingly, Achille Mbembe (2002, p.21) observes that what remains in the archive is a "montage of fragments", which then "creates an illusion of totality and continuity". The recovered *Ztorie Bhuku* webpages did not fully represent the deleted blog; hence, they mask the inherent gaps and silences within the archival record when pieced together. The only reliable archive comprises Hypertext Preprocessor (PHP) files, despite their lack of images. PHP files preserve user comments and discussions absent in the data recovered from the Internet Archive Wayback Machine. [58] Unlike the Internet Archive Wayback Machine, which only presents a partial view of the original content, the PHP archive provides complete stories along with metadata. It should be noted that working with PHP files highlights the challenges of digital archiving, where the choice of technology and recovery method significantly affects the completeness and quality of the preserved data. Locating and recovering the deleted short fiction from platforms like *Ztorie Bhuku* is essential to counter erasure in the archive. Despite the deletion of *Ztorie Bhuku*, the stories it hosted continue to hold significant influence and relevance.[59]

Life and death in the concrete jungle

The entry point of this section is to understand the myriad of experiences that unfold within the cityscape. I will pay particular attention to how young Zimbabwean writers are (de)constructing the city as a setting of their short stories and depicting it as a central character. The city is a microcosm of society and effectively mirrors the broader social and economic conditions that shape human experiences. I deploy the metaphorical imagery of the city as a jungle to highlight the dichotomy of urban existence, where the vibrancy and risks inherent in urban living are juxtaposed with the harsh realities and struggles that characters face. The analogy of the city as a jungle evokes Charles Darwin's (1872, p.67) theory of Social Darwinism, which posits the concept

[57] To view the snapshots of the deleted blog visit: https://web.archive.org/web/20130818151901/https://ztoriebhuku.wordpress.com/.

[58] PHP was originally an abbreviation of Personal Home Page, but it now stands for the recursive initialism PHP: Hypertext Preprocessor.

[59] Philani Nyoni's science fiction short story, "Celestial Incest", which was published on the *Ztorie Bhuku* blog was shortlisted in the 2018 African Writers Award.

of the ‘survival of the fittest,’ reflecting the struggle for existence. In this chapter, the short stories analysed portray the city as a competitive arena with a relentless quest for survival, resources, and opportunities. Most characters exhibit adaptability, resilience, and assertiveness, which are key traits needed to thrive in the so-called urban jungle.

I examine how the three short stories “Birth” (2013) and “Death” (2013) by Mthulisi Ndlovu and Noluthando Frost’s “Beloved” (2013) depict the city of Bulawayo as an inescapable melting pot of vices that highlight how the inhabitants are hemmed in an existential crisis. “Birth” (2013) and “Death” (2013) are serialised stories that unfold a single plot, providing readers with a progressively deeper understanding of the narrative as they read each instalment in sequence. “Beloved” (2013) engages with and reacts to the distorted biases present in Ndlovu’s (2013) narrative. Gérard Genette (1997) has termed this interplay between texts, where one text influences and corresponds with another, transtextuality. Transtextuality encompasses all aspects that establish a relationship between texts, whether overt or hidden. Through transtextuality, “Beloved” enters into a dialogue and builds upon the themes, motifs, and biases found in Ndlovu’s work, “Birth” and “Death”. Such an exploration prompts readers to read the three texts beyond their surface level and uncover more subtle connections. Secondly, it encourages an analysis of stylistic influences, shared themes, and recurring motifs that intersect across the texts. Similarly, Astvaldur Astvaldsson (2011, p.343) posits that using “fragmented narratives” requires readers to actively engage with the text, piecing together elements that help them understand the broader picture. In “Birth,” the initial instalment introduces us to an unnamed narrator who struggles with growing up without a father, facing solitude, debauchery, unemployment, and the death of his mother.

Conversely, “Death” presents a complementary perspective on the same plotline, adding depth and detail by naming the narrator and expanding themes featured in “Birth” to include sobriety, infidelity, in/vulnerability and suicide. While the overarching narrative remains consistent between the two series, “Death” gradually unveils new revelations, twists, and character development. The collaborative enterprise of writing and addressing sensitive topics such as infidelity, victimhood, mental health, and suicide facilitates a multiperspectival understanding of these short stories. In addition, I argue in this section that portraying these issues as inherently taboo and morally reprehensible overlooks the subjective nature of ethical judgments, human desire and behaviour. This section and the next will also pivot towards evaluating the fictional representation of characters within an urban setting. It analyses the cityscape to stress how the

urban environment acts as a dynamic setting where the characters' lives unfold.

My focus is on challenging the romanticised view of the city as a site of limitless opportunities, aspirations, transformations, and peril. Specifically, I aim to critique how the city is depicted as a place where characters from diverse backgrounds are granted the chance to transcend their circumstances, build a better future, and confront various challenges. This portrayal oversimplifies the complexities of urban life, neglecting the harsh realities that repeatedly trap characters in cycles of inequality, exploitation, and disenchantment. Instead of simply viewing the city as a space of potential for upward mobility, it is crucial to examine how structural factors such as poverty, systemic injustice, and exclusion shape the lived experiences of its inhabitants, particularly those from marginalised communities. In this light, the city becomes not only a symbol of hope but also a site of struggle and resilience, where the promise of success is elusive, and survival becomes a daily negotiation. Such a (de)construction of Bulawayo is allusive to the Dickensian motif of the city, which is characterised as a sprawling, bustling, and typically chaotic space teeming with diverse characters and experiences (Schwab 2021). Mthulisi Ndlovu's "Birth" and "Death" share thematic and aesthetic elements associated with urban settings. These short stories describe how the city is central to explicating the characters lived realities.

Leroy Ndlovu's "Birth" (2013) begins as a lamentation of a boy who grew up without a father but had a caring mother. It is written in a quasi-autobiographical style and first-person narrative mode interlaced with fragmented sentences. One revealing example is illustrated in the opening line and a string of sentences that follow:

> Birth. The saddest fucking moment of my life. I wept, and the world rejoiced. Born silent as I would remain throughout life, I was forced into lament by the rude hands of a masked doctor. Life and her violence; everyone was pleased by my grief. It signified health. (Ndlovu 2013a)

Ndlovu (2013a) purposefully uses short, staccato sentences that are emphatic and laden with meaning to lure the reader's attention. Ndlovu's short story has a protagonist narrator. It is told from the main character's perspective. Mika Nyoni (2011, p.85) avers that not naming the narrator highlights "the commonplacesness" and "typicality of the experiences and feelings" of the character in question and how his or her ordeals become relatable. I argue that writers on the *Ztorie Bhuku* blog deliberately use unnamed narrators to create a sense of universality and to emphasise themes rather than characters. The narrator's anonymity does not necessarily imply unreliability;

it is primarily a stylistic decision regarding narrative perspective. From the onset, the reader is guided by a melancholic tone that registers the narrator's revulsion and cynical detachment towards his birth and life.

The metaphor of birth is used in a paradoxical manner that is bereft of the warmth of childhood memories. Besides, life is described as sad, violent and earmarked by grief. Ndlovu (2013a) also uses birth imagery to address the burden of single parenting and the implications of fatherlessness in the city. As noted in the following remark: "cradled in my mother's loving arms, without a father to watch the scene with satisfaction" (Ndlovu 2013a). The theme of absent fathers is highlighted when the unnamed narrator describes how his father had vanished the moment he was told by his mother that she was pregnant. The narrator yearned to have had the opportunity to know the affection of his father; hence, his absence caused negative socio-psychological and developmental challenges, such as being an introvert. The narrator's reticence shows that he has no friends to talk or play with except for books. The narrator's characterisation of his father as a "bastard," "evil," "wonderful", and a "brilliant poet" reflects the profound ambivalence and ambiguity surrounding absent father figures (Ndlovu 2013a). On one hand, the father's abandonment engenders feelings of contempt and resentment, as evidenced by the pejorative terms used to describe him. On the other hand, there exists a sense of admiration and reverence for his talents and attributes, particularly his poetic prowess.

This duality in the unnamed narrator's perception of his absent father encapsulates a tension where feelings of anger and disappointment coexist with a longing for connection and understanding. The absence of paternal guidance leaves a void in the unnamed narrator's life, which creates what Raewyn Connell (2020, p.196) calls a "contradiction between a purged definition of masculinity and the actual conditions of emotional life". The absence of the unnamed narrator's father leaves him grappling with the discrepancy between societal expectations of masculinity and the lived experience of emotional neglect. The only person the unnamed narrator befriended was Patrick whom he regarded as a brother he never had. The unnamed narrator hero worshipped Patrick because of the following memorable first-time experiences:

> A lot of my firsts were facilitated either wholly or in part by him. Even the hooker I lost my virginity to was paid for by Patrick. […] I also owe my first taste of alcohol to Patrick. We were hiding in the bushes on the little hill behind the neighbourhood shops, guzzling that gin like

there would be no tomorrow. (Ndlovu 2013a)

The narrator's idolisation of Patrick is a quick reminder of the friendship between the unnamed narrator and Philip in Dambudzo Marechera's (1978) novella, *The House of Hunger*. Patrick is depicted as someone who is providing street education to the narrator. More useful for the purposes of my consideration of everyday life in the city are the interrelated themes of peer pressure, alcoholism and promiscuity. The narrator's attempt to pretend to be an adult to purchase alcohol further exemplifies the concept of kukiya-kiya. Through misrepresentation and deceptive behaviour, they attempt to bypass legal restrictions and social conventions surrounding alcohol consumption by minors. Additionally, the potential consequences of underage drinking, such as addiction and engaging in risky behaviours like unprotected sex, also pose significant health and safety risks. Interestingly, the narrator and his friend are subverting laws for personal gratification. Ndlovu's short story "Birth" follows a circular plot in which the same situation repeats itself. At the beginning of the story, the narrator is bitterly wrestling with loneliness and difficulties with social adjustment. When his best friend, Patrick, gets married, he becomes distant, and the narrator has to contend with solitude:

> Faster than I could realise what was happening I was back where I started. Without a friend in the world, I turned to the only other friend I had known nearly as long as Patrick. Books had long lost their appeal. My new friend was a Russian Tsar. He and I became much acquainted. I spent my days chugging down mouthfuls of the spirit. First, behind my desk at the office, and later, after I got fired, at the same fountain where I had spent my childhood days listening to my mother reminisce about how good she and my father had been. (Ndlovu 2013a)

The excerpt above provides an introspective exploration of memory, place, and emotional significance within the city. The spatial representation of the Centenary Park fountain reflects the cyclical nature of memory and experience as the narrator revisits the fountain in moments of both joy and sorrow. The fountain emerges as a symbol of solace and continuity amidst life's challenges and transitions. Through the narrator's recollections of moments spent at Centenary Park fountain, we can discern a sense of comfort and familiarity. Sitting at the fountain with his mother establishes a foundational connection between the narrator and the physical environment within the cityscape. The repetition of visits to the park in the narrator's childhood underscores the significance of this space in their formative years.

The fountain was a "special place" for both the narrator and his mother because it used to be her rendezvous with the now absentee father (Ndlovu 2013a). In other words, the fountain fills the void of growing up without a father. The same park had served as a rendezvous location for his parents when they were young. Despite his father's betrayal, the fountain retains its symbolic importance as a site of memory and emotional resonance for both the narrator and their mother. Hence, the fountain becomes a nexus of social interaction and acts as a backdrop for the narrator's relationships. In her chapter, "From Topos to Anthropoid: The City as Character in Twentieth-Century Texts", Jane Augustine (2013) contends that places in the city also exhibit qualities of agency and autonomy typically associated with human characters. Likewise, I argue that the Centenary Park fountain emerges as a powerful confidante character within the narrative, providing emotional support and guidance for the narrator amidst life's challenges. Just as a trusted confidante provides solace and understanding, the fountain becomes a symbol and source of emotional connection in times of distress. The anthropomorphisation of the city allows Ndlovu to explore themes of absentee fatherhood, solitude and debauchery. The narrator's descent into alcoholism and risky sexual behaviour serves as a manifestation of an unrelenting pursuit of human connection. Debauchery intersects with 'make-do' practices of coping amidst adversity. The narrator's debauchery stems from a profound sense of loneliness and abandonment. Instead of facing the vicissitudes of life head-on, the narrator seeks refuge in self-destructive habits, using alcohol as a means to numb the pain of loss and hardship.

The narrator preferred being in a drunken stupor, especially when he lost his job and found out that his mother was very ill. His mother's ill health and subsequent death shoved him further on "the path of self-destruction" (Ndlovu 2013a). "Birth" (2013) ends with a redemptive arc in which the narrator visits the fountain shortly after the death of his mother. The unnamed narrator claims that the fountain evoked feelings of nostalgia:

> I dont remember whether or not I went to the funeral, but I do remember being at the fountain at centenary park. What a cycle. The fountain now held a special place in my heart. [sic] (Ndlovu 2013a)

The fountain becomes a more integral and active participant exerting influence on the narrative. It also shaped the actions and experiences of the unnamed narrator. For instance, his decision to quit drinking alcohol represents a symbolic rebirth, as the narrator seeks to reclaim agency over his life

and move towards a more hopeful future. Instead of merely serving as a backdrop, the fountain transcends its physical form and assumes the role of a nurturing figure within the city. Like a wise elder, it provides a sense of stability and continuity, influencing the unnamed narrator to break free from destructive patterns and embrace positive change.

Gendered constructions of love and infidelity from a 'boy meets girl' perspective.

This study establishes a significant link between the pervasive influence of societal constructs on individual behaviours and beliefs surrounding infidelity and vulnerability. It also considers how concepts of masculinity and femininity shape characters' attitudes and interpretations regarding cheating, betrayal, and victimhood within relationships. Ndlovu's (2013) short story entitled "Death" revolves around Victor's personal struggles with addiction as a recovering alcoholic who had been sober for over two years. Victor admits to having a difficult life, describing it as a "steaming pile of shit" (Ndlovu 2013b). In an emotive trail of thoughts, Victor intones that "[i]ts sad that this narrative comes at a time when I feel as though I am about to lose my mind. Let us see if we can squeeze eighteen months into the next few paragraphs, shall we?" (Ndlovu 2013b). With a confessional tone, the story unravels the gripping struggle against the chains of addiction that have bound the narrator for so long. Victor's downward spiral into alcoholism had exacted a heavy toll, and the consequences were dire. The repercussions of his addiction had stripped him of the very means to sustain his livelihood, leaving him jobless and adrift. Victor intimates that before he could find employment, he sold off all his belongings to "generate a little currency" until the house was empty. (Ndlovu 2013b). This narrative vividly illustrates how characters resort to selling their property to survive. It also underscores the harsh realities they face in precarious economic situations, where selling off possessions demonstrates the willingness to forgo long-term security and personal assets in order to meet immediate financial needs. Therefore, Victor's desperation highlights the lengths to which characters are willing to go in order to sustain themselves in challenging circumstances.

The narrator's life took a dramatic turn when they crossed paths with Thandiwe within the confines of a library, experiencing what can only be described as love at first sight. This transformative encounter marked a pivotal moment in their existence, altering the course of their journey in profound ways. For instance, Victor is depicted as "gob-smacked", which conjures notions of enchantment, suggesting a powerful and instantaneous attraction that defies rational explanation (Ndlovu 2013b). Victor also brags that they had "what the novels call a whirlwind

romance" (Ndlovu 2013b). This romantic trope, repeatedly celebrated in popular culture and literature, captures the intensity and euphoria that can accompany the discovery of a soulmate. The narrator's life, previously devoid of this deep and profound connection, now brimmed with the possibility of shared dreams, adventures, and emotional fulfilment. Victor goes on to describe Thandiwe as both "pretty" and "small," employing a rhetorical pause to emphasise each characteristic (Ndlovu 2013b). This deliberate punctuation adds a sense of contemplation and appreciation to the description, highlighting the narrator's admiration for her physical appearance. Through the narrator's detailed observations and the careful selection of descriptive language, a sense of intrigue and fascination is created, drawing the reader into the narrator's experience. I argue that the concept of love at first sight can be understood as a manifestation of patriarchal gazing, which reduces women to mere objects of male desire. When someone experiences love at first sight, they are generally captivated by another person's physical appearance or outward qualities.

This initial attraction is based on external factors, such as beauty, charm, or charisma, which align with societal standards and ideals perpetuated by patriarchy. In this sense, patriarchal gazing reinforces and perpetuates patriarchal norms by objectifying women and reducing them to superficial qualities. The intensity of love at first sight can evoke powerful emotions and create a sense of infatuation. Yet it is important to evaluate these emotions within a broader understanding of healthy relationships and character development. Melissa Steyn and Mikki van Zyl (2009, p.3) observe that what is "desired" and "desirable" is constructed through subjectivity and negotiation. Thandiwe's appearance, particularly her choice of clothing, serves as a focal point for the narrator's attention and perception:

> This woman was simply captivating. She wore those skinny jeans that everyone is so obsessed with these days. They hugged her legs so tightly I hoped they would rip open, but they did not. Black skinny jeans; and a black t-shirt that bore the legend: You call me bitch like its a bad thing. I couldnt see much of her face because she wore a khaki sunhat. Yes. It was her body that drew my attention. Small as she was, something about her just said, Do not fuck with me. I've been around the block. And of course, there was the t-shirt. The t-shirt just screamed character. For the first time in my life I was tongue tied. [sic] (Ndlovu 2013b)

Victor's fascination with Thandiwe's appearance highlights the role of visual cues in shaping our perceptions of others and how they leave a lasting impression on one's psyche. The objectification of Thandiwe's body and appearance reinforces and shapes how women are perceived and treated as passive objects meant for the pleasure and consumption of others. Hackneyed stereotypes of female characters have been critically examined in Zimbabwean literary texts, particularly in terms of how language and prevailing attitudes contribute to the objectification and stereotyping of women. The pervasive nature of these stereotypes comes into sharp focus through Rudo Gaidzanwa's (1985) incisive socio-literary analysis titled *Images of Women in Zimbabwean Literature*. Gaidzanwa (1985) meticulously examines the objectification and eroticisation of the female body, laying bare the detrimental effects of such representations on societal perceptions and gender dynamics. Similarly, Newell (2002) challenges the assumption that financial autonomy inherently leads to negative portrayals of women in popular fiction. Instead, she suggests that the key factor influencing the increasingly negative representations of women is their marital status. The portrayal of women as mere objects of desire in popular literature perpetuates harmful gender norms and reinforces the patriarchal status quo. This highly sexualised and negative portrayal of female characters does not only marginalise and objectify women but also hampers their ability to be seen and valued beyond their physical attributes.

The fleeting moment of connection led Victor to spend significant time with Thandiwe before cohabiting, indicating his commitment and dedication to the relationship. It is noteworthy that perceptions of cohabiting vary among couples. While some couples see it as a stepping stone to marriage, others regard it as equivalent. Traditional values and expectations surrounding marriage could play a significant role in shaping the latter perspective. Zitha Mokomane (2005) presents a critical argument regarding the diverse perceptions of cohabitation, exploring whether it is seen as a viable alternative to marriage or merely a prelude leading to it. While Mokomane's (2005) argument provides an insightful perspective on the dynamics of cohabitation, it is essential to acknowledge individual experiences and the wide range of societal viewpoints. Ignoring this diversity risks oversimplifying the discourse and failing to capture the multifaceted nature of cohabitation in different contexts. These societal viewpoints warrant further examination because cohabitation has become a prominent aspect of modern relationships across different societies. Some view it as a progressive step away from traditional marital norms, providing greater autonomy and flexibility for couples (Popoola and Ayandele 2019). I argue that Victor and

Thandiwe's cohabitation resembles the notion of kukiya-kiya because it disrupts conventional norms and expectations regarding intimate relationships and family structures. For Victor, cohabitation presents a viable alternative to marriage, liberating him from societal expectations, lifelong commitments, and legal entanglements, while enabling the assessment of compatibility and the management of shared living logistics. Victor regards cohabitation as a pragmatic step towards marriage, ensuring a stable foundation before committing to a formal union.

Victor's unwavering trust in Thandiwe is shattered when he arrives home from work and finds the door locked, initially assuming Thandiwe is out running errands. As Victor enters their bedroom, he is confronted with the shocking sight of his married neighbour, Mr Nyathi, caught in a compromising act (Ndlovu 2013b). This moment challenges Victor's perception of his surroundings and reveals the hidden complexities of suburban life. This unexpected betrayal turns Victor's world upside down, challenging his perception of their shared connection and casting doubt on their budding thoughts of marriage. The unanticipated and shocking revelation of infidelity is ironic, considering the trust and intimacy the narrator had with Thandiwe. Ndlovu's (2013b) "Death" confronts the painful reality of infidelity and captures the emotional upheaval and psychological impact of betrayal within a relationship, highlighting the fragility of trust and human connections. When infidelity is discovered, emotions can escalate rapidly, and partners react with overwhelming anger, as depicted in the situation where Victor violently attacked Nyathi after catching the illicit lovers in the act (Ndlovu 2013b). Such violent reactions are never justified and only serve to perpetuate a cycle of harm and distress. Consequently, Victor is arrested and confined, leading to a period of self-reflection and spiritual questioning.

After Victor's discovery that he is HIV positive, a considerable weight of concern, fear and despair are added to the already tumultuous aftermath of infidelity (Ndlovu, 2013b). When he discovers his girlfriend's infidelity, Victor relapses from sobriety and starts drinking again. Victor's contemplation of suicide becomes a focal point, with the weight of betrayal and feelings of inadequacy and emasculation becoming overwhelming. Notably, the stigma surrounding HIV/AIDS causes people to perceive the diagnosis as a death sentence. "Death" presents a deeply troubling and introspective narrative as Victor contemplates ending his life:

> Did I tell you about the revolver on my desk? I was surprised by the ease with which one can get ones hands on a gun in Bulawayo. I always thought it was like trying to find a white cow.

> Obviously I cannot tell you how I acquired this little tool […] In just moments I shall finish the job that nature has been trying to do for 33 years. If the drugged liquor fails the revolver will tuck me into my eternal bed. (Ndlovu 2013b)

In this context, the concept of kukiya-kiya, which refers to the ability to obtain scarce or illegal items through informal channels, can be seen as relevant to the ease with which Victor acquires a gun in Bulawayo.

The juxtaposition of obtaining a gun with the rarity of finding a white cow underscores the prevalence of violence and the accessibility of firearms in the city despite strict regulations and societal norms against them. Kukiya-kiya reflects a phenomenon where characters use informal networks to engage in illicit activities in order to access goods that are difficult to obtain through official channels. In the case of Victor, the ease with which he obtains a gun suggests the existence of underground networks or black markets that facilitate the acquisition of firearms despite legal barriers and social taboos associated with gun ownership in Zimbabwe. "Birth" and "Death" highlight the pervasive nature of kukiya-kiya in Bulawayo, where characters resort to informal means to acquire items deemed essential for their survival or death, even if they are illegal or scarce.

The narrator's tone in "Death" oscillates between resignation and despair as they reflect on their impending actions. The above excerpt also reveals Victor's feelings of fear and uncertainty about his decision. These ambivalent emotions are attributed to the effects of poisoned liquor rather than genuine intent. Ndlovu (2013b) employs references from popular culture within the text, drawing parallels to other renowned figures who met similar fates, such as Ernest Hemingway, Kurt Cobain, Ingrid Jonker, and William Shakespeare. Aligning himself with these figures, Victor sought validation in the belief that suicide is a fate shared by even the most celebrated and accomplished artists. Such a rationalisation of suicide provides a sense of reassurance and acceptance in the face of personal struggles and hopelessness. It is significant to highlight that Victor commits suicide on his thirty-third birthday while also anticipating the arrival of Patrick (Ndlovu 2013b). This decision adds a sense of urgency and finality to the situation, highlighting his profound contemplation of the symbolic significance of his birth and death. The extreme nature of his actions reveals how deeply internalised gendered expectations surrounding male honour, control, and infidelity can lead to devastating consequences.

Comparably, in the previous chapter's analysis of Rugare Mareva's "If You Were in My Shoes" (2007), the unnamed narrator's violent response to his wife Shupikai's pregnancy by another man, culminating in both her murder and his suicide, underscores this point. This tragic outcome is not merely a personal failure but a reflection of how patriarchal norms pressure men into responding to betrayal through violence and self-destruction. It is worth noting that the characterisation of Victor as vulnerable and effeminate is part of the lore of patriarchal socialisation that creates a culture of silence and solitary discourses. In this regard, the patriarchal gaze and masculinist notions of invulnerability in men show how they engender 'disabling' qualities that make them fail to cope after discovering their partners' acts of infidelity.

Challenging gendered expectations of love and betrayal

Gendered perceptions of infidelity take on a fresh perspective when viewed through the lens of women. Conversely, this perspective provides an opportunity to challenge the conventional portrayal of infidelity, which typically places men in dominant roles, portraying them as the initiators or pursuers of extramarital affairs. In contrast, women are frequently depicted as passive and helpless victims of their circumstances. It is plausible to argue that adopting such a narrative perspective illuminates the agency and desires of women, breaking free from limiting stereotypes that invalidate their voices, emotions, motivations, and choices. This alternative viewpoint allows us to acknowledge that women are not merely passive actors in matters of infidelity and are also not solely responsible for preserving the sanctity of relationships. They, too, possess agency and the capacity to make decisions that defy societal expectations. Understanding the desires and motivations that drive women to engage in infidelity can unveil a comprehensive understanding of human relationships.

Noluthando Frost's (2013) "Beloved" gives a countervailing account of infidelity that critiques Victor's understanding and interpretation of Thandiwe's extramarital affair with Mr. Nyathi. "Beloved" builds upon and responds to the distortive biases inherent in Ndlovu (2013). Thandiwe unveils a disturbing truth about Victor's behaviour, asserting that he deliberately portrayed himself as a victim to maintain an innocent image (Frost 2013). In response, Thandiwe reveals that before meeting her, Victor engaged in transactional sex with prostitutes during his drunken stupors (Frost 2013). This rebuttal challenges Victor's moral high ground and exposes the

hypocrisy in his judgment of her actions. It further undermines Victor's perceived blamelessness and raises critical questions about his accountability for his own behaviour.

Thandiwe's revelation forces us to reconsider our initial judgment of Victor and confront the unsettling reality that he is far from innocent. Thandiwe's acknowledgement of Victor's genuine affection for her is a compelling insight into her character (Frost 2013). Thandiwe displays a profound sense of self-awareness by recognising her manipulative behaviour and candidly admitting to exploiting Victor's emotions for personal gain. Her admission highlights the extent to which she grapples with her own flaws and the moral dilemma she faces in the pursuit of boosting her ego through Victor's eagerness and joy. This awareness of her actions adds depth to Thandiwe's characterisation, contributing to the thematic richness of the narrative and inviting readers to reflect on the intricate interplay between human desires and ethical boundaries. In her analysis of confession in literature, Maria Olaussen (2008, p. 71) contends that "a confession is retroactive, and the narrative is shaped by the wrongdoing, which is to be disclosed." Olaussen's (2008) argument underscores the inherently reflective nature of confession, where recounting past transgressions influences and shapes the way the story is told, thus complicating the relationship between guilt, memory, and narrative construction. Frost's (2013) short story exemplifies this concept through the central theme of Thandiwe's disclosure. Throughout the narrative, Thandiwe deliberately accentuates details, emotions, and motivations relevant to her confession. In doing so, she effectively communicates her deep remorse and clear understanding of her actions and circumstances. This strategic shaping of the narrative facilitates Thandiwe's confession and highlights the profound impact of her wrongdoing and the subsequent process of redemption and self-reflection.

Thandiwe's self-perception is crucial in understanding her character and the power of self-labelling. Thandiwe's internal monologue demonstrates the power of self-labelling and the impact it can have on one's self-esteem and behaviour:

> My name is Thandiwe, and I really am 'beloved' of men wherever I go. [...] In my head I called myself 'the baddest bitch of them all'. I'll say it one more time: names, even the ones we give ourselves in our heads, matter. (Frost 2013)

Thandiwe accentuates the importance of names, including the ones we give ourselves in our heads. This suggests that self-identification and how we label ourselves can impact our behaviour and

interactions with others. Therefore, language plays a significant role in constructing social identities and lived realities. According to Cheela Chilala (2016, p.155), the act of naming in literature carries an intrinsic connection to the content of the narrative and cannot be dissociated from it. This viewpoint highlights the deliberate intention behind an author's choice of names for their characters, suggesting that these names are imbued with meaning and purpose, contributing to the overall thematic depth of the work. Furthermore, Chilala (2016, p.157) describes the creative and authoritative nature of naming as an "Adamic license", illustrating its literary value. Thandiwe's declaration of being 'beloved' and desirable reveals her strong sense of confidence and a keen awareness of her attractiveness (Frost 2013, para. 1). This self-perception raises questions about gender dynamics and how they might influence Thandiwe's self-worth. It also suggests that her attractiveness to men is central to her sense of self-worth, which societal norms and expectations around femininity and desirability can influence. She also uses the direct translation of her isiNdebele name, Thandiwe, which means Beloved in English. This self-identity appears to be a defining aspect of her personality. I also argue that the term "baddest bitch" implies a sense of strength, assertiveness, and superiority, and it influences how she perceives and projects herself to others (Frost 2013).

Thandiwe asserts that moving in with Victor was inevitable, suggesting a sense of resignation or acceptance. At first glance, this could imply a lack of agency or control in her decision-making, but Thandiwe establishes that she was sexually liberated. Beloved opens with Thandiwe's perspective on her relationship with Victor. Thandiwe does not shy away from detailing her sexual experience and hints at a promiscuous past, stating that she has "been around the block a few times" (Frost 2013). This self-disclosure implies a level of confidence and worldly knowledge regarding intimate relationships. Like Creatia in Lukungwe's "All for the Belly" (2003), Thandiwe also fits into the 'good time girl' archetype. In the previous chapter, I stressed the need to explore the broader implications of the notion of the 'good time girl' on cultural identity, representation, as well as women's agency and empowerment. The overriding value of the nexus between cultural stereotypes and perceptions necessitates a critical reassessment of the prevailing notions that influence our understanding of sexually liberated women.

Thandiwe's past and sexual experiences introduce the notion of unmatched desires and expectations. Thandiwe also expresses frustration with Victor's treatment, specifically his overprotective behaviour towards her, likening it to being treated like "a delicate China doll" (Frost

2013). This implies a power dynamic where Victor assumes a caretaker role, possibly driven by a fear of hurting and losing Thandiwe. Thandiwe's growing dissatisfaction with this treatment reveals a desire for more autonomy and a sense of agency in their relationship. Newell states (2002, p.6) that there is a pattern or formula to the way "sexually self-determining" female characters who are sexually liberated are depicted in popular literature as "misusing their sexuality." The reluctance to address the issue of infidelity directly is depicted by how Thandiwe questions how she would have broached the subject of Victor's perceived shortcomings in bed. Thandiwe's hesitation also hints at how the fear of punishment for infidelity can act as a form of surveillance, encouraging people to self-regulate their behaviour or adopt silence to avoid potential consequences. Thandiwe acknowledges her mistakes and expresses regret for not being honest with Victor about her sexual needs. Thandiwe recognises that their silence or withholding of information contributed to the current predicament. Thandiwe claims that she never had unprotected sex with Nyathi and had only considered fulfilling her unmet sexual desire (Frost 2013). Women who are unsatisfied in their relationships are inclined to "trade up" for a better partner and a more rewarding relationship, either before or after engaging in infidelity (Brand et al. 2007, p.103). Instead of addressing issues within the relationship openly, Thandiwe resorted to seeking fulfilment outside the relationship, undermining trust. "Beloved" also raises questions about accountability and responsibility in relationships involving multiple partners. It also underscores the risks associated with infidelity, especially when it comes to the transmission of sexually transmitted infections like HIV.

When infidelity is discovered in a relationship, it generally triggers intense emotions and reactions. One typical response is name-calling and the use of derogatory language directed towards the unfaithful partner. This behaviour can be a manifestation of the deep-rooted sexist attitudes that exist within patriarchal societies. The act of name-calling not only reflects the hurt and betrayal experienced by the person who discovered the infidelity but can also be seen as an attempt to assert power or inflict emotional pain on the unfaithful partner. Thandiwe laments how Victor hurled derogatory remarks about her character and morality, questioning her fidelity and worthiness as a partner:

> They called me a slore. You won't find that word in the Oxford Dictionary of English. In case you don't know, slore is about the filthiest name you can call any woman. It's an amalgamation

> of two more popular names for women of supposedly loose morals. If it wasn't for Pretty coming by that night, I still wouldn't know that. (Frost 2013)[60]

This extract highlights the pivotal role of Pretty, Thandiwe's best friend and a domestic worker, in revealing to her the derogatory meaning of the word 'slore.' The fact that Thandiwe learns this term from Pretty, a figure of a lower socio-economic class, challenges traditional class hierarchies of knowledge. The extract also critiques the social dynamics of labelling and shaming women, particularly in the way language is weaponised against those deemed to have loose morals. Punitive practices surrounding infidelity evolve and change over time, taking on different forms, such as social shaming and name-calling. I argue that the resort to name-calling and aggressive behaviour by men in response to infidelity can be seen as a defence mechanism to shield themselves from vulnerability and project strength in the face of emotional adversity. When confronted with the painful experience of infidelity, Victor and his friends struggle to process their feelings of hurt and betrayal. As a result, Victor's friends resort to name-calling and derogatory language to deflect attention from their own vulnerability. Kaye Mitchell (2020, p.17) discusses the gendering of shame in contemporary literature and notes that "men's shame is still frequently displaced onto female bodies, while women's shame is seen to dishonour the men with whom they are connected (whose property they are assumed to be)". Equally, Foucault's (1991) exploration of the economy of punishment helps us to understand how societal responses to infidelity are not isolated incidents but are embedded in the interwoven webs of power, norms, and disciplinary mechanisms. Therefore, shaming can also function to belittle the partner who cheated on them. It is also used by men to temporarily feel a sense of empowerment or control over the situation.

Thandiwe bemoans how Patrick, who happens to be Victor's best friend, accuses her of being "a murdering witch" (Frost 2013). Thandiwe, in response, finds the situation ironic and laughable as Victor's friends entertain the notion that she could be responsible for his death. Paradoxically, Thandiwe asserts that she was pregnant at the time and, in a twist of fate, reveals that Victor was the father who transmitted HIV to her. This disclosure redirects the responsibility onto Victor, questioning his supposed innocence while amplifying the narrative's critical examination of accountability and power relations. The blame placed on Thandiwe for killing Victor aligns with the concept of the "killer-bride suspicion" discussed by Canisius Mwandayi and

[60] "Slore" is a portmanteau of "slut" and "whore."

Sophia Chirongoma (2020, p.1). This phenomenon involves casting suspicion on the surviving spouse, pointing fingers at them, and unfairly positioning women as the primary culprits in the death of their spouses. It also reflects deep-seated societal anxieties that reinforce patriarchal narratives that undermine female agency and perpetuate harmful gender stereotypes. The irony of Thandiwe's case becomes evident as she finds herself at the centre of similar allegations, while she maintains that Victor, her late partner, was the one who transmitted the disease that eventually led to his demise. Considering both perspectives has allowed me to discern how societal norms, power dynamics, cultural influences, and individual agency intersect to shape narratives surrounding infidelity and invulnerability in a cohabiting couple. Ndlovu and Frost's short stories portray men's vulnerability and victimhood while critically dissecting patriarchal ideals of invincibility. These narratives challenge traditional gender norms and stereotypes, revealing how emotional experiences, societal pressures and mental health are consistently overlooked in portrayals of masculinity.

Streetwise strategies: The unwritten rules of the city

This section conducts a close reading of Lenni Mdawini Sibanda's short stories "Death on Wheels" (2013a), "Sex, Shebeen, Orgasms, and Beer" (2013b), Sozah Ruzario's "How Juju Can Get Back Your Lost Lover" (2013) and Leroy Mthulisi Ndlovu's "Locked Gates and Tall Grass" (2017). I explore how characters adapt to changing circumstances and make the most of available resources by exploiting informal opportunities with creativity and resilience to earn a living in the city. Instead of focusing solely on the glamour and excitement of city life, Sibanda, Ndlovu and Ruzario prioritise how characters overcome daily difficulties. Such an exploration challenges traditional perceptions and interpretations of hustling and examines the underlying power dynamics and social inequalities entrenched within urban spaces. The concept of the city's unwritten rules, usually epitomised in what is colloquially termed the "street code," plays a significant role in governing behaviour and interactions within specific social and cultural contexts. Elijah Anderson (1999, p.33), in his book *Code of the Street: Decency, Violence and the Moral Life of the Inner City* defines the street code as a "set of informal rules that govern interpersonal and public behaviour." While Anderson (1999) primarily focuses on how these informal rules perpetuate silence, crime and sanction violence, I argue for a distended interpretation of the street code, encompassing the improvised strategies and responses that shape daily life in the city. Indeed, these unwritten rules dictate behaviour in confrontational situations and facilitate navigating

challenges and escaping consequences. I am intrigued by how the city's unwritten rules exert pressure on characters, compelling them to conform to informal norms and codes of conduct. Understanding how these unwritten rules operate provides valuable explanations for how they are born out of necessity, expectations, and survival strategies.

In Sibanda's "Sex, Shebeen, Orgasms and Beer" (2013), the city of Bulawayo is depicted as a truly African city with its colonial aura, especially the hauntingly charming late nineteenth-century houses, coupled with the modern high-rise apartments. The eclectic spatial representation of a city imbued with simple and modern architecture typifies a "postcard view of Africa" (Sibanda, 2013a). Sibanda's focus on everyday life in townships, which he describes as the "belly of the city" and "the city's heartbeat", highlights a stark contradiction in urban dynamics (2013a). The term belly of the city evokes the underbelly, the dark and dangerous side of urban life, where characters are vulnerable and could metaphorically be 'eaten alive' by their harsh circumstances. In contrast, referring to the township as the city's heartbeat positions it as the very heart of the urban environment, the source of vitality and authentic life. Sibanda uses personification and vivid visual imagery of Magwegwe township to elicit metaphors of vibrancy and accentuate the importance of a bustling place and space that is taken for granted. Dustin Stokes (2019) suggests that fiction can evoke mental imagery in readers. When readers engage with fictional texts, their minds naturally conjure up images based on the descriptions and narratives presented. Stokes (2019) accentuates that these mental pictures are not fully elaborated within the text itself; instead, they require the reader to actively participate in expanding and fleshing out these images in their minds. In other words, fiction prompts readers to visualise scenes, characters, and settings, but the reader's imagination brings these images to life and fills in the details.

Townships in Bulawayo, such as Magwegwe, are portrayed as "an ulcer", something that tourists do not see" (Sibanda 2013a). The townships are invisible to passersby, especially the well-heeled visitors because they are located on the city's outskirts and have densely populated lower-income households. Bulawayo, with its impressive size, possesses what Jonathan Raban (2017) delineates as the soft (visible) and hard (invisible) qualities of the city. Similarly, Sarah Nuttall (2005) views the township and city as an *assemblage*, suggesting that they are not isolated entities but interconnected components that form a larger whole. Primorac (2010) calls for an inclusive understanding of the city's textual representations, particularly how they create a blur between official and unofficial, formal and informal, and visible and invisible aspects. In the short stories

analysed in this chapter, the township and the city are interconnected by various social, cultural, and economic factors that shape life in both the township and the city.

Sibanda skillfully employs a symbolic vignette to provide a kaleidoscopic view of urban life in Magwegwe, portraying it as one of the impoverished inner-city neighbourhoods. Nevertheless, as discussed in Chapter 2, the delineation between the township and the city is not rigid; instead, it is fluid and permeable, with constant flows of people, goods, and ideas between them. Muchaparara Musemwa (2006, p.187) aptly describes the historical evolution of Bulawayo as "a tale of two cities in one." Musemwa (2006) notes that the socio-spatial segregation inherent in the city ensured that the central business district, northern and eastern suburbs were on one side, and townships on the other. This spatial division is deeply entrenched in historical legacies, systemic inequalities, and class dynamics that have shaped the city's development. Therefore, economic status and social standing determined access to certain city neighbourhoods, amenities, and privileges.

Similarly, Khethani Mlilo, the first-person narrator in "Death on Wheels" (2013), stays in the low-density suburbs of Killarney but laments that these are the areas with the most carjacking in the city. It is intriguing to observe the paradox in the narrator's portrayal of Bulawayo's affluent suburbs, such as Killarney, which are characterised as relatively quiet yet simultaneously depicted as hotspots for crime (Sibanda, 2013a). This creates a sharp contrast with the townships or ghettoes, which, despite being portrayed as noisy and constantly bustling, are ironically described as much safer. The irony emerges in how these spaces, typically linked to poverty and marginalisation, are reframed as sites of security, while wealthier, ostensibly more stable areas become marked by vulnerability and danger, thereby unsettling dominant assumptions about safety and class privilege. This juxtaposition and spatial categorisation of Bulawayo shape perceptions of safety and disorder, challenging conventional ideas about affluence and security. It underscores the complexities of urban life in Zimbabwe, where material wealth does not necessarily equate to safety, and where the dynamics of power and class influence not only the physical landscape but also the lived experiences of its residents. Khethani intimates that when he used to stay in "the ghetto of Old Pumula", he could sleep peacefully with the car safely parked outside the yard (Sibanda, 2013a). Magwegwe Flats near the taxi rank are portrayed as a hive of activity, especially late at night as the taxi drivers knock off from work; a curious mix of noise deafens one's ears during those times, from car hooters to loud whistling plus loud shouting. In "Sex, Shebeen,

Orgasms and Beer" (2013), the third-person narrator conveys a sense of timelessness and perpetual activity within the townships by reiterating that "around these parts… ten o'clock pm is midday." This suggests that life there is unusually vibrant and continuous. The so-called nuisance elements in the urban space are shown as a contradiction and are defined by Mary Douglas (2003, p. 44) as "out of place" with regard to their status in the context of "ordered relations and contravention of that order." Douglas (2003) further highlights that what people consider as 'out of place' varies considerably according to location and time. It is noteworthy that distinct cultures of order and disorder demarcate the temporal and spatial configuration of the city.

More useful for the purposes of my consideration of everyday life in the city are inscriptions of survival and modalities of coping strategies. The township is depicted as a crucible of enduring struggle and hardship, where youths are immersed in a challenging environment:

> The township is a huge pot slowly boiling away, in it a gravy of youth cooked to live in misery, poverty and perverse sex worship. Escaping it is a distant dream; hence, once an opportunity comes, they hang on tooth, nail, toes and fingers; such stories are rare, but they do happen every once in a while. (Sibanda, 2013b)

In "Sex, Shebeen, Orgasms and Beer," Sibanda (2013) cogently portrays the harsh realities faced by young people in the township, implying that they are subjected to harrowing circumstances and a deviant form of sexual obsession from an early age. Similarly, Victor in "Death" (2013) exhibits similar behaviours, valuing women primarily for their physical attributes and perceived sexual prowess. The imagery of the township as a "huge pot slowly boiling away" suggests a simmering tension and pressure, with characters trapped within its confines (Sibanda 2013b). The ambivalent nature of the city in Southern Africa is poignantly noted by Irikidzayi Manase (2005, p.88), who, in his discussion of life in the city, argues that it "mirrors the paradox of being able to achieve success and failure at the same time." Manase (2005) further observes that dialectical links exist between poverty and wealth, life, death, home and homelessness, which result in the constitution of restless and dislocated identities for most urban dwellers. Therefore, searching for meaning in a violent and uncertain city involves seeking relationships that serve as anchors in turbulent times, providing emotional support, solidarity, and a sense of belonging in an otherwise hostile environment.

The discursive ordering of socio-economic constructs, such as poverty and wealth, within a temporal and spatial dimension enriches our understanding of life in the city. It should suffice to interrogate how poverty and wealth are discussed and represented over time and in different locations within the city. Furthermore, it is essential to consider the simultaneity of cause and effect of urban mobilities. Lefebvre (1996, p.127) contends that the city is characterised by "urban realities" such as "simultaneity and encounter." In urban settings, actions and their consequences co-occur and are interconnected. Also relevant and related to my discussion is Onookome Okome's (2012, p.170) analysis of the city of Lagos, notably how it "offers a blinding sense of freedom but one that is likened to a malarial state of consciousness." In this context, freedom experienced in the city is marked by a contrariety of optimism and an air of gloomy pessimism. The flats in Magwegwe are depicted as having a thriving not-so-underground 'red light district' which has brothels, taverns and shebeens. Chenjerai Hove in *Shebeen Tales: Message from Harare* (1997) observes how the township economy relies on informal enterprises such as shebeens and personal networks that are forged through nepotism and bribery so that they can operate without licenses and evade raids by law enforcing agents. David Pratten (2006, pp.3-4) observes how the agency of ordinary people "illustrates the complexity, plurality, temporality and improvisation of their actions." In simpler terms, Pratten (2006) observes that while people possess the power to make choices, their actions are unpredictable and influenced by the necessity of adapting to various situations. Quite tellingly, their agency is not straightforward or uniform. Instead, it reflects the diverse circumstances and situations people find themselves in.

Seduction, sex and coupling in the city

This subsection focuses on the fluidity and diversity of relationship dynamics within urban environments. It provides valuable insights into how transient or unconventional intimate relationships and social connections are subjected to greater scrutiny and stigma. Katja Werthmann (2022, p.44) notes that "forms of coupling" encompass various types of relationships and social arrangements that people engage in within urban settings. Another reason Werthmann (2022) elucidates is that what constitutes 'forms of coupling,' such as intimate partnerships, co-parenting arrangements, and communal living structures, can vary significantly depending on a range of factors, including cultural norms, social conventions, longevity, and legal definitions. Notably, these 'forms of coupling' do not always fit neatly into predefined categories or conventional understandings of marriage and family. Instead, they emerge through informal and formal social

practices or community norms. In “Sex, Shebeen, Orgasms and Beer” (2013), Sis Do, a Shebeen Queen, manages a shebeen strategically located on Magwegwe Flats near the taxi rank, a bustling hub, especially during late-night hours when taxi drivers complete their shifts (Sibanda, 2013b). Sis Do runs her shebeen with her daughter, Nesisa, affectionately known as Sissy. Evidently, Sissy’s involvement in the business transcends typical waitressing duties. She actively utilises seduction and flirtation to entice patrons and enhance sales:

> As they were settling down, like a film star Sissy (shortened version of Nesisa), the shebeen queen’ daughter cat walked niftily into the room balancing a tray with two plates of steaming hot food. […] Sissy had a body that provoked most men physically giving them conjured dreams at night, yes her body screamed sex and all the perverted things associated with it. Unfortunately for the men she knew this hence her high price afforded by only a handful businessmen, those lucky tycoons only had glowing stares when they left her room in the morning. Sas Bo was watching all this amused, chuckling to himself as Sissy handed them their plates, Sas Bo could not help but comment saying Sissy no matter what the food tastes like I will enjoy it, knowing you cooked Sissy flashing a pearly white smile responded Yes I cooked it especially for you uncle, on the fire with my thighs spread. [sic] (Sibanda 2013a)

Sissy’s presence is portrayed as a key factor in the success of the shebeen. Sissy is also described as scantily dressed, exposing her “milky white thighs”, captivating male patrons with a “free show” of flirtatious allure and banter (Sibanda, 2013b). The description of her movements, characterised by swaying hips, revealing glimpses of her body and suggestive brushes against male customers, effectively mesmerises them. The narrative portrays patrons brazenly ogling her. Ironically, Sissy is portrayed as acutely aware of her sexual appeal, adeptly leveraging it to her advantage. Young women who engage in extramarital affairs with married men are typically portrayed as morally corrupt and seductive temptresses who exploit their sexuality for personal gain (Newell, 2002). Despite the overt sexualisation of her appearance, she maintains agency and control over her flirtatious banter. For instance, she sets a high price for sexual encounters and only caters exclusively to wealthy businessmen, demonstrating her autonomy and business savvy.

Khethani, in “Death on Wheels,” graphically portrays how Sis Khethi, the proprietor of Mfazomithiyo Butchery in the city centre, adopts a strategic approach akin to Sis Do’s tactics (Sibanda, 2013a). Sis Khethi employs young girls as part of her marketing strategy to successfully draw in male customers. This parallels the methods employed by Sis Do at her Shebeen, where

Sissy, her daughter, fulfils a similar role (Sibanda, 2013b). This similarity suggests a broader pattern within urban establishments, where female allure is exploited to enhance business and attract clientele. Khethani's sensory experience of this female allure is shown the moment he enters the butchery:

> I step into the bitchery sorry I meant butchery there is that smell of flesh and blood, the teenage butcher girl keeps her cool but not for long her eyes just can't keep away from me. She steals a glance at me but I am prepared for that, I give her the biggest wink possible and a dessert of licking my lips suggestively, which gets her in a tizzy her hands start fumbling with a bloody chunk of meat. (Sibanda, 2013b)

The analogy between the smell of flesh and blood and the demeanour of the teenage butcher girl creates a sense of tension and anticipation. Khethani undermines the female allure of the young butcher girl by winking and suggestively licking his lips, all in an attempt to gauge her reaction. The girl's reaction, evidenced by her clumsy handling of meat, reveals her intimidation in response to Khethani's flirtatious behaviour. The deliberate play on the words "bitchery" instead of "butchery" serves to underscore the narrator's deep-seated perceptions about young women who work in such places. This wordplay effectively parodies the butchery, likening it to a brothel. Comparing a butchery to a brothel suggests a moral judgment about the perceived immorality associated with both establishments. It implies that the behaviour or atmosphere within the butchery is deemed inappropriate or morally questionable, similar to the stigma attached to brothels.

Societal perceptions and stereotypes about young women working in butcheries as morally bankrupt are also shared by female characters. An old lady, while waiting in a queue in the butchery, overhears the flirtatious conversation between Khetani and the young butcher girl:

> If black girls could blush then she would be a red robot now, Man I am happy, so I decide to do a little mischief so I say "I want you" she is shocked I have never shown her any serious attention, I continue I want you on your knees sucking my dick, then later on I bang your brains out". The old lady in the queue just behind me lets out an embarrassed cough, to my surprise the teenage butcher girl reaches over the counter pulling me by the neck, kisses me fully on the mouth. Funny now as I intended to get her embarrassed, but I am the one who gets embarrassed by her act. I walk out as she calls after me "Khetz, when will I see you". (Sibanda, 2013b)

The old lady's reaction highlights her disapproval of the young girl's behaviour, perceiving it as disrespectful and unprofessional. Her decision to voice discontent and leave the queue reflects broader societal norms regarding appropriate conduct and customer service standards. Khetani's decision to play mind games by feigning interest towards the young butcher girl to test her reactions backfires when the flirtatious conversation proves embarrassing. Abigail Wiese (2023) posits that shame serves a dual function in human interactions, both disrupting and motivating social connections. Firstly, shame causes Khethani to distance himself from an embarrassing moment. Secondly, it also prompts the young girl to unexpectedly reciprocate Khetani's advances, revealing her own desires and intentions to pursue a relationship with Khethani.

The name Mfazomithiyo originates from isiNdebele, translating to "[t]he Pregnant Woman." It is noteworthy that the butchery is named after a communal area in Filabusi, a town in the Matabeleland South Province, with its name derived from a mountain bearing the shape of a pregnant woman.[61] Importantly, the interpretation of Mfazomithiyo can be seen as a tribute to the area's geographical features, capturing the imagery of pregnancy, typically associated with expectancy, life, fertility, and the nurturing aspect of motherhood. In spite of that, I argue that such an interpretation introduces a sense of irony and humour, juxtaposing the symbolism of pregnancy with the reality of a butchery, a place associated with emotional detachment and moral indifference. Metaphorically, Sis Khethi's butchery represents an embodiment of all forms of exploitation and dehumanisation that are normalised.

The nurturing aspect of motherhood is problematised when Khethani budges into Sis Khethi's office in the butchery and catches her red-handed in a sexual act with Qhubeka, a teenage schoolboy. Khethani regards Sis Khethi as a 48-year-old paedophile who is molesting a teenage boy in broad daylight (Sibanda, 2013b). Khethani laments how young people like the butcher girl and Qhubeka are figuratively 'butchered' by desperation, hopelessness, poverty, and unemployment (Sibanda, 2013b). Khethani criminalises the cross-generational transactional sex between Sis Khethi and Qhubeka despite her gift of "a thick wad of notes" to the latter before his swift departure from the office (Sibanda, 2013b). Nonetheless, it is interesting to consider the casual and transactional nature of sexual encounters between Sis Khethi and Qhubeka as that of a

[61] The term Mfazomithiyo was used in Dion Nkomo's poem, "Ubuzwe bami" available on the Poetry International website. See the Glossary of Ndebele Terms: https://www.poetryinternational.com/en/poets-poems/article/104-8550_Glossary-of-Ndebele-terms

'Sugar mommy' and a 'Ben 10.'[62] Priscilla Boshoff and Ntombi Lina Mlangeni (2021) analyse the societal attitudes and perceptions surrounding portraying the 'Ben 10' phenomenon in the South African tabloid, *The Daily Sun* and commentary on social media platforms like *Facebook*.[63] Boshoff and Mlangeni (2021) observe that the term 'Ben 10' originates from South African township culture and describes a cross-generational transactional relationship between an older woman and a younger man. A useful direction of inquiry might be how the 'Ben 10' phenomenon carries connotations of impropriety and deviance, reflecting societal norms that dictate acceptable forms of intimate relationships.

The portrayal of Sis Khethi as a predator and Qhubeka as a victim overlooks the agency and autonomy of both parties involved. For instance, Khetani observes condoms on the office floor, signalling Sis Khethi and Qhubeka's use of protection (Sibanda, 2013b). Khethani's condemnation underscores entrenched societal attitudes that stigmatise non-normative expressions of intimacy, particularly those involving significant age disparities between men and women. Butler (1993, p.111) contends that heterosexual hegemony operates through a "heterosexist economy," which serves to elevate and validate specific expressions of sexuality while suppressing and deeming others as "unviable." Central to Butler's (1993) argument is the idea that societal norms surrounding sexuality are not neutral but are instead shaped by power structures and hierarchies. Drawing from Butler's (1993) observation, it becomes apparent that cross-generational and transactional relationships between old men and young women are legitimised, while those of sugar mommies and 'Ben 10s' are regarded as deviant and taboo. For example, only poor young men who cannot afford to meet Sissy's financial demands criticise her casual transactional relationships while envying wealthy older men who can. It is evident that societal norms and biases shape the representation of female characters and perpetuate stereotypes about women's sexual behaviour. Similarly, the preceding chapter illustrates how Creatia's parents in Lukungwe' "All for the Belly" (2003) condone their daughter's cross-generational transactional relationship with a wealthy older man from the city. A key aspect of cross-generational

[62] A 'sugar mommy' is a financially affluent older woman who enters into relationships with younger male partner, who is described as a 'Ben 10' often providing financial support and gifts in exchange for companionship or sexual favours. Masenya (2017) employs the terms "female blesser" and "sugar mama" interchangeably, critiquing gender norms and economic inequalities in South African townships.

transactional relationships in short stories analysed in this chapter is how young women and men use them as a pragmatic strategy for improving their economic and social circumstances. The cross-generational and transactional relationship between Sis Khethi and Qhubeka accentuates the fluidity and reversal of gender roles and age norms.

Khethani's patriarchal conceptions of sexual intercourse between older women and young men are deeply ingrained in notions of masculinity, sexual performativity, phallic control, and virility. Khethani's assumptions about Sis Khethi's preference for teenage boys stem from societal norms and expectations regarding masculinity and sexual performance. As a result, older women, like Sis Khethi, are perceived as seeking out young men who are more virile and sexually potent than older men to fulfil their sexual desires and fantasies. Paradoxically, these conjectures are overturned when Khethani sees Qhubeka fumbling with his trouser zip. He cannot help but notice Qhubeka' "tiny package" and muses that Sis Khethi prefers this (Sibanda, 2013b). The speculation about Sis Khethi' preferences underscores the subjective nature in which women are judged and stereotyped based on age, class, perceived sexual attractiveness and traditional understandings of sexuality. For instance, in Khethani's worldview, sexual intercourse is seen as a performance where men, whether young or old, must assert their dominance and prowess. Dominant discourses surrounding phallic size play a significant role in shaping societal perceptions of hegemonic masculinities and anxieties related to sexual satisfaction. Scholars such as Judith Butler (1993), Alan McKee (2004), Menelaos Apostolou (2015), Daniel Fiaveh (2019) and Raewyn Connell (2020) have explored how the obsession with (larger) phallic size in discussions of masculinity perpetuates the notion of sexual prowess and satisfaction. Khethani assumes that Qhubeka's penile size does not make Sis Khethi to reach her orgasm. Additionally, the normalisation of male sexual desires and gratification contributes to the objectification of women and the marginalisation of their sexual agency and desires.

While Sis Kheti is embarrassed to be caught with Qhubeka, Khethani reveals her vulnerability. She even begs him not to tell anyone, fearing it would destroy her reputation (Sibanda, 2013a). Despite being Khethani's boss, Sis Kheti's behaviour exemplifies how women are subjected to scrutiny and judgment based on societal expectations of gender roles and behaviour. Khethani's enjoyment of Sis Kheti's distress highlights the imbalance of power and agency in their interaction. Sis Kheti's plea for discretion underscores how Khethani holds the power to potentially damage her reputation, thereby exerting control over her social standing and

autonomy. Tsitsi Dangarembga (2022, p.98) in *Black and Female* contends that successful women also fear the harsh judgment and repercussions for deviating from societal expectations:

> A woman's career achievement is de-normalised and rendered atypical. […] Women are required to confirm that their success is within the framework of a patriarchal agenda, and will not destabilise it. It is a kind of quid pro quo. The subtext of the women's assertions is, 'In spite of my defiance of patriarchy in that way, I still concede to patriarchy in that way'.

Despite striving for autonomy and self-expression, Sis Kheti is constrained by societal expectations and norms. Her conformity to patriarchal norms reflects the broader challenges women face when negotiating the complexities of identity, power, and social acceptance.

Ironically, the sexuality of male characters is portrayed as natural, instinctual, and even celebrated. "Death on Wheels" (2013a) portrays sexually active teenage boys asserting their agency and autonomy over their bodies and desires, albeit in a risky manner. Notwithstanding the inherent risks involved, these teenagers seek opportunities for pleasure and fulfilment:

> I know what I am missing it' s the delicious gossip dished out by the street vendors, oh how they decorate their tales like for example I heard one of them talking of her neighbors' two teenage sons who were caught in a particularly nasty spot both of them had simultaneously been stung (infected with venereal disease). Of all the things in the world the mother was at her wits end how could her two sons both be infected with an STI at once .As I was driving , I screwed my ears up and heard the most ludicrous explanation ever, as it turns out those two kids were having a very nice time whilst their mother was at work .These two school pupils asked over one of their fellow female students, understand I am not talking of a scene from a porn movie but this happened and not only on one occasion , these two would look for the most wayward girl in their class and bring her over whilst others were having sports practice. Then the real funny part began they would have sex with her, but the catch was that on each occasion they only had one condom which they kept on re-using taking turns with it. So imagine the shame when the mom asked both of them who had infected them, and she fainted when she heard the answer as her sons pointed at each other so she could only presume that her boys were two perverted incestuous homosexuals. [sic] (Sibanda, 2013a)

This excerpt is based on the gossip that Khethani eavesdrops on from his female passengers while driving in the city. What is interesting is that the two teenagers found alternative uses for repurposing condoms in a resource-constrained urban environment to fulfil their practical needs

and desires. They reuse the same condom multiple times, highlighting their resourcefulness and adaptability in overcoming limited access to sexual health resources. The notion of reusing condoms in teenagers' sexual encounters can be seen as a form of repurposing things, another aspect of urban survival strategies closely linked to kukiya-kiya. This pervasive pattern of risk-taking in intimate relationships mirrors the perilous sexual activities undertaken by Victor and Patrick in "Birth" (Ndlovu, 2013). The mother's reaction hints at the vilification and criminalisation of homosexuality, as well as its taboo status in Africa (See Sibanda, 2022). It also underscores misconceptions about sexual orientation and minority sexuality.

Like the two teenage boys, Khetani expresses his sexual desires openly without reservation. His decision to stay with Tracey for six months after having been caught cheating also underlines how men pursue and satisfy their sexual desires without stigma or judgment. Khethani boasts that Tracey is "selling sex to survive," but for him, "it's free," and he gets to "milk the chocolate cow" every day, enjoying the sweetness (Sibanda, 2013a). In doing so, Khethani trivialises and normalises Tracey's engagement in transactional sex out of necessity rather than choice. He solely focuses on his sexual gratification while disregarding the economic vulnerabilities and systemic inequalities that compel Tracey into sex work as a means of survival. For example, the sexualised stereotype of milking a 'chocolate cow' underscores the commodification and fetishisation of sex. Khethani further reveals that Tracey "is just some whore I picked up in Manor Hotel's Glass Bar in Bulawayo," revealing his disregard for her and their casual relationship (Sibanda, 2013a). Throughout the narrative, Khethani displays a lack of remorse and guilt for betraying his wife's trust and breaking the commitment made to his marriage. Instead, he seems focused on missing his son and the impact the separation has on the child, showing little concern for the emotional harm he has caused his wife, Sihle. This unapologetic behaviour raises questions about Khethani's values and sense of responsibility as a husband and father. Khethani reflects on the complexity of human emotions and how characters justify their actions to preserve their self-image.

To cope with the cognitive dissonance arising from the affair, Khethani engages in rationalisation. He convinces himself that he deserves happiness and that the affair temporarily escapes his marital issues. This rationalisation allows him to justify his actions and avoid confronting the consequences of his infidelity and its impact on his family. Their relationship appears to involve open discussions and agreements about acceptable behaviour regarding emotional and sexual connections outside their partnership. Such openness raises questions about

the flexibility of fidelity and whether it can be redefined based on each partner's specific needs and desires. Ironically, Khethani appears to harbour resentment about Tracey's profession, viewing it as inconvenient in their relationship, particularly when she will "be hosting her regular clients" (Sibanda, 2013b). This aspect of their relationship causes Khethani to have to sleep in a lodge in town, which he considers one of the drawbacks of being in a relationship with a sex worker. According to Conley and Moors (2014), extra-dyadic relationships, where partners engage in connections outside their primary partnership, can inspire personal growth and encourage monogamous partners to question conventional beliefs about relationships and marriage. This questioning, in turn, may lead to more conscious and intentional choices in their relationship. Correspondingly, Wosick-Correa (2010, p.45) notes the concept of 'agentic fidelity', which refers to a unique and individualised form of loyalty in extradyadic relationships. By redefining fidelity in this manner, Khethani and Tracey's relationship exemplifies how couples can tailor their commitments to match their unique values and aspirations.

Khethani's attitude towards his partner, Tracey, is described in lewd terms, referring to her as his "prostitute girlfriend" who sells sex to survive (Sibanda, 2013a). He boasts about having a sexual relationship with her without any commitments. This behaviour aligns with a societal expectation for women to conform to traditional gender roles, including being submissive and faithful in marriages. Chipo Hungwe (2006) analyses the implications of definitions of respectability among Zimbabwean women. Another reason, Hungwe (2006) posits, is that women, particularly wives, are respected as long as they adhere to the expectations of being submissive and faithful. In essence, respectability for wives is contingent upon their ability to conform to traditional gender roles, which include being submissive to their husbands and remaining faithful in their marriages. This insight calls to mind a scene when Sihle visits Khethani and pleads for him to return home to his son. It highlights the challenges women face when they are the betrayed partner (Sibanda, 2013a). Sihle ends up viewing Khethani's promiscuity as a form of rejection and abandonment that leads to feelings of inadequacy and sexual jealousy. Interestingly, Khethani's attitude towards both women is evident when his comments reflect his perception of them. Khethani describes the two women in his life, Sihle and Tri, in a striking manner, saying, "So the two ladies in my life stand face to face, Sihle dignified and motherly whilst Tri is a naked sexpot" (Sibanda 2013a). This comment reveals Khethani' contrasting views of the two women, highlighting his perception of their roles and identities. On the one hand, his description of Sihle

as ‘dignified and motherly’ suggests a perception of her as someone who embodies traditional qualities of respectability and nurturing. On the other hand, his portrayal of Tri as a ‘naked sexpot’ indicates a more sexualised view of her, possibly emphasising her physical attractiveness and sensuality.

In a tense moment when a fight breaks out between Tracey and Sihle, Khethani steps in to calm down his wife using charming words. He carefully tells her, “My lady, my queen, you rule me. Forgive me” (Sibanda, 2013a). Khethani’s gesture indicates that he still respects the mother of his child and also reveals how men’s places of vulnerability can vary between private and public settings. Critically, in this regard, male characters are conditioned to seek vulnerability in places they do not intend to maintain forever. They view vulnerability as a momentary release, choosing to express their feelings in moments of emotional intensity and then reverting to a more guarded demeanour afterwards. This explains why Tracey misinterprets Khethani’s reverence for his wife, suggesting possible jealousy or insecurity.

Khethani’s assumption that “sex workers are emotionally disabled” to love is deeply problematic and reflects a narrow and misguided perspective about commercial sex work (Sibanda, 2013a). This brings attention to the complexity of their relationship, where genuine emotions may be intertwined with unequal power dynamics and objectifying behaviour. Engaging in sex work does not grant Tracey invulnerability or make her immune to the risks and challenges associated with the profession. He views Tracey as lacking the qualities of a faithful, loyal, and committed housewife despite her sexual prowess. As a result, Tracey is hurt and upset, feeling degraded and objectified by Khethani. She accuses him of seeing her as just a sexual object, while she hopes to be his wife someday (Sibanda, 2013a). Khethani’s inability to respond adequately to Tracey’s concerns exposes the challenges and limitations of extradyadic arrangements. He struggles with conflicting emotions, torn between love for Tracey and confusion about whether it is genuine love or mere lust binding them together. This inner conflict blurs the lines between love and desire in their casual relationship.

Despite their physical intimacy, their emotional connection remains fractured. Tracey’s longing for a deeper connection, represented by her desire to marry Khethani, underscores the human need for emotional intimacy and marriage. For her, leaving sex work is contingent on Khethani’s willingness to marry her. Steyn and van Zyl (2009, p.4) observe that hierarchical social values play a crucial role in constructing the idealised heterosexual union, characterised by a

"virile," physically attractive, healthy, and able-bodied man, along with young monogamous wives or partners who desire to raise a family. This argument shows how societal values and norms shape our perception of idealised masculinity and desired relationship structures. By establishing specific criteria for the ideal sexual male, such as physical attractiveness and social status, society reinforces particular standards of desirability and eligibility for marriage. Consequently, it prompts a critical examination of how these constructed ideals impact characters who do not fit within these narrow definitions, including those who deviate from traditional gender roles and identify as part of non-heteronormative relationships.

In stark contrast to previous 'forms of coupling' in Leroy Ndlovu' "Locked Gates and Tall Grass" (2017), Lungile and Samantha epitomise a genuine and enduring love despite facing significant challenges. Their relationship is characterised by mutual support, understanding, and sacrifice, indicative of true love (Ndlovu, 2017). Despite the meagre salary, Samantha's dedication to her job at the restaurant reflects her commitment to contributing to their relationship and supporting Lungile during his unemployment. Lungile, in turn, appreciates Samantha's efforts and acknowledges her sacrifices, even though he sometimes struggles with inadequacy (Ndlovu, 2017). Their three-year relationship demonstrates resilience in adversity, particularly Samantha's difficult family circumstances. Despite her father's abandonment and the financial strain on her family, Samantha remains steadfast in her commitment to Lungile and their future together. Lungile and Samantha find ways to stay connected and express their affection for each other. Without conventional means of communication, such as regular phone calls or text messages, they find a way to stay connected and express their affection for each other. They communicate using a "Please-Call-Me" request between them, further underscoring their connection and resourcefulness.[64]

Mushikashika and the right to the city

The term mushikashika encompasses various interpretations depending on context and perspective.[65] Lloyd Pswarayi (2020, p.3) characterise mushikashika as "the activities of youth engaging in confrontations with municipal authorities to conduct transport business in non-

[64] A "Please Call Me" is a free service provided by mobile network operators that allows customers to send a text message requesting the recipient to call them back. This service is especially useful when a person has no airtime left but needs to communicate urgently.

[65] The chiShona term 'mushikashika' originates from the isiZulu word 'umshikashika' or 'umzukuzuku', which conveys the idea of a dishonesty or obtaining something through deceitful means.

designated areas." Specifically, mushikashika refers to the informal and usually unauthorised transport businesses these youth operate. Pswarayi's (2020) definition captures a micro-entrepreneurial aspect of mushikashika, which can be considered too broad as it overlooks the social and economic dimensions of informal transport. Darlington Mutanda (2022) refers to mushikashika as the in/formal transport services operating outside formal regulations during peak hours when formal public transportation is inadequate or inaccessible. Mushikashika refers to improvised forms of transportation, such as registered minibuses, unlicensed taxis and private vehicle operators who represent a complex network of informal entrepreneurship and mobility solutions in city spaces. Mushikashika has been primarily associated with informality, illegality, and sometimes criminality within the transport industry.[66] I contend that exploring the concept of mushikashika should involve examining how operators of commuter omnibuses employ adaptive and disruptive strategies to maximise profits. For instance, despite possessing proper documentation for operating within the city, Khethani engages in practices such as picking up passengers along the way rather than at the bus terminal and dropping them off at undesignated locations. This deviation from formal regulations reflects a preference for mushikashika practices, which generate income more rapidly. This agency underlines how Taxi drivers, through iterative manoeuvres, overcome a litany of violations and risks such as overspeeding, overloading commuter omnibuses and picking up passengers at undesignated areas.

In addition to confrontations with municipal authorities, mushikashika operators generally face risks and challenges, such as competition from formal transport services, safety concerns, and legal repercussions. Khethani retorts, "breaking the law is in my bones" (2013a). Khethani chooses risk over poverty to eke out a decent living. I recontextualise how Khethani takes risks as a redemptive discourse of survival that exists beyond the gaze of traffic police. Pertinent to my discussion of mushikashika is Henri Lefebvre' (1996) concept of 'the right to the city,' which challenges how urban space should not be monopolised by private interests and bureaucratic authorities. Central to Lefebvre's (1996) concept is the idea of urban space as a social product shaped by the interactions and practices of its inhabitants. Despite being illegal, Khethani laments how mushikashika operators fulfil a crucial need within the urban community by providing affordable and convenient transportation options (Sibanda, 2013a). Khethani is maximising the unemployment in the city by capitalising on the high demand for transportation services.

[66] See Dube and Chirisa (2012); Chikengezha and Thebe (2022).

Despite the scarcity of formal employment opportunities, Khethani's kombi, Sweet Gedlela [kettle], transports thousands of people to the city centre daily. Notably, when it comes to survival in the city, characters in "Death on Wheels" tend to focus on opportunities and quick profits rather than danger, risk, hazard, and the violation of laws. Khethani describes the frustration and challenges faced by official transport operators, which highlight the inefficiencies and delays inherent in the formal public transport system:

> It is never that easy, for we have to wait for over two hours to get our cars into the loading zone at Egodini Terminus, but as for me patience has never been my strongest point […] So as others wait at Egodini taxi Rank, I am out on the streets doing my bread and butter business. I am a man who stands on two feet, I am both in legal and illegal business as you know a man has to eat. (Sibanda, 2013a)

The economic challenges and limited opportunities within the formal transport sector push Khethani to resort to operating within the informal economy to survive. Khethani's assertion that he is 'a man who stands on two feet, both in legal and illegal business' encapsulates the blurred boundaries between formality and informality, legality and illegality, within the transport sector (Sibanda, 2013a).

The coexistence of informal practices with formal structures and regulations enables Khethani to adopt adaptive strategies that mitigate risks and maximise profitability. Laura Stark and Annika Teppo (2022) observe that the exclusivity of the formal sector produces informality.[67] Characters like Sis Khethi, Khethani, and Sis Do have found creative ways of integrating informal activities into the formal economy sustainably. Similarly, AbdouMaliq Simone (2004) notes that informality in African cities flourishes through three interrelated processes and contexts. Firstly, it thrives in environments perceived as lacking formal structures. Informality is an alternative system in these spaces, providing solutions and opportunities where formal institutions are deemed insufficient or absent. Secondly, informality skilfully leverages its understanding of alternative systems and modes of operation to create new pathways and opportunities. This proficiency in navigating and utilising emergent formal structures allows informality to elaborate novel spheres

[67] Stark and Teppo (2022) define informality as activities that exist outside government regulation, control, support, and taxation. In essence, these are economic or social activities that operate beyond the formal structures and systems established by governmental authorities.

of activity. Thirdly, informality's ability to supplement, and sometimes even surpass, formal institutions challenges the conventional binary between the formal and informal sectors. This process demonstrates the dynamic and adaptive nature of informality, which is not merely a passive byproduct of institutional deficiencies but an active driver of innovation and change. Consequently, Sis Khethi's, Khethani's, and Sis Do's businesses thrive due to the everyday tactics they employ to evade and subvert formal structures and regulations.

De Certeau (1984, p.129) maintains that practices of making do are "many-sided" and exhibit cunning and stubborn characteristics, offsetting each other and interacting outside the purview of panoptic power. Khethani acknowledges the illegality of their actions but justifies them by emphasising the lucrative nature of informal endeavours compared to legal alternatives. It is worth mentioning that the informal nature of mushikashika operations is characterised by street codes:

> When we reach the spot Thamu is raved into action he jumps out and started the illegal activity called touting (Illegal but very common and accepted). Within ten minutes the kombi is full, and I roll out Sweet Gedlela like it' on soap. Second pick up at the illegal spot was like a fairytale, very smooth and it went in without an incidence.

Touting plays a significant role in the operation of mushikashika, particularly in facilitating the coordination between the driver and the conductor. When Thamu, Khethani's conductor, arrives at the designated spot, he understands the assignment beforehand and has to act fast, actively soliciting passengers to fill the kombi within ten minutes. Thamu is responsible for attracting passengers to the vehicle, negotiating fares, and ensuring it departs only when it reaches full capacity. Touting is vital for maximising profits in mushikashika operations, as it allows Khethani to fill the vehicle quickly and efficiently, reducing waiting times and increasing the number of trips made throughout the day.

Khethani recognises the need for transportation among the unemployed population and leverages this demand to generate income. He capitalises on the lack of formal employment options by providing a vital service that facilitates movement within the city, creating a sustainable livelihood for himself. The city is also portrayed as "a dying economic city", but people like Khethani are resilient and optimistic, as shown by the remark:

> Even if my city is dying, man, I have never loved it as much as I do today. The hustle of the early morning, workers going to the depleted industries and civil servants in worn out office attire, they all face the day with the ferocity of a pride of lions going to the hunt. They are my customers today, unfortunately for me I missed the early birds, our market women, these are street vendors -they wake up at the crack of dawn off to 5th avenue, in the centre, there to get the freshest and cheapest green produce. (Sibanda, 2013a)

Khethani acknowledges urban inhabitants' hardships and struggles yet admires their resilience and determination. He appreciates their resourcefulness and ingenuity in the face of economic challenges. Sara Ahmed (2006, p.9) describes mobilities as a two-fold process involving disorientation and reorientation when people inhabit spaces. Ahmed (2006) further contends how the dynamic nature of movement and mobilities highlights both the disruption and transformation that occur when negotiating the challenges and opportunities presented by reimagining and reinhabiting spaces. Street vendors exemplify the embodiment of mobility described by Ahmed (2006), as they experience similar transitions of 'disorientation' and 'reorientation' as they move between different locations to ply their trade. Street vendors in "Wheels on Death" face the disruption of established patterns and the transformation of their surroundings. Yet, they adapt by creating new routines, forming social connections, and reinventing their identities to suit their trade demands. Street vending thus becomes a tangible manifestation of urban mobilities. Street vendors set up makeshift stalls and use push carts to resist and reappropriate the spaces around them. Spatial practices such as hawking, touting and caterwauling actively negotiate the challenges and opportunities presented by reimagining and reinhabiting spaces. The city becomes a site of unwanted practices which rely on routines of everyday life and circuits of mobility which continue to change.

Conclusion

The short stories published on the *Ztorie Bhuku* blog open up vistas of everyday life within the cityscape, where the concept of kukiya-kiya looms large and holds significant sway. Characters, in various ways, are depicted resorting to strategies of survival and adaptation in the face of economic hardship and social inequality. Central to the themes of infidelity, betrayal, vulnerability, debauchery, exploitation, and poverty, these stories tackle the moral economy of the urban environment, where notions of morality are profoundly shaped by the exigencies of survival. This

moral ambiguity permeates the city's social fabric and highlights the tension between exploitation and integrity and self-interest and communal values. While some characters exploit the vulnerabilities of others for personal gain, others grapple with the quandaries inherent in their actions, striving to maintain their integrity amidst the temptations of deceit and subterfuge to outwit their competitors. Conversely, the theme of invulnerability emerges as characters employ tactics to shield themselves from pain and adversity. Their resourcefulness, resilience, and ingenuity are motivated by the quest for self-preservation to eke out a living and assert agency within a city that consistently marginalises them. These adaptive strategies are two-fold and reflect the blur that exists between legality and illegality as they negotiate the challenges of city life. Moreover, the vulnerability of the characters exposes the harsh realities they face as they struggle to eke out a living and assert agency within a system that repeatedly marginalises them.

Chapter 4: Desperate Measures and Transmutations of Desire in Zimbabwean Facebook Fiction

Introduction

The preceding chapter grappled with the multi-layered dimensions of survival and presented the argument that survival represents an omnipresent and inherent aspect of everyday life within a curated selection of Zimbabwean short stories disseminated through digital platforms such as blogs. The exploration of survival is a recurring motif that sheds light on the socio-economic dynamics of individual resilience within the Zimbabwean context in the post-2000 era. The central point of significance revolves around the manifestations of survival and the diverse strategies urban dwellers employ to cope with the myriad challenges posed by the urban milieu and their economic situation. It also argued that literary production in Zimbabwe has traditionally been constrained by limited publishing opportunities, censorship, and the high costs associated with print media. These barriers have driven writers to seek alternative sites for self-publishing online. Due to the high cost of internet access in Zimbabwe, *Facebook* (now Meta) has emerged as a more affordable and accessible platform for publishing short fiction.[68] The transition from blogs to *Facebook* was spurred by initiatives such as Facebook Zero and Free Basics, which empowered a broader spectrum of writers to contribute to a participatory literary culture. Facebook Zero, launched in 2010, and Free Basics, introduced in 2014, are initiatives by *Facebook* in partnership with mobile network operators to provide free, zero-rated access to a stripped-down, text-only version of *Facebook* on mobile phones.[69] Waiving data charges for accessing *Facebook* significantly lowered the barrier to internet use and alleviated the prohibitive constraints of traditional publishing costs (Santana 2021).

This chapter addresses several interrelated questions. First, how do marginalised authors utilise *Facebook* as a publishing platform? Second, how do these writers leverage the same social

[68] *Facebook* was launched in 2004 as a social networking site that was primarily designed for instant messaging and content sharing. Over time, it underwent significant changes in its interface and functionality. These changes led to a shift in how the platform was classified, moving from the narrow label of a social networking site to broader categories such as social media and digital platforms. See Bucher (2021) for a detailed history of *Facebook* and its role in the larger digital ecosystem, which includes *WhatsApp* and *Instagram*.

[69]. biNu was another mobile application that provided fast, cheap, and easy access to internet services It functioned as a scaled-down version of the traditional Facebook application, providing smartphone capabilities to people with basic phones.

media site for literary marketing? This chapter examines these dual functions to argue that *Facebook* operates as a crucial platform for both the dissemination and promotion of contemporary literature. I am particularly interested in writers who view and actively utilise *Facebook* as a platform for self-publishing and marketing, challenging conventional notions of legitimacy and marginality. Santana (2021) contends that Facebook fiction has the potential to redefine the boundaries of what is considered marginal in the domain of publishing. Kiguru (2022) complements this notion by emphasising the nexus between different forms of literary and cultural production mechanisms. Facebook fiction, being a dynamic part of this interconnected literary and cultural production, contributes to breaking down traditional boundaries and hierarchies. Another argument I posit in this chapter is that the perception of self-publishing on social media platforms, including *Facebook*, is not static; rather, it is evolving gradually towards greater mainstream acceptance.

The textual analysis centres on four short stories published on *Facebook* that depict human aspirations' dynamic and adaptable nature and how characters strive to fulfil them. I argue that depicting human desire in these stories acts as potent catalysts that propel characters to undertake extreme and perilous ventures such as occultic rituals, shamanic pacts and gold panning. It particularly examines how the transmutation of desires influences characters' motivations and actions in Banabas Karuma's "Ambition Prevails" (2021), a short story featured in the anthology *What Preys in the Night* (2021), which includes five short stories. Isdore Guvamombe's "Hell Hath No Fury Like a Woman" (2021) and Vine Ziwane's "Bloodbath" Part One and Two (2022) were published in *The Queensdale Report*, an interactive online magazine launched in 2021 on *Facebook*.[70] The magazine primarily focused on issues affecting Queensdale residents and neighbouring suburbs such as Cranborne, Chadcombe, Hatfield, and Msasa Park, and later expanded its entertainment section to include short stories contributed by emerging and seasoned writers from other towns in Zimbabwe. [71] Recent editions of the magazine are now published as

[70] In its early stages, *The Queensdale Report* operated as a newsletter with a well-structured format tailored to the diverse interests of its readership. It included distinct sections such as Letters to the Editor, which facilitated community dialogue on local matters, and Arts and Culture, featuring a Poetry Corner, a Question-and-Answer column where writers engaged in conversation, and a Sunday Motivation column offering inspirational content. Additionally, the magazine extensively covered local sports through its Sports Report section, highlighting activities and achievements in Queensdale and neighbouring areas. Throughout, advertorial content played a role in promoting local businesses and events, contributing to community engagement and economic activities.

[71]. *The Queensdale Report* magazine is shared on a Facebook page of the same name, and the short stories and poetry are reposted on Intanga Hub, which has 1,000 followers.

digital flipbooks using FlipHTML5, a platform that enables writers to create and share flipbooks from PDFs.[72]These issues are compressed and backed up on Google Drive, with links provided through Linktree. Since *Facebook* allows only one clickable link in profiles and posts, Linktree enables users to bypass this limitation by directing followers to a page with multiple links.[73]

Karuma's "Ambition Prevails" (2021) follows Charles and an unnamed narrator, two dissatisfied regional truck drivers, on a journey from Harare to rural Chipinge to seek occultic means of enrichment. Before this, they had unsuccessfully attempted high-stakes ventures involving gold, diamonds and gambling. Charles' obsession with material wealth led him to convince the unnamed narrator to visit a notorious shaman named Chiripi, who promised them sudden prosperity through dubious means. As the story unfolds, it highlights the characters' internal struggles and moral dilemmas. Their desperation culminates in their acquisition of sudden wealth through occult rituals and the use of a goblin, underscoring the dangerous allure of quick riches. Guvamombe's short story "Hell Hath No Fury Like a Woman" (2021) depicts how hopelessness pushed Muchemwa, who was unemployed, to travel to Espungabera, Mozambique, in a quest to change his fortunes by acquiring charms from a shaman. [74]These charms were intended to enable him to exploit the superstitions and fear of witchcraft among people in rural areas, ultimately deceiving them. The story concludes with an exposition of how Muchemwa, who had rapidly amassed wealth by using magic to hypnotise people into confessing they were witches, is exposed by his wife after he impregnates another woman.

Vine Ziwane's "Bloodbath" Part One is set at Venice Mine in Kadoma, where the protagonist, Jabu, and his companion Nobby arrive for gold panning. A sense of predestination and uneasiness fills Jabu as they observe the gold fields. Nobby cryptically refers to the location as "a place of both death and fortune," alluding to the dangers and potential rewards of the mining industry (p.13). The lawlessness in the mining township sets a dark and foreboding tone, foreshadowing the potential conflicts and challenges they must overcome. Part One ends with Jabu and Nobby finding some gold ore, only to be attacked by dangerous criminals who survive by stealing from gold panners. Jabu and Nobby narrowly escape death when they are attacked with

[72] See https://online.fliphtml5.com/gwiii/ijdj/#p=1
[73] See https://linktr.ee/thequeensdalereport?subscribe
[74] The story first appeared in *The Herald* newspaper in 2012 under the full title "Hell Hath No Fury Like a Woman Scorned," which was later truncated in *The Queensdale Report.*
See https://allafrica.com/stories/201211090005.html

machetes. “Bloodbath Part Two” begins with Jabu and Nobby heading to sell their gold ore, unaware that the criminals who previously attacked them are tracking their movements. The gang follows them to the buyer’s office, and Jabu and Nobby realise the buyer and the gang are part of an organised crime syndicate in the mining town. Despite this, the gold buyer chases off the gang to pay Jabu and Nobby a large sum of money, which they quickly squander on women and drinking at bottle stores and night clubs. The gang catches up with them again, injuring Nobby, who bolts out of a window, leaving Jabu vulnerable. Jabu surrenders and pays the gang all the money he has. Nobby, determined to seek revenge despite his injuries, rallies a group of disgruntled gold panners tired of such victimisation. The ensuing fight between the gold Panners and the gang results in a bloodbath that eventually kills Nobby and the four gold Panners. Fortunately, Jabu manages to escape to the police camp, who then arrest the gang of criminals. The story concludes with Jabu returning to his rural home in Gokwe, reflecting on the deadly consequences of their pursuit of fortune.

A common thematic thread that runs through these narratives is the journey motif, which serves as a metaphorical vehicle for the transmutation of desires and aspirations. These stories portray characters embarking on transformative journeys across diverse geographical spaces, from rural areas to foreign countries and mining towns and from towns back to rural areas. All these mobilities are driven by their pursuit of alternative means to fulfil their material or sexual desires. The characters’ spatial mobility vividly illustrates their willingness to go to great lengths, literally and figuratively, to achieve their goals and surpass local limitations. In contrast to earlier chapters that focused on circular migration within localised contexts, the short stories examined here highlight characters’ expansive measures in their pursuit of prosperity, success and satisfaction. Exploring the various manifestations of desire is crucial for understanding human behaviour’s erratic and paradoxical nature, particularly in moments of desperation. According to Jacques Lacan (2006, p.692), desire is an endless pursuit that embodies the perpetual seeking and the inherent impossibility of its complete fulfilment. Lacan’s (2006) argument revolves around the idea that desire emerges due to unresolved or unfulfilled needs. The chapter at hand addresses the problems surrounding fulfilling one’s aspirations through innovative, sometimes unorthodox strategies. However, it is essential to point out that the desire for wealth is unpredictable and irrational, challenging the conventional assumptions and understanding of economic behaviour. The same

chapter also engages with the underlying psychological, social, and cultural forces that influence the manifestation of this fundamental human desire.

Further, I shall attempt to show how characters in these stories are driven to impulsively pursue unconventional and sometimes risky endeavours in their quest for contentment. More specifically, I deploy Lacan's (2006) notion of desire to argue that the search for wealth transcends purely economic motives. The motivation for wealth also stems from deeper psychological needs such as recognition, self-worth, respect, economic security and sexual pleasure. This understanding challenges simplistic views of wealth acquisition and exposes the complex, multifaceted desires that underpin human striving in contemporary society. The selected short stories serve as cautionary tales, unearthing the risks and uncertainties accompanying the pursuit of seemingly enticing objectives such as wealth, power and sexual satisfaction. These short stories appropriate plots and themes common in fables and allegories published in colonial and postcolonial popular magazines, as well as early Zimbabwean novels.[75]

The chapter is divided into three sections. The first section situates this emergent literary form within Zimbabwe's larger socio-historical and cultural milieu. It positions Zimbabwean Facebook fiction as a generative site of literary innovation and socio-political critique. The following two sections conduct close readings of selected texts to examine the transmutation of desire, focusing on the literary techniques, narrative strategies, and thematic preoccupations employed by these authors.

Engaging Facebook readers: Strategies for publishing short fiction

This section outlines the key characteristics of short fiction published on *Facebook*, providing an operative definition of what I term Zimbabwean Facebook fiction. It examines the pivotal role of popular culture in shaping emergent cultural forms that bypass gatekeeping mechanisms, amplifying marginalised voices and lived experiences. Facebook fiction refers to fictional narratives, stories, or literary works created, published and shared on the *Facebook* platform (Santana 2018). Facebook fiction presents a unique form of literary expression that stands out from other social media platforms like *Twitter* (now X) and *Instagram* due to its specific format, audience engagement and community-building capabilities (Kelsey 2010). *Facebook* allows for

[75] For a detailed analysis of post/colonial short stories and novels that employed the fable, folktale, and allegoric forms, see McLoughlin (1990) and Vambe (2004).

longer posts than X and Instagram, allowing writers to share more substantial excerpts or even full short stories (Kelsey 2010). The character limit for a standard *Facebook* status update and group posts is 63,206 characters, facilitating deeper narrative development and more detailed character arcs (Bucher 2021). In this sense, I consider Facebook fiction as a 'textual field' where the life of a text extends beyond its original context. This perspective aligns with Barber's (2007, p.218) notion of 'textual fields', which represent conceptual spaces where textual materials interact and transform due to diverse influences and interpretations. The short stories I analyse are published on Facebook Pages, where authors create public profiles to connect with their audiences. These Pages are platforms for sharing content and engaging with readers, who actively comment on the stories, ask questions, and provide feedback.[76] Reader comments and reactions also become part of the narrative itself. Authors incorporate reader feedback into subsequent instalments, making the story collaborative. These interactions function as paratexts that shape the reading experience.

Facebook fiction is reflective of and influential to the participatory culture from which it arises. What is interesting is that the sharing of content creates a dynamic interaction between the author and the audience. Due to their brevity, short stories can be published directly as posts, and this allows for immediate sharing with followers, who can read, like and comment on the stories. Followers can tag others and repost the stories on their own timelines, in groups, or with friends, increasing the reach and visibility of the content. Maria Mäkelä (2019) employs a literary-narratological analysis to underscore the narrative structures embedded within social media posts. Mäkelä (2019, p.161) further considers "everyday posts on Facebook as art forms" deeply embedded in the socio-cultural context of their creation." In essence, I think of Zimbabwean Facebook fiction as a subset of the broader genre of Facebook fiction that includes short stories, novellas, serialised novels and poems.

The content of Zimbabwean Facebook fiction typically mirrors the everyday realities, aspirations, and struggles of its authors and readers, much like oral traditions and popular literature. Another striking characteristic of Facebook fiction is the use of vernacular languages, with some short stories bearing English titles but written entirely in chiShona or isiNdebele.[77] Language

[76] Unlike personal profiles, which are used by individuals to connect with friends and family, Facebook Pages are designed to facilitate public communication and can be monetised.

[77] The structure of these narrative works often features a chapter-by-chapter focus on individual characters, creating an episodic, plot-driven format that caters to the attention spans and engagement patterns of social media audiences.

choice in Facebook fiction significantly impacts the breadth of its audience. It is significant to recognise the inherent challenges of appealing to a diverse audience while striving to maintain coherence and relevance. These competing demands inevitably create tensions between inclusivity and focus, forcing a delicate balance between broadening appeal and ensuring depth in content. Balancing the varying expectations, cultural nuances, and interests of a heterogeneous audience necessitates careful negotiation, which can risk diluting the central message or alienating specific groups. Carli Coetzee (2002: p.96) observes that unique backgrounds, experiences, competing interpretations, and expectations between the "intended" and "ideal" audiences generally result in a lack of shared understanding. The intended audience are those who share the *writer's* "interests and concerns", while the ideal audience are those the *writer* "represents" (Coetzee, 2002, p.96, emphasis added). In essence, the language used in Facebook fiction is not merely a medium of communication but a vital element that shapes the narrative's impact, engagement, and cultural relevance. Language plays a crucial role in how stories are told, received, and shared, influencing the reach and depth of the storytelling experience.

While this study prioritises short stories in English, the fluidity between genres is noteworthy. Novels are sometimes rebranded as short stories and vice versa, demonstrating the dynamic nature of this literary form. Additionally, these unconventional approaches to storytelling, publication, and branding reflect the flexibility of literary expression on digital platforms. Antonio Gramsci (1985, p.41) advances that contemporary literary forms must evolve from an organic, bottom-up cultural shift that emerges from an unprecedented cultural relationship with the popular masses of readers. Gramsci's (1985) argument is particularly relevant when considering the rise of these short stories on *Facebook*. These stories reflect the voices, concerns, and creative expressions of writers who use the platform to share their stories. Zimbabwean Facebook fiction incorporates local folklore, contemporary issues, and personal anecdotes to resonate deeply with their audience.

The writers commonly double as editors and graphic designers, adding a distinct Do-It-Yourself (DIY) aesthetic to their publications. This DIY approach is reminiscent of the Onitsha market literature of mid-20th century Nigeria, where authors took on multiple roles to produce and disseminate their work independently (Okome 2009; Newell 2002). Much like the Onitsha pamphlets, which were characterised by their grassroots and self-published nature, contemporary digital authors engage in a similar practice, utilising their creativity and resourcefulness to retain creative control and connect with their audience directly. The Onitsha pamphlets were known for

their vibrant covers, engaging titles, accessible and didactic content that addressed social issues, offered advice and recycled popular stories (Ogene, 2017). Similarly, Zimbabwean Facebook fiction also exhibits a unique blend of creative approaches that challenge traditional publishing norms.

A common feature of Zimbabwean Facebook fiction is the unauthorised use of eye-catching images for book covers, usually accompanied by the writers' phone numbers. The blatant disregard for conventional intellectual property protocols highlights how marginalised writers prioritise direct engagement with their audience and monetary again over adherence to established publishing standards. Nyambi (2016, p. 139) designates extra-textual elements such as book titles and design choices as "cover narratives." Nyambi (2016) further argues that the visual and textual cues on book covers are not merely decorative but carry meanings that potentially aim to align with the book's actual content. Building on this argument, I contend that these paratextual elements are consistently employed as marketing strategies that manipulate, complicate or enhance the reading experience in ways that extend beyond the text itself. For example, in some cases, a member of the audience who engages the most on the writer's Facebook page will have their photograph featured on the book cover. Popular culture thrives on the sharing and remixing of ideas, which frequently blurs the boundaries between originality and appropriation. I argue that originality is not a fixed attribute but a dynamic process. This iterative process highlights that originality is less about being entirely novel and more about how writers engage with and transform existing materials. Consequently, the collaborative and communal nature of popular culture increasingly challenges traditional notions of intellectual property.

Furthermore, these writers also employ provocative titles as strategic lures to capture readers' attention on social media. Zimbabwean writers who publish short fiction on *Facebook* demonstrate a savvy understanding of the need to stand out in a crowded online space. Their marketing strategies are also exemplified by recycling known plots and titles of Hollywood and Nollywood movies. For example, Ellah Munetsi and Elwin Munatisire's "Why Did I Get Married" (2023) and Double Gee's (real name; Godknows Gochera) "Pregnant Virgin" (2023).[78] I argue that the artistic intent behind self-publishing these short stories on *Facebook* is primarily for recognition and, secondarily, monetisation. While *Facebook* allows users to monetise content

[78] These chiShona novellas copy or borrow titles and plots of Hollywood and Nollywood films such as Tyler Perry's *Why Did I Get Married* (2007) and Uchenna Mbunabo's *Pregnant Virgi*n Part 1 and 2 (2021).

directly, they need at least 10,000 followers. Zimbabwean writers with relatively few followers typically begin by building their audience on *Facebook* and engaging with potential readers. This initial following is then directed to paid content on platforms like *Amazon*, *Kobo*, *Ubuy*, *StreetLib*, and *Write Design IQ*, where they sell self-published eBooks.[79] Writers who cannot afford to use the aforementioned platforms prefer to tease out free chapters on Facebook and then sell serialised chapters in *WhatsApp* and *Telegram* groups.[80] According to Adenekan (2021), the digital space is a site where the production and dissemination of literary works are inextricably linked to commercial interests and considerations.[81] Adenekan's (2021) argument implies that the digital environment has blurred the boundaries between artistic expression and economic forces, creating a dynamic where the two are mutually reinforcing. The digital space, with its capacity for widespread distribution and accessibility, has enabled writers to reach broader audiences but has also exposed their work to the forces of commercialisation and monetisation. Kiguru (2022) observes that online platforms hosting short stories constitute more than just repositories for literary content and serve as interactive spaces that engage both the audience and other sites of literary production (p.142). For example, Barnabas Karuma's single-authored anthology, *What Preys in the Night* (2021), was initially promoted on *Facebook* and shared as a free ebook for a brief period before becoming available for purchase on digital platforms like *Amazon* and directly sold via *WhatsApp*.

This chapter recognises the inherent literary value and cultural significance of digital short stories. The literary worth of such stories should not be contingent upon their migration to print form. Zimbabwean Facebook fiction is also distinguished by its unique cultural, social, and economic context.[82] The production, dissemination, and reception of short stories on *Facebook* are shaped by cultural practices, social structures, and lived experiences of the authors and their audience. To attract more traffic to their Facebook Pages, Zimbabwean writers such as Banabas Karuma, Isdore Guvamombe, and Vine Ziwane strategically utilise allegories, legends, fables, and

[79] Homegrown websites such as Mazwi.com, Kairezi.com and Dzidza.xyz which offered favorable terms and conditions to budding writers in Zimbabwe, are now defunct and no longer accessible.

[80] Another method they use is asking interested readers to send airtime vouchers, after which they send the chapters.

[81] See also Kiguru (2016) who designates contemporary writing as a commodity circulating within local and global literary market structures. While market structures provide opportunities for broader distribution and cultural exchange, they also impose constraints that shape the production, content, and reception of literary works.

[82] In the preceding chapters on popular print magazines and blogs, I have demonstrated how post-2000 writings in Zimbabwe emerged from the specific experiences and challenges faced by Zimbabwean writers, including economic hardships and the quest for recognition.

sensational topics to not only captivate readers but also to deepen engagement and broaden their readership base.[83] George Ogola (2017) observes that many critics have failed to acknowledge or fully understand the elements that contribute to the widespread appeal and success of popular literature. These elements include accessibility, relatability, and the ability to resonate with a broad audience. Popular literature often reflects and addresses its readers' everyday experiences, struggles, and aspirations, making it more engaging and relevant to the masses. Yet, traditional literary criticism prioritises highbrow, canonical works, which can lead to the marginalisation and undervaluation of popular literature.

Drawing on popular narrative forms, these writers actively engage with cultural resonances and universal themes, making their stories more intriguing and deeply relevant to diverse audiences. I deploy Ato Quayson's (1997) notion of interdiscursivity to characterise how elements from oral narratives, folklore, and traditional storytelling techniques are incorporated into Facebook Fiction, creating a dialogue between them. Similarly, Yékú (2016, p.1) observes that "traditional oral poetics" have historically played a significant role in preserving and conveying cultural values through the characteristic modes of storytelling, folklore, and myth. Notably, these oral traditions have given rise to familiar character archetypes, such as the hero, the villain, the victim, and the trickster, which have long been featured in popular print magazines, tabloids and music. I contend that the remediation of oral poetics continues manifesting in the digital age, as Facebook fiction reproduces recognisable archetypes and relatable themes. The intersection of traditional storytelling forms with contemporary socio-cultural and economic realities enhances the narratives' aesthetic quality and serves as a fit vehicle for social commentary and critique. Notably, the creative synthesis of established cultural systems of reference, such as orality and modern influences, creates new and hybrid forms that depart significantly from the traditional influences in new and innovative ways.[84]

I am interested in contemporary writers' strategies to creatively subvert established norms and engage with their audience on digital platforms. De Certeau's (1984) notion of tactical

[83] A prominent Facebook page used by upcoming writers in Zimbabwe is "The Zimbabwe Writers Project," created in 2013, with 6,300 followers. Barnabas Karuma administers the page "Write Design IQ," created in 2018 with 1,825 followers, and "Zim Writers and Readers," a relatively new page created in 2023 with only 24 members. Notably, these writers often repost their published short stories and promotional material on their personal profiles as well.

[84] Barber (1997) argues that popular art (including literature) is characterised by its ability to merge diverse cultural elements, creating hybrid forms that challenge established norms and expectations.

practices. These tactics include poaching traditional storytelling techniques, plots and pseudonyms. Poaching, in De Certeau's (1984) sense, involves the subversive appropriation of dominant cultural texts and practices. Like poaching, Adesokan's (2023) sampling concept involves strategically reusing old texts to create new meanings and narratives. The use pf pseudonyms by writers publishing short stories on *Facebook* represents a strategic manoeuvre to compartmentalise their creative personas from their personal identities. For instance, Banabas Karuma publishes under the initials B.T. Karuma, which allows him to maintain a degree of separation between his writing career and private life. Zimbabwean writers who publish short fiction on *Facebook* intentionally sidestep the conventions of literary tradition by opting instead for an aleatory writing style. Strikingly, the inherent tension between embracing aleatory writing and adhering to established conventions raises crucial questions about its effectiveness. Patricia Waugh (2002, p.12) posits that aleatory writing responds directly and spontaneously to the "pluralistic and hyperactive multiplicity of styles" prevalent in contemporary culture. For example, the non-linear storytelling, communal participation, and improvisation of oral literature enrich contemporary writing. These storytelling methods and thematic explorations enable contemporary writers to use the digital platform's ability to amplify popular content. Writers on *Facebook* are pushing the boundaries of traditional storytelling by experimenting with serialised narratives, multimedia integration (including images, videos, and hyperlinks), and interactive plots shaped by reader feedback. This participatory nature of cultural production underscores the crucial role of audiences in co-creating meanings. The writer-reader interaction allows writers to adjust their narratives in real-time, ensuring their stories remain relevant and engaging.

Correspondingly, Santana (2021) posits that the success of Facebook fiction hinges significantly on authors' capacity to immerse themselves in relentless self-promotion, navigate algorithms, and cater to prevailing consumer trends. This assertion aligns with Barber's (2022, p.xvi) exploration of the influence of audience preferences and engagement on the reception of popular content. Importantly, Barber's analysis (2022) underscores the uneven nature of reception, emphasising the various pathways through which people interpret, appreciate, and connect with cultural products. In contrast to traditional publishing formats, these digital platforms facilitate a dynamic, two-way interaction between authors and readers. This interaction imbues the act of reading with immediacy and fosters a sense of interconnectedness within the literary community. It is noteworthy that these short stories on *Facebook* are continuously reshaped by readers, which

is a crucial aspect that further distinguishes them from the more static and author-centric model of the traditional novel. As readers engage with the stories, comment on them, and even suggest plots, the narratives become ambulatory and responsive to the collective input of the online community (Adenekan, 2021). For example, readers create their posts or threads discussing the story. Within these discussions, they might speculate about future plot developments and desire to see certain characters return. In essence, Facebook fiction augments readers' voices and empowers them to become co-creators of the literary works they consume. The reader's intervention by the readers disrupts the conventional hierarchies of literary production. The transformative nature of this interactive element blurs conventional distinctions between creator and consumer, turning the act of reading into a shared, communal experience. It is noteworthy that, despite lacking the institutional backing and visibility enjoyed by established authors, contemporary writers explored in this chapter employ creative and grassroots strategies to thrive within the digital space. This resilience and adaptability showcase how success is not solely dependent on traditional structures but is cultivated through innovative approaches in the ever-expanding realm of digital literature. Notably, self-publishing on *Facebook* may initially appear marginal when viewed through traditional publishing paradigms, and this chapter emphasises the dynamic nature of this perception.

Facebook fiction possesses the potential to redefine the boundaries of what is considered marginal in the publishing domain. Facebook fiction, with its potential for diverse cultural expression, narrative innovation, and broad accessibility, aligns with the broader trends of inclusion that Sarah Brouillette (2014, p.119) identifies as representing a "particular community." Contemporary writers write Zimbabwean Facebook fiction for an audience domiciled in Zimbabwe and the diaspora. For Zimbabweans in the diaspora, Facebook fiction is a vital link to their homeland. It bridges the gap between their current realities and cultural roots, providing stories that echo their memories and experiences. These narratives provide a sense of connection and continuity, helping the diaspora maintain their cultural identity and stay informed about what is happening back home. As a fiction writing platform, *Facebook* allows writers to transcend geographical boundaries and reach local and global audiences. They draw upon shared cultural and social knowledge and the experiences of marginalisation and displacement to create narratives and representations that resonate with their audiences within Zimbabwe and the diaspora. The representation of everyday life on Facebook captures the unique experiences, challenges, and

aspirations of Zimbabweans, making it a resonant platform for the audience. Therefore, in real-time, short stories published on *Facebook* by Zimbabwean writers respond to current events, societal issues, and personal experiences.

The immediacy of self-publishing on *Facebook* grants emerging writers a unique cultural significance, making them potent vehicles for social commentary and personal expression. In this chapter, I build upon Barber's (2022; 1987) postulations that the most active and generative forces driving the creation of new cultural elements reside within popular culture. I contend that short fiction published on *Facebook* constitutes what Barber (1987, p.5) calls a "fugitive category" within popular literature. A 'fugitive category' refers to experimental, transient, and ephemeral literary works that resist confinement within established genres (Barber 1987, p.5). Similarly, Santana's (2014, p.168) insightful description of certain literary works as "migrant forms" is particularly apt when considering the nature of Facebook fiction. Santana (2014) further maintains that these 'migrant forms' are always in a perpetual state of flux and challenge conventional categorisation by blending or defying existing forms and norms. I contend that the short stories analysed in this chapter embody the very essence of these 'migrant forms,' as they often transcend the confines of the initial platform and migrate to other digital spaces.[85]

The ephemeral and fragmentary nature of Facebook fiction also poses a challenge to categorisation. Short stories and novellas are generally published in serial formats, with instalments appearing sporadically.[86] Such an episodic storytelling strategy allows writers to break the narrative into smaller, digestible posts. Each post functions as a self-contained unit that contributes to the overall storyline and hence creates anticipation for the next instalment (Santana 2018). Furthermore, the fragmentation of the narrative into multiple vignettes challenges the traditional narrative structures and disrupts the reader's expectations of a unified storyline. The fragmented nature of the narrative creates a sense of disorientation that compels readers to engage more actively by piecing together the story. For instance, Vine Ziwane's short story "Bloodbath" gained additional visibility and interest when it was serialised in *The Queensdale Report.* Fundamentally, *Facebook*, as a social media platform, provides a unique opportunity to

[85] See also Shringarpure (2020), who discusses the convergence of digital forms and migrant forms that reflects the experiences of displacement, fragmentation, and adaptation often associated with migration.

[86] Popular print magazine, *Parade* serialised Ndabaningi Sithole's *Busi*, the first English "novel" by a black Zimbabwean writer for three years from 1959 until 1961. This novel first appeared as a disjointed narrative and remains unpublished. See Veit-Wild (1993).

complement printed publications. Facebook fiction interacts and circulates as part of a larger network of meaning-making practices, enhancing the reach and impact of literary works. Nevertheless, the ephemeral quality and structure of short fiction on *Facebook* pose a unique challenge for situating these works within established categories of literary analysis. Unlike the physical permanence of printed books or the relative stability of digital publications, Facebook fiction is characterised by its fleeting and constantly evolving presence. *Facebook* posts can be edited, deleted, or hidden, making it difficult to capture and analyse them as a stable literary text precisely.

The episodic nature of serialised Facebook fiction further complicates attempts to treat it as a cohesive and self-contained work. Primorac (2003, p.50) contends that Zimbabwean literature can be categorised into "textual groupings […] united by sets of underlying structural/semantic and generic traits." Nevertheless, Primorac's (2003) categorisation presupposes a certain degree of stability and uniformity in literary production, which is inherently at odds with the fluid and ephemeral nature of Facebook fiction. Kiguru (2022, p.142) avers that contemporary literary platforms that publish short stories also attribute to their ephemerality and classification within mass culture. The transient nature of digital platforms and the brevity of short fiction align with the characteristics of mass culture, which usually prioritises easily digestible content. The ephemerality of Facebook fiction increases when it transitions to other platforms, such as *WhatsApp.*[87] Yet, this transitory nature does not diminish its literariness. On the contrary, it highlights the dynamic nature of digital storytelling and self-publishing practices

The ease of publishing on *Facebook* can blur the lines between professional and amateur writers, as anyone can share their creative work on the platform. For example, Tsitsi Dangarembga (2022), in her collection of essays, *Black and Female*, chronicles her persistent struggles and rejections, even after the success of her bestseller, *Nervous Conditions* (1988). When Dangarembga worked on the manuscript that became *This Mournable Body* (2018), she found herself without a publisher or agent. In the *Open Country Magazine*, Dangarembga describes how, without a publisher and an agent, she felt isolated from professional feedback and validation, hence resorted to posting excerpts of her manuscript on Facebook, hoping for any resonance with her audience (Obi-Young, 2020). Dangarembga's fortunes shifted in 2014 when her excerpts on

[87] See Ngoshi (2021) and Gora (2018) for a detailed discussion of publishing practices on *WhatsApp* by Zimbabwean writers.

Facebook garnered the attention of Ellah Wakatama Allfrey, a former editor at Jonathan Cape and Granta magazine (Obi-Young, 2020). Dangarembga's struggles illustrate how *Facebook* is a vital platform for emerging and prominent writers. While Dangarembga used *Facebook* to get an editor, countless budding Zimbabwean writers rely on social media platforms to gain local visibility and validation.[88]

Hazel Ngoshi (2021) contends that contemporary Zimbabwean writers view writing on *Facebook* not as a fringe activity but as a central and meaningful component of self-publishing and marketing. Ngoshi (2021) further posits that self-publishing and marketing on *Facebook* can be seen as a manifestation of entrepreneurial agency and the promotion of individual autonomy:

> The dissemination of art forms on social media platforms is a recent development, which has seen a number of literary artists producing short stories, novels and novellas that are serialised on Facebook and WhatsApp. The exercise is also remunerative, since artists (similar to Victorian-era literary developments, where newspapers aided the rise of the novel through serialisation) in some instances ask readers to pay for the next chapter. Mobile money transfers are used in the payment system. (p.808)

The rapid publication and iteration of short story fiction on *Facebook* presents advantages and challenges. The platform's affordances enable topical or serialised narratives that responsively engage with current events and evolving trends, affording writers real-time audience interaction. Nonetheless, this immediacy may engender literary quality compromises to facilitate expedient monetisation. Additionally, the uncontrolled sharing and use of content on *Facebook* raises concerns regarding intellectual property protection. Indeed, the platform's saturation with content makes it difficult for emerging Facebook Page creators to gain visibility and traction. Despite these challenges, Zimbabwean Facebook fiction remains a discursive platform for articulating everyday life.

Shamanic pacts, occultic bargains and ethereal transactions in Banabas Karuma's "Ambition Prevails" and Isdore Guvamombe's "Hell Hath No Fury Like a Woman".

This section focuses on the exploration of ambition and its entanglement with the obscure facets of desire and the perilous nature of enigmatic aspirations in Karuma's "Ambition Prevails" (2021)

[88] In the introductory chapter, I discussed how few existing independent publishers, such as College Press, Zimbabwe Publishing Houses, and Mambo Press, tend to dominate various genres, imprints, and markets, exerting a substantial impact on which books get published, distributed, and promoted. Consequently, the closure of publishing houses, such as Baobab Books in 1998 and Weaver Press in 2023, further pushes emerging writers toward self-publishing avenues

and Isdore Guvamombe's "Hell Hath No Fury Like a Woman" (2021).[89] Karuma and Guvamombe invite readers to grapple with the inherent paradox of pursuing desires with the potential for immediate gratification and long-term consequences. Their work acts as a poignant reflection on the precarious balance between ambition and the potential pitfalls. Both short stories appear to adhere to a trajectory of literary creations that employ magical realism to confront and expose the harsh truths of the human condition and the silenced aspects of society. Wendy Faris (2004, p.1) highlights the function of magical realism in contemporary literature, emphasising its role in empowering "marginal voices, submerged traditions, and emergent literature." According to Faris (2004), magical realism is a stylistic approach that deliberately blurs the boundaries between the natural and supernatural. I assert that the strategic deployment of magical realist elements in Zimbabwean Facebook fiction is a powerful literary mechanism for challenging dominant social, political, and cultural norms.

Correspondingly, Nyambi (2015, p.1) observes how post-2000 Zimbabwean literary texts evoke "fictional life-worlds" that interrogate the lingering effects of colonialism and the socioeconomic inequalities that continue to plague the nation. Nyambi's (2015) observation aligns with the core tenets of magical realism, which, as Faris (2004) notes, blends the real and the supernatural to unsettle dominant modes of representation. The strategic interweaving of the real and the fantastical within the two short stories under scrutiny functions as a subversive discursive tactic that disrupts conventional modes of representation and exposes the hidden truths beneath the veneer of everyday reality. Karuma and Guvamombe destabilise the reader's sense of what is 'natural' or 'normal' with magical realist techniques, creating openings to articulate marginalised perspectives, interrogate hegemonic power structures, and imagine alternative realities. An undertaking in writing that deploys magical realism is to utilise fantastical elements to symbolise societal anxieties, psychological turmoil, and a stark portrayal of societal hardships.[90]

Karuma's "Ambition Prevails" (2021) is a sensational story that commences with a transition from the bustling urban setting of Harare, the capital city of Zimbabwe, to the tranquil

[89] Although Tyler Perry produced a movie with the same title in 2014, Guvamombe's short story predates it, having been first written in 2012. The title itself is a proverb adapted from a line in William Congreve's play, *The Mourning Bride* (1697).

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[90] See Naishe Nyamubaya's (2015) short story, "Tsikamutanda" in *Writing Mystery and Mayhem*, an anthology edited by Irene Staunton

rural expanse of Chipinge. Central to the narrative are two characters, Charles and the unnamed narrator, whose impulsive decision to embark on a weekend trip to Chipinge, a district in Manicaland Province in southeastern Zimbabwe, close to the border with Mozambique. sets the stage for a gripping tale. I argue that Karuma's use of Chipinge as a setting is a calculated narrative strategy intended to exploit the sensationalism and exoticism associated with the area' perceived mysticism and occultism. Tenson Muyambo and Emmanuel Sithole (2021) lament how dominant media narratives, particularly in mainstream print newspapers and popular songs, have perpetuated harmful stereotypes about Chipinge and its inhabitants. Muyambo and Sithole (2021, p.235). cogently argue that these media representations depict Chipinge as a 'hub of witchcraft and occultism' inhabited by "super-sangomas." Rather than challenging such reductive tropes, Karuma's work capitalises on and reinforces these damaging stereotypes. On top of that, Karuma exploited how readers would readily recognise and identify public perceptions of Chipinge.

The narrative centres around Charles, driven by an unwavering pursuit of wealth, and entices the unnamed narrator with the prospect of sudden prosperity through the dubious services of the notorious and enigmatic shaman, Chiripi. The narrative arc unravels the unnamed narrator' internal reflections, contemplating his vulnerability and the potential repercussions of their involvement in this perilous pursuit of material gain. As the events unfold, the narrative shifts away from the initial fascination with the mystique of the supernatural setting, emphasising Charles and the narrator's personal fortitude and moral contemplation. Their dissatisfaction with their low remuneration and economic downturns fuelled their desperation for wealth. This depiction highlights the pervasive impact of financial instability on the characters, underscoring the profound influence of external economic factors on their decision-making processes and ambitions. The narrative explores the experiences of Charles and the unnamed narrator, highlighting their struggles as regional truck drivers entrenched in tedious and unfulfilling occupations. Their journeys across different countries such as Zambia, South Africa, and Mozambique, coupled with the recurrent necessity of sleeping on the road, vividly underscore their profession's transient and challenging aspects.

Embedded within the narrative are various sub-plots that shed light on Charles' unyielding quest for affluence through a series of daring and high-stakes ventures, ranging from endeavours involving Kadoma gold and Chiadzwa diamonds to clandestine dealings in the black-market foreign exchange. Despite sporadic instances of success, Charles remains entrenched in his

position as a truck driver, prompting a nuanced exploration of the complexities surrounding his pursuit of financial gain. This portrayal of Charles emphasises his relentless ambition and engagement in ventures that significantly shape his identity and reputation. Chiripi probes Charles and the unnamed narrator's willingness to embrace the darkness that accompanies their desires by challenging them to the daunting task of sleeping atop graves in the rural graveyard. This narrative shift accentuates the harrowing nature of their trials to achieve their ambitions. The unnamed narrator's inability to overcome fear and rest in this unsettling environment serves as a representation of his internal moral conflict. Chiripi's probing actions serve to unravel the characters' true motivations and highlight the sacrifices they are willing to make in their pursuit of wealth and success. In contrast, Charles' success in completing the task and receiving the goblin from Chiripi signifies his readiness to confront the unknown and embrace the supernatural elements at play. This pivotal moment in the narrative not only marks a turning point for the characters but also explores the psychological and moral ramifications of their actions, inviting readers to contemplate the limits of human ambition and the precarious line between success and moral compromise. The sudden influx of money after the story juxtaposes the moral dilemmas and horrors witnessed earlier, creating a stark contrast that accentuates the transformative power of ambition and its ability to warp one's perceptions and values.

Similarly, Isdore Guvamombe's "Hell Hath No Fury Like a Woman" (2021) captures the journey of Muchemwa from an undisclosed rural area to Nyakapupu Village in Guruve. Muchemwa had travelled to Nyakapupu village to visit his mother and attend the kurova guva ceremony. In chiShona cosmology, kurova guva is a sacred ceremony that brings back and welcomes the spirit of the deceased from the grave to his or her hut, placing them amongst their descendants (Gundani 1994, Vambe 2009). The solemn commemorative atmosphere of the ceremony is disrupted by the sudden arrival of Muchemwa's wife, leading to a palpable shift in the emotional tone. This disruption hints at underlying tension or unresolved conflict. Despite Muchemwa's attempts to mitigate the situation in private, his wife adamantly seeks to expose and embarrass him in front of his relatives, unveiling revelations of his infidelity and engagement in occult practices. It is through her revelation that we get to know of Muchemwa's use of mystical charms that he got from a shaman in Espungabera, Mozambique, to manipulate clients into false confessions of witchcraft. Michael Taussig (2016) contends that the true potency of magic emerges when the underlying trick is exposed and acknowledged. In essence, the real power of magic lies

in its ability to navigate between revelation and concealment. Muchemwa's wife also showcases her familiarity with her husband's tricks by doing a public demonstration of the hallucinatory and fear-inducing effects of Muchemwa's occultic power. This dramatic exposé highlights the deceit employed by her husband. The subsequent confrontation resulted in Muchemwa's aggressive behaviour and attempts to physically harm his wife to destabilise the impact of the unsettling revelation of his deceptive practices, prompting a re-evaluation of the community's beliefs and perceptions.

I want to argue that the interconnectedness between traditional folklore narratives and present-day realities fosters a deeper understanding of the cultural and societal dynamics of shamanic rituals. My discussion thus invites us to consider shamanic pacts as a form of escapism that allows characters like Charles and Muchemwa to transcend the limitations and hardships of their everyday lives. To comprehend shamanic pacts, it is necessary to provide a brief overview of shamanism. Lars Pharo (2011) asserts that shamanism is a constructed transcultural concept encompassing many interpretations. Pointedly, a reductive conceptualisation of shamanism as a religion has influenced various perceptions of shamanic practices (Pharo 2011). Michael Harner (1982) states that shamanism operates as a method or approach to understanding and interacting with the spiritual and physical worlds. Shamanism does not prescribe a singular, universally accepted set of beliefs, unlike established religions with rigid doctrines and systematic teachings. Instead, it provides a platform for personal experience and exploration. This flexibility allows practitioners to derive their own interpretations and conclusions based on their personal experiences with the spiritual realm. Similarly, Fiona Bowie (2000, p.126) posits that shamanism is a religious technique rather than a distinct category of religion. While there are similarities in the spiritual and metaphysical aspects between African Traditional Religions and shamanism, the latter varies significantly across cultures and continents. The points of convergence, such as communication with ancestral spirits and ritualistic practices, do not imply homogeneity. Pharo (2011) emphasises the functional aspects of shamanic rituals and their role in addressing spiritual and existential concerns.

Situating shamanism within the context of navigating existential anxieties and uncertainties highlights its significance as a mode of fulfilling Charles and Muchemwa's economic aspirations and materialistic desires. Shamanic pacts reflect Charles' and the unnamed narrator's search for answers to existential questions regarding "overnight success" (p.11). In other words, shamanic

pacts involve supernatural or mystical elements, with the shaman acting as an intermediary between the spiritual and physical realms. Galina Lindquist (2006, p.10) states, "Phantasmic discourses are all about filling up the void." In light of this observation, my focus goes beyond the underlying motivations towards seeking supernatural solutions for economic struggles. This exploration underscores how shamanic practices provide profound insights and solutions to the existential dilemmas faced by the characters. Examining phantasmic discourses, such as shamanic pacts, prompts me to explore how beliefs in the supernatural can provide a sense of hope. The shamanic pact between Charles and Chiripi represents a binding covenant in which Charles seeks to fulfil his ambitions and escape poverty through money-making occult rituals.

Right from the onset of "Ambition Prevails" (2021), Charles is depicted as "determined," seeking information from "a guy who knew a guy" who had amassed immense wealth after consulting Chiripi (p. 11). The elusive web of connections that Charles uses to gain information about Chiripi signifies the hidden yet potent influence of deep-rooted superstitions surrounding the acquisition of wealth. The narrative nuances the visibility and invisibility of power dynamics, highlighting the simultaneous concealment and circulation of information akin to Foucault's (1991) exploration of power as a pervasive force operating through networks. This explains why Charles' secretive manoeuvres reveal the existence of a 'public secret' that remains concealed yet accessible to a chosen few. Occultic rituals involve esoteric or hidden knowledge that is not widely understood and is often pursued to acquire intangible resources such as spiritual insights and financial gain. In light of such observations, Charles exemplifies the idea of a secretive network that guides and leads him to Chiripi.

This explains why, upon arriving at Chiripi's homestead, the unnamed narrator, who is not privy to the same information as Charles, begins to experience bouts of doubt and scepticism. The narrator questions the legitimacy of the shaman's authority and his ability to provide access to wealth:

> How can such a weather-beaten old man claim to hold the keys to wealth? From all appearances, life has knocked him down a couple of pegs. He lives a rural life in the middle of nowhere. He's thin and dark, probably from labouring on some measly crops. His cheeks are hollow, and his skin clings to his face like melting shrink wrap. (p13)

The extract exemplifies magical realism through its narrative ambiguity, subversion of expectations and juxtaposition of the ordinary and the extraordinary. The depiction of the shaman's physical attributes and modest lifestyle is a subtle commentary on human perception and the

interplay between appearances and reality. The blending of realism and magic challenges conventional notions of wealth and power. It also invites the readers to consider the enigmatic and paradoxical dynamics within the narrative. For instance, Chiripi, despite his impoverished appearance, holds the promise of wealth through his purported supernatural abilities. The narrative's embrace of ambiguity is a quintessential feature of magical realism. The text encourages an open-ended engagement by withholding absolute certainty, challenging the reader to navigate the liminal space between the mundane and the extraordinary. The narrative's refusal to provide clear-cut resolutions disrupts the reader's expectations, fostering a more contemplative and imaginative reading experience. The text does not simply present a straightforward account of events but rather prompts the reader to ponder the deeper implications and the transformative potential of the narrative's supernatural elements.

Comparably, in "Hell Hath No Fury Like a Woman" (2021), Muchemwa also utilises enchanted artefacts that he was given by a Shaman in Espungabera, Mozambique, with the intention of coercing villagers into making inaccurate admissions of involvement in witchcraft. Pardon Mwansa (2017, p.5) states that people are drawn to witchcraft and other occult practices because they provide a means of addressing fundamental human needs not adequately met through mainstream societal structures and institutions. Mwansa (2017) contends that there is an inextricable link between the occult and witchcraft, where the latter involves using magical powers or supernatural means to control and influence things. Mwansa's (2017) argument is pertinent in considering how Muchemwa uses magic to deceive people into believing they are witches. Instead, the conflation of occult practices and witchcraft tends to oversimplify the heterogeneity of these practices. It is crucial to recognise that the perceived link between the occult and witchcraft is imbued with historical, social, economic, and political dynamics. To demonstrate the point made above, it is useful to consider how Muchemwa utilised the mystical charms:

> […] Muchemwa (the mourned one) had long left for another area where he had become a major traditional healer. His name had been adjusted to Tsikamutanda. This was more aligned to his miracle realm, where he was a witch hunter. He had taken the country by storm. During his witch-hunting escapades, he made a fortune in cattle and cash. He bought cars. He was living a dream. (p.10)

Muchemwa gained widespread influence and substantial success after he relocated and became a traditional healer specialising in witch hunting. Tsikamutanda is a person who engages in the practice of actively seeking out and persecuting people accused of witchcraft or sorcery. When

Muchemwa became a self-appointed vigilante who hunts witches, he changed his name. The transition from being 'the mourned one' to Tsikamutanda signifies Muchemwa's profound identity transformation, perceived power and authority. Notably, this change in identity is not merely a shift in name but a complete repositioning within the community, suggesting a shift in roles and perceptions. For example, Muchemwa claims to have the ability to identify witches or people involved in witchcraft, yet he uses magic to extort money and livestock from the alleged witches he targets. This is evident in the fortune he accumulated in cattle and cash, enabling him to purchase cars. Muchemwa, who was once unemployed, exploits a predatory and opportunistic dimension to witch hunting practices, where the cleansing rituals serve to extract payment or valuables from villagers who are already struggling.

Muchemwa's witch hunting was driven by intertwined social, economic, and political tensions, coupled with a deliberate effort to scapegoat marginalised members of society. These accusations of witchcraft were usually baseless, serving more as tools for exclusion and control than genuine concerns. Discursively, the occult economy influences economic behaviours and social dynamics, thus intersecting spirituality with material pursuits. Fidelis Duri (2017) attributes the emergence of self-proclaimed witch hunters to the socio-economic hardships in Zimbabwe. Duri (2017) further observes how witch hunters asserted themselves as providers of solutions to social and economic issues:

> The *tsikamutandas* claim to offer solutions by employing African indigenous knowledge systems such as witch hunting where they could identify witches, exorcise evil spirits and cleanse both the perpetrators and victims of witchcraft. Among the Shona people of Zimbabwe, *tsikamutanda* literally means 'to step on the wooden log,' a nickname they earned after the magic sticks they use to identify witches. (p.41 emphasis in original)

It can be argued that the tsikamutanda position themselves in rural areas where they exploit the vulnerabilities and anxieties that villagers and rural communities face during times of crisis, often leading to the search for scapegoats and supernatural explanations. The economic downturns and resulting social upheaval act as triggers for the heightened tendency to attribute blame to witchcraft. It can be claimed that the attribution of economic hardship and personal misfortunes to witchcraft can be a means for people to grapple with the high levels of unemployment, the soaring cost of living, and political instability. Additionally, the belief in witchcraft serves as a way for local communities to make sense of their struggles and uncertainty.

Andreas Zvaiwa (2021) highlights how the widespread belief in witchcraft as a source of misfortune in Zimbabwe enables the proliferation of predatory practices. Tsikamutandas, or witch

hunters, exploit the economic and political situation to play on people's fears, superstitions, insecurities, and misfortunes (Zvaiwa 2021, p.189). Furthermore, Zvaiwa (2021, p.189) observes that witch hunters are not just opportunists but are skilled manipulators, effectively utilising psychological tactics to hoodwink vulnerable communities. Self-proclaimed witch hunters like Muchemwa capitalise on the vulnerability and anxieties of villagers, wielding their perceived mystical powers to identify and condemn alleged witches. Muchemwa employs a repertoire of 'magical' and 'policing' methods to identify those alleged of witchcraft. The public spectacle of witch hunting reinforces Muchemwa's perceived power and legitimacy, solidifying his authority and influence over the community. Also, belief in witchcraft serves as a platform for expressing deep-seated resentments and tensions within the community. It provides an outlet for people to channel their frustrations and anxieties, allowing communities to assert a sense of agency and attempt to regain control over their circumstances. Blair Rutherford (1999) avers that the invocation of witchcraft during economic and social turmoil in Zimbabwe can be understood as a strategic response by local communities to navigate and resist state domination, capitalist forces, and the challenges of modernity.[91] Occult practices become an alternative for characters like Muchemwa and Charles to exert power and influence over their circumstances, especially when they feel helpless or lack control. Felicity Wood (2015, p.285) critiques the commercialisation and commodification of occult practices, particularly magic. Wood (2015) observes that the magic market exploits people's interest or curiosity about the occult by providing products and services while making grandiose claims about the benefits and profits to be gained.

Likewise, Muchemwa turns to harnessing the allure of magic as an alternative means of wealth creation by creating a dramatic spectacle of witch hunting. In his work, *Zimbabwe's Casino Economy: Extraordinary Measures for Extraordinary Challenges* (2008), Gideon Gono employs the metaphor of a 'casino' to suggest a risky and volatile economic environment that demanded unconventional actions to address economic hardships caused by hyperinflation.[92] Arguably, the unconventional measures suggested by Gono (2008) are akin to the magical practices discussed

[91] Rutherford (1999) argument suggests that the rise of witchcraft is symptomatic of deeper societal issues that leads to the commodification of occultic practices. The commodification of witchcraft is critiqued in Doris Lessing's short story, "No Witchcraft for Sale," in the anthology *This Was the Old Chief's Country* (1951), explores the ethical dilemma faced by Gideon, who comes from a lineage of traditional healers and refuses to commercialise his knowledge of herbs that cured his master's son when he was attacked by a snake.

[92] Gideon Gono is a former Governor of the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe (RBZ), who held the position from 2003 to 2013.

by Pierre Bourdieu (1990). Bourdieu (1990, p.97) posits that people invest in magic as a practical response to real-world challenges and uncertainties. Put simply, magic becomes a practical utility in addressing everyday challenges. Likewise, Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff (1999, p.282) assert that the widespread availability and use of "potent magical technologies" play a crucial role in the considerable expansion of occult economies. These magical technologies encompass various rituals, practices and belief systems employed by people within the occult economy to manifest wealth and acquire possessions through manipulating supernatural forces (Comaroff and Comaroff 1999). The key contention in this argument is that within the occult economy, there is a purposeful utilisation of supernatural forces to materialise their desires, particularly wealth and possessions.

Comparably, Patrick Desplat (2024) observes that in times of economic upheaval, occult practices provide a sense of control and predictability that conventional economic models fail to deliver. In other words, occult practices are not mere fringe occurrences but play a significant role in shaping societal responses to instability and transformation. I argue that as a result of socio-economic changes, the characters in the short stories I analyse struggle to keep pace with the new realities. Consequently, they resort to seeking alternative solutions that seem more attuned to the anxieties and uncertainties they experience. The turn to occult practices represents a departure from mainstream economic models and a yearning for a sense of order and predictability amidst the chaos of rapid change. Occultic rituals and shamanic pacts in Karuma's "Ambition Prevails" (2021) and Guvamombe's "Hell Hath No Fury Like a Woman" (2021) enable Charles and Muchemwa cope with the disruptive forces of modern capitalism and the attendant feelings of powerlessness and disorientation.

The coexistence of traditional practices alongside formal legal structures in Zimbabwe has allowed witch hunters like Muchemwa to ply their trade predominantly in rural areas, effectively sidestepping the colonial-era laws that failed to recognise the legitimacy of witchcraft. Historically, handling witchcraft cases in Zimbabwe has reflected a blend of traditional and formal legal systems (Chavunduka 1980). Traditional courts and family gatherings played a central role in the adjudication of such cases, readily acknowledging the existence of witches and affording them a distinct legal approach that recognised supernatural beliefs and practices. However, a notable shift has occurred, primarily driven by formal legal changes. The Witchcraft Suppression Act, initially enacted in 1899 and later amended to the Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act Chapter 9:23 of 2001, has maintained the core elements of denying the legitimacy of witchcraft with only

minor modifications.[93] Consequently, witch hunters like Muchemwa have been forced to operate predominantly in rural areas, where traditional courts persistently permit them to handle such cases. It should be noted that traditional healers and witch hunters permitted to operate in rural areas should be registered members of the Zimbabwe National Traditional Healers Association (ZINATHA).[94] In contrast, formal courts in Zimbabwe have categorically denied the existence of witches, marking a significant departure from the recognition seen in traditional settings. This transformation in the adjudicative process signifies a broader societal and legal shift in how accusations of witchcraft are addressed, with the formal courts mandating that such cases be referred to them, indicating a move away from the traditional approach. The coexistence of these divergent legal frameworks has created a situation where Charles and Muchemwa have had to seek out rural areas and even venture outside the country to engage in occult rituals and shamanic pacts, as the formal legal system has failed to recognise the legitimacy of their traditional practices. This dissonance between the colonial-era laws and the persistent belief in the power of witchcraft has perpetuated a parallel system of adjudication, one that operates outside the purview of the formal legal structures.

Ironically, Muchemwa is not a registered member of ZINATHA and instead serves as an archetype of a trickster who perpetuates a cycle of fear and mistrust within the community. The trickster figure is central in many African oral traditions, embodying wit, cunningness, and subversive intelligence that challenges social norms (Finnegan 2012). Yékú (2016) argues that digital platforms provide new avenues for the trickster figure to be reimagined and adapted to resonate with contemporary audiences. The remediation of the trickster in digital mediums mirrors the communal aspect of traditional oral storytelling, where the audience plays an active role in shaping the narrative. Digital trickster figures in Facebook fiction engage with everyday issues, such as social injustice and cultural identity, in a way that evokes emotional responses. Muchemwa's treachery contrasts sharply with the deceit of the sangoma in Sozah Ruzario's "How Juju Can Bring Back a Lost Lover" (2013) and the kraal head's son in Maburutse's "The Perfect Solution" (2002), both of whom feign knowledge of traditional rituals to cleanse people of curses

[93] The Witchcraft Suppression Act reflects the British colonial administration's strategy to undermine traditional African spiritual practices, which they viewed as superstitious and a threat to their authority. By criminalising witchcraft, the British settlers aimed to dismantle the social cohesion and cultural identity rooted in these practices, thereby facilitating the imposition of their own legal and cultural norms.

[94] See Rutherford (1999) and Chavunduka (1980).

and bad luck. Despite the contrasting urban and peri-rural setting these narratives illustrate how desperation motivates characters to exploit opportunities for financial gain. However, I argue that while the remedies offered by these charlatans are fraudulent, they prove effective, harmless, and even beneficial. The sangoma in "How Juju Can Bring Back a Lost Lover" gains financial rewards and enhances his reputation, while the kraal head's son similarly profits through cunning. Their psychological insight and discernment provide genuine relief in seemingly hopeless situations. Thus, their deception, though unethical, does not negate the positive outcomes their interventions achieve. It is not my intention here to suggest that all sangomas and witch hunters are extortionists. Yet, simultaneously, it is important to recognise the inherent contestations in witchcraft discourses.

Oswell Moyo and Oswelled Ureke (2023) criticise a trend in media representation in Zimbabwe that associates traditional healers and indigenous herbs with superstition, bizarre rituals, and illegal activities. Nevertheless, it is also essential to consider a counterargument that acknowledges the existence of sensationalised stories that highlight the underlying issues of desperation and the resort to 'get-rich-quick' rituals and extortion. One could assert further that Muchemwa does not only prey upon his clients' vulnerability but also perpetuates a fraudulent narrative. Firstly, he exploits prevalent beliefs and fears surrounding witchcraft to assert his authority. Secondly, Muchemwa capitalises on the vulnerable villagers seeking genuine solutions to their personal challenges.

In her study of witchcraft discourses in the Buhera district in Zimbabwe, Jens Andersson (2002, p.430) observes how sorcery is inextricably linked to existential insecurities. Andersson (2002) notes that people would use a chikwambo, a chiShona term for a goblin, for wealth creation. Similarly, Edmore Dube and Phillip Mazambara (2016, p.199) discuss the aspects surrounding the creation and manifestation of goblins in African belief systems:

> Zvikwambo (goblins) are phenomena whose forms are difficult to enumerate and fix. […] The specialist can choose any everyday vessel to house the spirit which creates a misleading outward appearance. Quite often goblins take the form of the yearned for aspect such as money.

Here, Dube and Mazambara (2016) explain the process of goblin creation, wherein a shaman channels a spirit and places it within an everyday object. This choice of vessel allows for a deceptive appearance, concealing the true nature of the goblin. Notably, goblins adopt forms that align with the desires or aspirations of characters, illustrating their connection to the human experience. Karuma and Guvamombe draw from popular cultural references to goblins, which are

frequently discussed in folkloric texts, tabloid newspapers like *Kwayedza*, and radio programs.[95] Adesokan (2023) argues that sampling involves processes of alteration and adaptation, resulting in a remix or rearrangement. This approach reflects how contemporary cultural production reconfigures traditional narratives, highlighting the evolving relationship between folklore and modern media.

In Chapter 2, which focused on circular migration, I discussed Tashaya Clemence's short story, "I Only Managed to Escape with My Son's Bike" (2000). This story introduces a plot that subtly alludes to ritual killings and the illicit trade of body parts orchestrated by a group of criminals. The criminals operate in rural areas but supply body parts to urban businesspeople who seek to enhance their enterprises using these macabre means.[96] The gruesome trade in body parts for ritual killings, referred to as muti murders in some African contexts, involves the use of body parts to perform occultic rituals aimed at bringing prosperity to these businessmen. The prevalence of ritual killings among African business communities reflects deep societal anxieties about wealth acquisition and morality. Trust Mutekwa's *Yokwira Mutarara* (2018), written under the pseudonym Ticha Muzavazi, explores this practice as a sinister means of establishing wealth and promoting businesses. Similarly, the anthology *Writing Mystery and Mayhem* (2015), edited by Irene Staunton, includes short stories that depict ritualistic practices and the pursuit of prosperity through unethical and nefarious actions. These literary works discuss the socio-cultural and moral dilemmas surrounding such practices, challenging readers to confront the darker undercurrents of societal aspirations and the ethical costs of material success in Zimbabwean society. Wood (2005, p.69) defines "blood money" as money acquired through occult means, especially from talismans and goblins. Supernatural entities and creatures also signify the intertwining of material desires with spiritual beliefs, emphasising the precarious nature of seeking wealth through mystical means. Therefore, the perceived capabilities of goblins, as their creators and users believe, encompass a wide range of possibilities, spanning from the everyday to the extraordinary and imaginative.

[95] For example, Tete Tilda's *Zvinoyera Zvinoshamisa, Zvinotyisa Zvinoda Kufumurwa*, radio show broadcasted on Star FM and simulcast on *Facebook* and *YouTube*. Popular songs songs like "Kunhonga" by Kireni Zulu and "Tula Bechuledu" by Mangoma Express exemplify how traditional beliefs about goblins were reimagined in popular music.

[96] The story exclusively refers to businessmen who engage in occult practices.

The grotesque depiction of the goblin and its shape-shifting ability underscores its subversive potential, challenging conventional boundaries between the real and the mythical. By embodying fluidity and unpredictability, the goblin destabilises fixed notions of identity and power, turning its mythical status into a vehicle for critiquing societal norms and fears. The goblin embodies deeper socio-political and economic critiques in a country marked by political instability, economic hardships, and cultural tensions. Karuma's and Guvamombe's short stories become potent tools for social commentary on corruption, inequality, and societal decay; writers critique the status quo. The goblin, traditionally a figure of fear and superstition, becomes a metaphor for hidden truths and systemic injustices within Zimbabwean society. The subversive potential of these digital narratives becomes more apparent when the narrator registers shock after seeing the goblin that Chiripi gave them. When Chiripi initially presented the goblin, it appeared as nothing more than "an odd figurine with beads and knotted cloths" (p.26). After some time, the goblin transformed into the form of "a little old man" (p.25). Additionally, the narrator notes that, at a glance, one might have confused it for "a baby," with a decrepit face reminiscent of the underbelly of an aged iguana (p.26). Notably, the ability to perceive the goblin is exclusive to the narrator and Charles, making it a unique and somewhat elusive presence. The depiction of the goblin and its perceived invisibility to others within the bus encapsulates Mbembe's (1992, p.8) exploration of "the regime of unreality", wherein the boundaries between the real and the mythical become blurred. This interplay between the unseen mythical realm and the mundane everyday setting of the bus highlights the simultaneous coexistence of different realities in the narrative. This parallel creates a tension that challenges the readers' preconceptions and invites them to reconsider their understanding of the boundaries between the supernatural and the natural.

The narrator's visceral reaction to the goblin's terrifying presence evokes fear and disbelief (p.26). This response reflects the character's struggle to reconcile the intrusion of the mythical into the seemingly ordinary world of the bus. Through this narrative device, the Karuma invites the reader to question the nature of reality and how the unseen forces of the mythical realm can intersect with the mundane aspects of daily life. The goblin's presence becomes a catalyst for exploring the fluid boundaries between the visible and the invisible, the rational and the irrational, and the known and the unknown. Furthermore, incorporating the goblin within the contemporary setting of a bus journey suggests a continuity between traditional African mythological narratives and the lived experiences of Charles and the unnamed narrator. This blending of the mythical and

the mundane serves to challenge the notion that traditional beliefs and practices are relics of the past, disconnected from the present-day realities of the characters.

I argue that the utopian realm of magical realism subverts the status quo by temporarily suspending the normative order, thereby creating space for the re-imagination of social relations. In the short stories of Guvamombe and Karuma, the subversive potential of magical realism lies in its capacity to challenge and reshape the boundaries of what is considered 'normal' or 'acceptable' within Zimbabwean society. In "Ambition Prevails" (2021), the initiation into the shamanic pact unfolds in a chilling sequence, strategically orchestrated by Chiripi in his hut (p.16). The locus for the commencement of the ritual is marked by the placement of two clay pots containing a potent mixture of herbs and dry twigs between Charles and the narrator. This symbolic arrangement foreshadows the mystical journey they are about to embark on. The narrative then turns sinister as Chiripi directs them to an unkempt rural cemetery, where the clay pots are ceremoniously positioned atop unmarked graves. Karl Bell (2019, p.12) contends that supernatural beliefs create "imagined topographies and occult connections" to peculiar settings. The link between configurations of space and semiotics is evident in Bell's (2019) argument, which resonates with Lefebvre's (1991) concept of representational spaces. Bell's (2019) perspective aligns with Lefebvre's postulations on the subjective and cultural dimensions inherent in interpreting space. Notably, Chiripi attributes supernatural significance to the rural graves. Graves, as spaces with cultural and imagined significance, are perceived as more spectral during nighttime, invoking a sense of mystery and fear. The spectral quality of the rural graveyard serves as a portal between the realms of the living and the dead, thus underscoring the paranormal nature of the shamanic pact. Subsequently, placing the pots on the graves connects with the spiritual forces dwelling in the realm beyond. As Chiripi retreats to the hut, leaving Charles and the narrator alone on the graves, a sense of vulnerability and isolation intensifies. The choice of the burial ground as their resting place adds an eerie layer to the ritual, underscoring the gravity of the pact they are entering into.

At this juncture, the narrator's internal reflections are triggered by his father's earlier warning about goblins using the souls of the deceased to bestow wealth upon their owners (p.19). This introspective moment reveals an aspect of the shamanic pact that centres on the extraction of financial prosperity from the potential life the deceased could have led. The narrator grapples with the moral implications of this supernatural transaction, making him feel as if he is robbing the dead

person's family of their rightful blessings and inheritance (p.19). The juxtaposition of the mystical ritual with the haunting words of the narrator's father allows him to confront the implications of this shamanic pact. Despite the apparent contradiction between auditory and visual cues, the narrator sees Charles as seemingly engaged in a mysterious dance yet producing only grunts. Pierre Bourdieu's (1977, p.72) concept of a "matrix of perceptions, appreciations, and action" enables us to analyse the sensory experiences in the unfolding scene. In this pivotal moment, the dissonance between what the narrator sees and hears becomes more than a mere plot twist. It becomes a doorway into the subjective realm of perception shaped by cultural predispositions. Bourdieu's (1977) matrix suggests that people interpret their surroundings through immediate sensory input and a web of ingrained beliefs, values, and cultural constructs. Considerably, dancing could be interpreted as a shamanic ritual. In African cultures, dances are integral parts of shamanic practices, and they are commonly used to connect with the spiritual realm and to invoke supernatural entities (Welsh-Asante, 1996). The narrator's bewilderment at the dance hints at the unfamiliarity and potential mysticism associated with shamanic rituals. The narrator's inability to comprehend Charles' actions underscores a psychological unease that mirrors the inherent risks of occultic rituals.

"Ambition Prevails" (2021) prioritises the inner workings of characters' minds to give readers an immersive understanding of their emotions and thoughts. This profound focus on consciousness as a narrative focal point illustrates the subjective experiences of the narrator's paramount position and his stream of consciousness over the traditional centrality of plot development. The portrayal of Charles gripping a snake by the neck adds layers to the symbolism that immediately conveys a sense of entanglement and struggle. This imagery evokes a visceral response and symbolises the inherent threats and dangers of pursuing personal ambitions. In exploring the intersection of magical realism with themes of wealth and supernatural forces, the symbolism of the snake in Karuma's narrative is a powerful metaphor. According to Wood (2005, p.71), pursuing wealth through occultic practices in Southern Africa typically involves confronting symbolic ordeals, frequently symbolised by encounters with snakes. Wood (2005) further highlights that such rituals require not only a commitment to occultic practices but also an acceptance of the challenges and risks they entail. The snake, known for its constrictive nature, mirrors the constraints and obstacles inherent in the quest for enduring prosperity. Occultic rituals are coupled with a willingness to confront challenges and undergo symbolic ordeals, particularly

those that involve encounters with snakes. Wood (2015) observes that dangerous wealth-giving spirits can manifest as shapeshifters, sometimes taking the form of a snake.[97] Therefore, "Ambition Prevails" (2021) also hints at a precarious balance, where Charles must confront, and control potentially destructive forces associated with his desires during occultic rituals. This thematic exploration aligns with principles of magical realism, where the supernatural elements intertwine seamlessly with the characters' everyday reality. The snake that Charles grapples with symbolises both peril and transformative potential; hence, Karuma inserts it into his narrative to blur the boundaries between the mundane and the magical.

The narrator's frantic attempt to avoid seeing the impending threat and the desperate decision to leap off the ground and run to Chiripi's house. The narrator's internal questioning about battling a "dark creature" amplifies the psychological tension of how occultic ritual involves monstrous acts (p.20). The narrator's psychological turmoil mirrors the instinct for self-preservation and the human tendency to flee from perceived dangers. When the narrator fails to complete the occultic ritual at the graveyard, Chiripi appears not to be surprised and retorts, "It's not in your blood. Your ancestors wouldn't allow it" (p. 21). Chiripi's comment suggests that occultic practices can be incompatible with one's bloodline. Put simply, spiritual lineages play a pivotal role in either facilitating or hindering one's involvement in occultic rituals. In stark contrast, Charles completed the ritual without the restrictions from his forebearers. This notion can be seen as reflective of the archetype of the chosen one which is prevalent in mythologies and esoteric traditions.

The final phase of the occultic ritual demanded the inclusion of blood and the sacrifice of a cherished relative. Chiripi strategically positions a small clay dish filled with water between Charles and the narrator (p.24). This seemingly mundane clay dish takes on symbolic significance and acts as a conduit that bridges the ordinary and the mystical realms. As Chiripi instructs Charles to gaze into the water, a sequence unfolds wherein the reflection of his brother initially materialises, succeeded by that of a young boy (pp.24-25). Notably, Charles consistently refuses to choose people close to his heart in both instances, leading to the swirling and replacing each image with another face (p.25). The pivotal moment arrives when Charles, upon seeing the image

[97] Wood (2015) specifically refers to wealth-bestowing entities such as "mamlambo" within the context of Xhosa-speaking communities in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa. The "Mamlambo", is a shape-shifting entity capable of adopting various forms such as a snake, a mermaid, or a seductively appealing human.

of his sister, “licks his lips before nodding” (p.25). Chiripi’s subsequent commentary underscores the gravity of Charles’ choice:

> “Good choice,” says the shaman. “She has great potential still.” He offers Charles a large needle. “Pierce it,” he instructs, short of command it. I can’t believe what I’m about to see. The sweat trickles on my back like a spider crawls down my spine. I should not be here for this. Charles slowly takes the needle. When he pieces the image, the woman immediately collapses and the water turns red like the clay dish bleeds. I take in a laboured breath. Have I just witnessed murder? Am I an accomplice? I could never have done this. I should never have come. But Charles is unmoved. Is this what ambition risks becoming—cold determination and ruthlessness? (p.25)

Chiripi’s facilitation of the shamanic pact underscores the important decision-making inherent in occultic rituals. The narrator’s incredulity and Charles’ apparent lack of astonishment raise inquiries that obscure the distinction between reality and the supernatural. The narrator grapples with the moral implications of what transpired, questioning whether witnessing this act constitutes complicity in what appears to be a form of murder. The internal conflict deepens as the narrator reflects on their participation in this dark ritual, recognising a stark disparity between their moral boundaries and Charles’ resolute determination. The climactic moment arrives when Charles, seemingly unperturbed, opts to sacrifice his sister. His stoic demeanour prompts contemplation on the transformative influence of ambition. The immediate and grisly aftermath unfolds as Charles pierces the image, resulting in the sister’s demise. In essence, Chiripi’s orchestrated shamanic pact thrusts the spotlight onto the pivotal choices integral to occultic rituals. The contrast between the narrator’s disbelief and Charles’ seemingly unemotional response encourages reflection on the blurred boundaries between the tangible and the supernatural.

Guvamombe’s and Karuma’s short stories leave readers in suspense to provoke critical reflection on the moral and existential dilemmas inherent in seeking power through occultic rituals and supernatural pacts. The narratives collectively argue that pursuing power through occult means inevitably leads to moral and existential crises. Guvamombe and Karuma challenge readers to analyse the consequences of Muchemwa and Charles’ actions, particularly the price they pay for their desires. Despite having made money through occultic rituals and shamanic pacts, the experiences of Muchemwa and Charles reveal the uncomfortable truths about human ambition and the seductive yet destructive nature of supernatural deals. The suspenseful endings in both short stories underscore the precarious nature of the characters’ (or the reader’s) choices. Just as Muchemwa’s and Charles’ fates remain uncertain, the reader is left to ponder the moral and

existential ramifications of pursuing wealth through supernatural means. Guvamombe's and Karuma's short stories create a sense of unease and uncertainty that forces readers to confront whether they would be willing to engage in occult rituals to attain wealth and power. This narrative device serves a didactic purpose and compels the reader to reflect critically on the consequences of occultic rituals.

Although the selected short stories highlight a broader pattern of economic exploitation masked as spiritual guidance, they fail to address the specific exploitation by charismatic Pentecostal church leaders who prey on gullible believers. This oversight is crucial, as it highlights how faith intersects with the exploitation of Zimbabwe's socio-economic crisis. Chitando et al. (2013), in *Prophets, Profits, and the Bible in Zimbabwe*, interrogate the commercialisation of religion within charismatic Pentecostal churches, shedding light on how religious leaders exploit the socio-economic vulnerabilities of their followers. Church leaders manipulate the faith of the believers by linking financial contributions such as tithes and offerings to promises of divine blessings and success. In doing so, these church leaders not only perpetuate the myth that material prosperity can be attained through spiritual obedience and financial sacrifice but also exacerbate the economic hardships of their followers. Nonetheless, my analysis of Guvamombe's and Karuma's short stories through the lens of material and economic conditions has uncovered how desperation pushed characters to extreme measures, resorting to magical realism to survive. Magical realism as a genre allows characters to navigate their harsh realities through fantastical elements, which provides a means of escape and a way to comment on their socio-economic struggles. Magical realism becomes a vital coping mechanism, transforming dire circumstances into narratives where the impossible becomes possible, thus providing a form of relief and insight that literary realism might not achieve without being censored. Furthermore, this form of escapism highlights the characters' desperation and the ethical dilemmas they face. The use of magical realism underscores their struggle to reconcile their immediate needs with their moral compass in a world that seems indifferent or hostile. These stories blend the extraordinary with the mundane to highlight the interplay between the character's agency and systemic constraints while also providing readers with a poignant exploration of the character's internal and external turmoil.

The interactive nature of *Facebook* enhances engagement with these stories. *Facebook* as a platform allows for a dynamic relationship between writer and reader, where feedback and dialogue blur traditional boundaries between producer and consumer. This interactivity amplifies

the reach of these stories and deepens their impact as readers actively participate in the storytelling process. The cultural traditions and beliefs explored in these narratives engage a wide audience, including both sceptics and believers, fostering a communal dialogue that transcends individual perspectives. The interplay between magical realism and the interactive features of *Facebook* narratives demonstrates how digital platforms can transform storytelling. Integrating fantastical elements into Facebook fiction allows Zimbabwean writers to address real-life issues while engaging readers in a participatory dialogue.

The dark side of gold and chikorokoza

This section focuses on the problematic realities and perils of gold panning in mining towns in Zimbabwe. I contend that the perceived benefits and livelihood opportunities provided by gold panning are overshadowed by a range of detrimental consequences that warrant closer scrutiny. Some scholars have conflated gold panning with the broader concept of artisanal and small-scale gold mining (ASGM), collectively branding them as 'chikorokoza' (Hwehwe and Thebe 2021; Chipangura 2020).[98] Such linguistic framing stems from public discourse and policy debates surrounding the formalisation and decriminalisation of gold panning in Zimbabwe (Mkodzongi, 2020b). Comparably, Shumirai Nyota and Rugare Mareva (2012) trace the origin and evolution of the chiShona term "korokoza" and its relevance during the economic crisis in Zimbabwe:

> The *chi*Shona term korokoza (illegal gold panning) was coined when some Zimbabweans, makorokoza (illegal gold panners) practiced that panning in and around gold mines. The makorokoza did so without proper gold mining instruments but scraped the ground with hand tools. The word korokoza was coined from the sound metaphor of scrapping the ground for gold […] In Shona lingo that means of survival is termed kukorokoza and the practioners are termed makorokoza (p.11 emphasis added).

The term 'kukorokoza' becomes part of everyday vocabulary that reflects the adaptive strategies of Zimbabweans in response to economic hardship, akin to what I discuss in Chapter 3 as kukiya-kiya. I use the term 'gold panning' as used by Ziwane in his short story and maintain that it is a more appropriate descriptor of chikorokoza that emphasises the subsistence-based nature and informality of this activity, as opposed to the more formal and commercial connotations associated with artisanal and small-scale gold mining.[99] It is noteworthy that popular cultural representations

[98] A synonym for chikorokoza that is used interchangeably is chigweja. See Nyota and Sibanda (2012) and Chiba (2024;2023).

[99] Chikorokoza shares similarities with the zama zama phenomenon in South Africa, where illegal miners also use rudimentary tools to scavenge for gold.

in mainstream print and broadcast media have significantly influenced the perception of chikorokoza in Zimbabwe. [100]

These portrayals have generally sensationalised the illegal aspects of gold panning, oscillating between romanticising the 'gold rush' lifestyle and highlighting the harsh realities faced by illegal miners. Clapperton Mavhunga (2014, p.223) observes that "we must first reject the dualism whereby formal sector careers count as employment while the vast array of mobilities that animate ordinary people's entrepreneurship in the informal sector do not". Mavhunga (2014) advocates for recognising and valuing the diverse economic activities in the informal sector, which are vital sources of income and economic mobility, especially in Zimbabwe, where unemployment is rife. Facebook fiction I analyse in this section depicts how the informal sector, such as gold panning, generates substantial income and livelihoods. Ziwane's short story advocates for the recognition of informal economic activities. In his book *Contested Criminalities in Zimbabwean Fiction* (2019), Tendai Mangena argues that the categories of crime and the criminal thus challenge conventional notions of legality and morality within Zimbabwean literature. Mangena (2019) encourages literary critics to move beyond simplistic dichotomies of "good" and "bad" and consider the social, economic, and cultural factors that shape the public's perception of criminality.

"Bloodbath Part One and Two" acknowledge the realities on the ground, where limited formal job opportunities compel Nobby and Jabu to seek alternative means of earning a living. I am interested in how these characters participate in their subjectivation. My close reading of "Bloodbath" Part One and Two (2023) will tackle the nuances and motivations that drive characters to engage in gold panning. Following Ogola's (2017) assertion regarding marginal discourses within popular culture, I focus on marginal activities such as chikorokoza to illustrate how they function as vehicles for the voices and experiences of marginalised groups in society. I intend to highlight the multifaceted realities of marginalised communities in mining towns without homogenising their diverse experiences.

The evocative title "Bloodbath" in Vine Ziwane's short story immediately conjures images of extreme violence and a significant loss of life. This title sets the tone for the narrative and prepares the reader to confront the thematic exploration of violence and its consequences.

[100] Notably, Cont Mhlanga, wrote and directed the popular local drama series, *Amakorokoza,* which was aired from 20024 to 2006 on Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC) TV during prime time. *Amokorokoza* won the National Arts Merit Awards (NAMA) for Zimbabwe's Best television soap opera in 2006. See Mkodzongi (2020b) for a detailed analysis of newspapers that either vilified or valorised chikorokoza.

Furthermore, the 'bloodbath' imagery evoked by the title reflects the ruthless and unforgiving nature of the world in which the makorokoza operate and those engaging in informal or illegal work. "Bloodbath" Part One opens with a vivid first-person description of the sunset over the Venice mine, immediately establishing a serene yet unsettling mood that provides an intimate glimpse into Jabu's thoughts and emotions. The first-person narrative perspective allows the reader to experience the fear and tension firsthand, making the dangers of the gold fields more immediate and personal. It reveals how Jabu, the narrator, is filled with "uneasiness and disquiet" when he looks at how the sun created a picturesque scene, casting the goldfields in a warm glow (p.13). The inherent conflict between the enticing promise of wealth in the goldfields and the significant dangers that accompany it highlights the precarious nature of pursuing such fortunes. Ziwane powerfully depicts both the tangible and intangible realities of the goldfields, highlighting how they entice characters with the potential for material gain while simultaneously exposing them to physical, emotional, and social perils. Through the character of Jabu, who arrives at Venice Mine with his friend Nobby, Ziwane critiques the disillusionment that follows the pursuit of quick wealth. Nobby's prior experience at Venice Mine becomes pivotal in illustrating the harsh truths of the environment. His welcoming words to Jabu are not just a friendly gesture but a cautionary signal, reflecting the complexities and risks associated with the goldfields. In this, Ziwane emphasises the divide between the idealised dreams of fortune and the grim realities on the ground and by extension underground:

> We sat in silence for a while and then Nobby said, "Welcome to the place of death and fortune, Jabu." "Both money and death are found in those goldfields." He said, pointing at the soil heaps and deep mine shafts. […] Be careful with where you tread. You are still a virgin in this trade, there are rules that need to be followed" he paused and then continued, "This place is full of many things, gold, money, prostitution and death as well. (p.13)

This familiarity raises questions about Nobby's past experiences and the potential influence he may wield within this setting. The domineering presence of Nobby over the narrator underscores the hierarchical nature of the community and the potential for exploitation of the inexperienced and the vulnerable. The reader can infer that Nobby was an expert in gold panning and had spent many years searching for gold in deep mine shafts and pits. He was well-acquainted with the risks and rewards associated with this line of work. The same dialogue suggests the normalisation of the perilous conditions in which gold panners operate in. For instance, Nobby's ability to clearly and succinctly articulate the coexistence of "money and

death" in this environment points to a deeper understanding of the realities faced by those who work in these goldfields (p.13). The ominous language in the opening dialogue establishes the overarching themes of the story, namely the precarious balance between survival and the pursuit of wealth in the face of extreme danger and violence.

Jabu and Nobby arrived at Venice at sunset and found other "gold panners scattered around the whole township drinking and smoking" (p.13). The presence of "young and middle-aged women wearing tight and skimpy clothes" standing by the shop verandahs further suggests an atmosphere of transactional relationships and potential exploitation (p.13). The prevalence of prostitution, child marriages and other illicit activities hints at the moral sacrifices characters are willing to make in their quest for financial gain. Ziwane depicts his setting as steeped in vice, where desperation and opportunism intertwine. The socio-economic conditions in such mining townships reflect the human cost of the gold trade, where the pursuit of wealth leads to moral and social degradation. Nobby warns Jabu about the dangers of the gold panning they are in, explicitly cautioning him about the Mashurugwi, a group of thugs associated with violence and criminal activities in the gold panning fields. Nobby emphasises the importance of being careful where they tread, highlighting the potential threats posed by the Mashurugwi, who are portrayed as more dangerous than the mine traps (p.13). Jabu's initial orientation made him aware of the lawlessness of his new surroundings. Nobby's warning alerts Jabu to the risks and challenges they may encounter in the mining community, underscoring the need for caution and vigilance. Nobby's caution not to interfere with the Mashurugwi or step into their mineshafts underscores the theme of territorial control and the brutal enforcement of power.

Grasian Mkodzongi (2020b) analyses the origins of the Mashurugwi gangs in the mining communities across Zimbabwe. Mkodzongi (2020b) observes that Mashurugwi gangs underwent a dramatic transformation over time, evolving from economically marginalised youths from the small town of Shurugwi in the Midlands Province into a menace that terrorised mining communities through acts of robbery and violence. Such acts of violence and exploitation have undoubtedly created an atmosphere of fear and insecurity within these communities, undermining their economic and social well-being. It should be underlined that the initial pursuit of economic stability and livelihood through gold panning paved the way for establishing organised criminal enterprises. The term Mashurugwi has evolved beyond its strictly geographic connotations and has

come to represent a broader socio-cultural and criminal identity associated with the perpetrators of violence and predatory behaviour in the mining industry (Mkodzongi 2020b).

The impact of the Mashurugwi gangs' activities on the Venice mining community has been profoundly detrimental. The fear experienced by Jabu when Nobby mentions Mashurugwi highlights their dominance and control over the gold panning fields. Their reputation for extreme violence is encapsulated in the chilling warning, "[t]hey can skin you alive and drink your blood," which underscores their brutal enforcement of territorial control (p.13). The imagery of being 'skinned alive' evokes a primal fear and the savage reality of conflicts over resources. This depiction illustrates the power dynamics within the gold mining community, where the Mashurugwi's authority is unquestioned, and their presence is both feared and revered. Mashurugwi symbolises an extreme form of danger and lawlessness within the gold fields. Jabu had heard of the notoriety of the Mashurugwi, and these harrowing stories highlight the psychological toll of their fearsome reputation. The internal struggle between acknowledging the danger and seeking reassurance from Nobby underscores the precarious balance between hope and fear. This tension illuminates how characters navigate environments dominated by violence and uncertainty, demonstrating the constant negotiation between survival and the human desire for safety.

Vine Ziwane's short story also provides insight into the menial labour involved in gold panning. The narrative depicts Jabu and Nobby engaging in physically demanding and repetitive tasks as they work in the gold fields. Jabu and Nobby are shown digging and chiselling rocks in the mine shaft for gold ore. The description of their labour highlights the strenuous nature of gold panning, with both experiencing physical exhaustion, muscle aches, blisters, and sweaty, dusty conditions. Despite their efforts, there is no guarantee of success, as indicated by the lack of immediate rewards for their hard work. The story conveys the challenging and unpredictable nature of gold panning, emphasising the perseverance and resilience required to endure the demanding tasks involved in pursuing precious metals. It sheds light on the harsh realities of toiling tirelessly in the forlorn hope of striking gold amidst the gruelling conditions of the minefields.

On the fourth day of fruitless digging, Jabu angrily throws the heavy hammer away. This act symbolises both the literal and metaphorical weight of their labour and the potential futility of their efforts. Jabu's impatience highlights the contrasting attitudes and dynamics of his relationship with Nobby. Nobby's calm and seasoned demeanour starkly contrasts Jabu's growing frustration

and exhaustion. This difference in attitudes underscores the economic desperation that has driven them to seek a living through such gruelling work. Jabu and Nobby's lived experiences reflect a broader commentary on the economic conditions that force ordinary people into dangerous livelihoods. Jabu's frustration is not just with the immediate difficulty of gold panning but with the larger systemic issues that have left them with few alternatives. The narrative reveals how economic hardship pushes characters to their limits, leading to physical and emotional exhaustion, and highlights the stark contrast between experienced survivors like Nobby and those, like Jabu, who are still grappling with the harshness of their reality.

Jabu's frustrations made him want to quit, but Nobby reminded him of the prospects that had motivated him to come to Venice Mine:

> "Jabu, panning is not for the faint-hearted, there are no guarantees here. Sometimes you go home empty-handed or with a single gram or a point. But for now all we have to do is to keep digging." "My body is hot and I am need of a fresh bath." "Jabu you better forget about bathing." "We don't bath when we are underground. Bathing will mean washing away all the lucky". [sic] (p.13).

Nobby reassures Jabu about the physical and emotional fortitude required to navigate the challenges of gold panning, setting the stage for exploring the gold panners' resilience and determination in uncertainty. Nobby also underscores the unpredictability and risks inherent in their endeavour, highlighting a stark reality where outcomes are sometimes beyond one's control, dependent on luck rather than effort alone. The dialogue also reflects a deep-seated superstition among miners, particularly the belief in luck. Nobby's expression of the superstition against bathing underground illustrates a belief in preserving luck or fortune by avoiding certain actions. What is not clearly explained is whether Nobby's superstition arises from his cultural beliefs and practical experience. It is noteworthy that superstitions also function as a source of psychological comfort and a means of exerting control in an otherwise unpredictable environment. For instance, Nobby's belief in superstitions reflects his personal anxieties and his perception that these beliefs can influence his fate. As discussed in the preceding section, magical realism draws significantly from the cultural and historical contexts in which superstitions are deeply embedded. Superstitions, not only constitute psychological reassurance but also symbolise profound existential themes. Nobby's superstition creates a narrative space where the fantastical is seamlessly integrated into everyday life. Such superstitions are deeply ingrained and influence his behaviour and decisions even in challenging circumstances. The text invites reflection on the broader human tendency to

seek patterns and meaning in uncertainty and how cultural practices can serve as coping mechanisms in challenging and unpredictable situations like gold panning.

Jabu and Nobby's resilience in the face of unpredictable and discouraging circumstances paid off on the sixth day when they emerged from the mine shaft with a sack "full of gold ore" (p.13). Their perseverance led to their gold pits yielding "two or more grams of gold per day" (p.13). However, their newfound success quickly attracted the attention of the Mashurugwi, who demanded a "tribute payment" from them (p.13). While Nobby resisted surrendering the gold ore, Jabu froze in fear upon seeing two men wielding "razor-sharp machetes" (p.13). The sudden arrival of Rasbin, Nobby's friend, bolstered Nobby's resolve to confront the Mashurugwi. Rasbin's defiance against the armed men escalated into violence despite Nobby's attempts to comply with extortion demands out of fear for their safety and well-being. Consequently, Rasbin sustained a severe injury when attacked in the face with a machete. The physical altercation is depicted with a sense of urgency and chaos, further emphasising the high stakes and the gold panners' desperate struggle to protect their hard-earned gains.

The extortion tactics employed by the Mashurugwi place significant economic burdens on Jabu and Nobby, who are already struggling to make a living through gold panning. The forced extraction of resources by Mashurugwi pushed Rasbin and Nobby to retaliate as a means of self-preservation and reclaiming what is rightfully theirs. Rasbin's display of solidarity and concern for Nobby's wellbeing made Mashurugwi retreat. The narrative takes an intriguing turn as "Bloodbath Part One" concludes, with the Mashurugwi fleeing the scene and Nobby and Jabu attending to the wounded Rasbin and sending him to a clinic. The sudden flight of the Mashurugwi suggests that Nobby, Jabu and Rasbin were able to mount a successful counterattack against the Mashurugwi's aggression. This reversal of roles subverts the previously established vulnerability and challenges the assumption of the inherent helplessness of gold panners in the face of the Mashurugwi's violence.

"Bloodbath" Part Two presents a revealing glimpse into the opaque world of Zimbabwe's illicit gold trade, where the criminal enterprise of the Mashurugwi collides with politically connected gold buyers. The story begins with a transaction between Nobby and an unnamed gold buyer, a powerful and well-connected figure. The nonchalant way the gold buyer handles the exchange, weighing the gold and swiftly counting crisp US dollar bills, underscores these transactions' routine and covert nature. The efficiency in exchanging illicit cash for gold points to

the deeply entrenched nature of the criminal networks involved. The sudden arrival of the Mashurugwi further reinforces the notion that this is no ordinary business deal. The gold buyer' swift and forceful response, brandishing a weapon to assert his dominance, underscores the prevailing power structures within this criminal enterprise. This display of force intimidates both Nobby and the uninvited guests, demonstrating the gold buyer's willingness to use violence to protect his interests and maintain control over the lucrative gold trade. The lawlessness that pervades the illicit gold trade, where the criminal activities of the Mashurugwi are enabled by their symbiotic relationship with politically connected gold buyers who allow them to operate with impunity. The subservience of the Mashurugwi, who obediently leave when told to do so, illustrates that they are subordinate to the gold buyer and operating under his patronage Therefore, the protection afforded to the Mashurugwi perpetuates a cycle of exploitation and corruption, undermining the rule of law and the livelihoods of the marginalised communities caught in the crosshairs of this illicit enterprise.

Mashurugwi's capacity for even more egregious acts of terror against the local community is revealed by their sudden and unexpected arrival at the nightclub where Jabu and Nobby are enjoying their hard-earned money with women. Mashurugwi's ruthless and brazen behaviour creates a sense of fear and panic among the patrons. Their notorious reputation for violence and the dread they instil in the local population is evident from the warning whispered to Jabu about "the Mashurugwi terror group" being present (p.14). This reputation for brutality underscores the profound impact of the Mashurugwi's acts of terror, which extended beyond mere intimidation and involved a callous disregard for the well-being of the local community.

The narrative emphasises Mashurugwi's overwhelming numbers and "dangerous" nature, making them a formidable force that the local community alone cannot effectively confront. (p14). Jabu advises Nobby against seeking personal revenge and suggests reporting them to the police. However, Nobby's refusal hints at the deeper systemic issues and potential corruption within the authorities tasked with maintaining law and order. When the victims, such as Nobby, attempt to seek justice through official channels, they are met with the frustrating realisation that "reporting these murderers to the police is a waste of time" (p.14). This failure of the criminal justice system emboldens the Mashurugwi to continue their reign of terror unchecked. To understand the extent of violence in small mining towns, I rely on the work of Gediminas Lesutis (2021). In his book, *The Politics of Precarity: Space of Extractivism, Violence, and Suffering,* Lesutis (2021, p.3)

observes that "violence manifests through structural, symbolic, and bodily modes of injury," highlighting the multifaceted nature of violence and its pervasive impact on people and societies. Put simply, structural, symbolic, and bodily violence are interconnected, each form reinforcing and perpetuating the other.

Structural violence refers to how society's political and economic organisation systematically causes unequal access to resources and opportunities (Lesutis, 2021). In "Bloodbath," the gold buyer sustains this form of violence and his patronage system, which perpetuates cycles of poverty and marginalisation. The gold buyer exploits a system of patronage to control the gold market, compelling small-scale gold panners to sell their gold exclusively to him. He also leverages his political influence to ensure the police do not prosecute the Mashurugwi who work for him. Such monopolistic practices limit the panners' access to fair market opportunities and ensure their dependence on the patronage network. Lesutis (2021) further notes that symbolic violence involves the imposition of dominant cultural norms and values, leading to the internalisation of inferiority among marginalised groups. In Ziwane's short story, this violence is subtle and operates through language. For instance, Nobby calls Jabu a "virgin" to emphasise his amateur status and the need to learn the trade from him (p.13). Similarly, the Mashurugwi refer to their extortion as "chegumi," the chiShona word for tribute, and belittle other gold panners by calling them "young brothers" (p.13). This infantilisation and emasculation reinforce and legitimise existing power hierarchies, making it difficult for the exploited to challenge their subjugation. Additionally, the insidious nature of symbolic violence propagates stereotypes and perpetuates a culture of fear, further entrenching social inequalities.

Symbolic violence is also evident in the stigmatisation of gold panners, whom the police perceive as criminals or deviants rather than victims of systemic failures. Lesutis (2021) observes that while bodily violence is the most direct form of violence, it is underpinned by structural and symbolic violence. Structural and symbolic violence in Ziwane's short story created conditions that made physical violence more likely and more devastating. Bodily violence involves the immediate and visible harm inflicted on people, as seen with the Mashurugwi's actions. This type of violence usually results in severe trauma, disability and death. For instance, the physical harm experienced by Rasbin and Jabu and the subsequent death of Nobby illustrates how bodily violence is not only an outcome but also a manifestation of deeper, systemic issues. I also analyse Nobby's desire for revenge using Connell's (2020, p.68) concept of "essentialist" definitions of masculinity

to understand how he yearned to assert and reclaim his manhood and masculinity. Connell (2020) notes that essentialist definitions of masculinity narrowly focus on what it means to be a 'real' man. Nobby's response to the attack demonstrates his adherence to a masculine ideal that equates manhood with the capacity for fighting back and retribution.

When the Mashurugwi wounds Nobby, his reaction is one of "towering, shaking rage" and a vow of "vengeance" (p.14). He declares, "I am a man, and I will die fighting" (p.14). This strong, aggressive, and uncompromising stance reflects a conception of masculinity centred on the ability to defend one's honour and protect oneself through physical force. Nobby chooses the path of personal retaliation, asserting his manhood through the promise of violent retribution. I argue that Nobby's masculine identity is deeply intertwined with his willingness to engage in a deadly confrontation with the Mashurugwi. His "oath of vengeance" and his determination to "have men who will be backing him" underscore the centrality of these aggressive, hypermasculine qualities to his sense of self (p.14). Reporting to the police would undermine his masculine status and authority within his community.

Nobby's reliance on an essentialist, violent conception of masculinity ultimately proved to be his downfall, costing him his life as well as the lives of the other Makorokoza who had rallied behind him in his quest for revenge. Nobby's unwavering adherence to masculinity, defined by physical aggression and the capacity for retaliation, led him to pursue a deadly confrontation with the Mashurugwi single-mindedly. Disregarding Jabu's cautious advice to report the incident to the authorities, Nobby instead chooses to assert his manhood through the promise of violent vengeance. This decision reflects Nobby's deep-seated belief that true masculinity is inextricably linked to one's willingness to engage in a "fight to the death" (p.14). Ziwane's short story questions the idealised image of masculinity, which is privileged and upheld as the standard to which 'all' makorokoza aspire to be in the face of widespread violence. Muchemwa and Muponde (2007, p.xvii) advance that the dominant form of masculinity, which is characterised by traits of invincibility, such as physical prowess, fails to account for the realities of vulnerability. Muchemwa and Muponde (2007) problematise hegemonic masculinities, both unrealistic and harmful, as they impose rigid standards that fail to accommodate the complexities of lived experience. This critique calls for a more nuanced understanding of masculinity that acknowledges vulnerability. Nobby's actions underscore the extent to which his masculine identity was contingent upon his ability to prove his physical dominance and bravery in the face of a perceived

threat. Nobby's desire to uphold this essentialist ideal of masculinity proved his undoing. Nobby rallies a group of Makorokoza to support his retaliation plan, setting in motion a chain of events that leads to a deadly clash with the Mashurugwi.In the ensuing violence, Nobby and the other men who had followed him were killed, sacrificing their lives in a futile attempt to assert their manhood through physical confrontation.

The irony is that it was only when the police finally arrived on the scene that the cycle of violence was brought to an end. The intervention of the formal justice system, which Nobby had so adamantly dismissed as a "waste of time," worked as the ultimate check on the consequences of toxic masculinity (p.14). This tragic outcome highlights the dangers inherent in essentialist definitions of masculinity that prioritise aggression, violence, and the need to assert one's dominance over others. The final scene after the bloodbath paints a profoundly melancholic picture. Jabu has not only lost his close companion, the person who had been trying to shield him but he is also left alone and destitute, with the money they had worked so hard to safeguard now gone. The story's conclusion underscores the tragic human toll of Nobby's quest for revenge and his rigid adherence to a narrow, violent conception of manhood. Jabu, who had tried to counsel Nobby against this course of action, is now left to pick up the pieces, bereft of his friend and with their shared economic security now shattered.

I argue that Facebook fiction that tackles violence as a theme resonates with contemporary issues, such as economic and political instability. *The Queensdale Report* readers are drawn to unfiltered stories that reflect struggle and resilience. Thus, the medium of *The Queensdale Report* as a digital magazine published on *Facebook* provides a relevant context for Ziwane's story, as both address the broader issues of governance and resource management. "Bloodbath" provides social commentary on the risk involved in gold panning. Ziwane portrays the harsh realities of characters in gold-panning communities who endure intense hardship and violence. The depiction of the consequences of greed and the pitfalls of wealth-seeking aligns with the magazine's editorial focus on ensuring that local institutions are held accountable and that resources are managed responsibly. Ziwane's story complements the magazine's agenda of advocating for better governance and accountability.

Furthermore, the extreme suffering depicted in Ziwane's story mirrors emerging writers' systemic challenges to gain recognition. Similarly, emerging writers face significant obstacles in reaching an audience. The absence of a robust publishing industry mirrors the dire circumstances

in Ziwane's story, as these writers grapple with the struggle for visibility and recognition, akin to the fight for survival depicted in the narrative. Characters in Ziwane's story confront systemic violence and exploitation in their pursuit of economic stability as emerging writers contend with a publishing landscape. The lack of an established publishing infrastructure presents significant challenges, including limited access to resources and networks necessary for visibility. These barriers create a metaphorical minefield where writers must overcome impediments to achieve success and recognition, similar to how the characters in "Bloodbath" manoeuvre through the perils of illegal mining.

This suffering reflects a desperate struggle for survival against formidable odds, highlighting the harsh realities of an oppressive environment. The extreme suffering experienced by Ziwane's characters is not just a narrative device but a reflection of a broader reality where survival demands extreme resilience and ingenuity. Emerging writers facing similar desperation exhibit remarkable determination and creativity in overcoming these obstacles. They often resort to unconventional methods such as self-publishing, leveraging social media platforms, and building grassroots networks to circumvent the limitations imposed by a traditional publishing industry. Furthermore, Ziwane's depiction of the characters' desperation in the story mirrors the tenacity writers require to persist and thrive despite systemic constraints. Both scenarios underscore a universal theme of struggle against systemic forces whether they are environmental, economic, or institutional.

Conclusion

Closely examining the short stories published on Zimbabwean Facebook pages, this chapter has demonstrated how this emergent form of digital literary expression engages with the transmutation of desire as a response to lived realities. It also illuminated how Zimbabwean Facebook fiction harnesses the transformative power of the imagination to challenge dominant sociocultural narratives and envision more inclusive and equitable futures. The strategic deployment of magical realist techniques, such as blending the mundane and the marvellous, disrupting linear temporality, and subversion of conventional notions of reality, positions these digital literary works as vital sites of socio-political resistance.

The chapter has shown how the writers of Zimbabwean Facebook fiction leverage the malleable nature of the online medium to publish stories that transcend the constraints of physical

reality, opening up new realms of possibility and reconfiguring the boundaries of what is possible. Zimbabwean Facebook fiction highlights the consequences of unchecked ambition and underscores the dangers of pursuing wealth at any cost. Importantly, the analysis has highlighted how these narratives depict alternative means of securing livelihoods and financial security, often through invocating occult practices, magical interventions and gold panning. The transmutation of desire, as manifested in the characters' pursuit of economic stability and social mobility through unconventional, even taboo, means, highlights the ingenuity required when navigating their realities' complexities.

Chapter 5: Conclusion-Writing off Marginality

This thesis began by exploring the literary history of short fiction in colonial newspapers in Zimbabwe and in popular and student magazines to identify the continuities and disruptions within this writing tradition. The critical motivation underlying this approach was to examine the material conditions under which these short stories were produced, disseminated across various platforms, and preserved. I have argued that short fiction transcends temporal and technological boundaries, reflecting broader cultural and archival shifts. Building upon Mbembe and Nuttall's (2004, p. 352) call to action for "working with new archives - or even with old archives in new ways", this study sought to rethink and reimagine how we engage with and interpret print and digital archives. Inherent within this critique is the recognition that archives, far from being neutral repositories of information, are imbued with the social, political, and cultural hierarchies that have long marginalised contemporary writers' perspectives and lived experiences.

It is precisely this troubling reality that necessitates a radical rethinking of archival practices. Harris (2024; 2018) observes how digitisation fills the gaps and silences in both historical and contemporary records. Moreover, the exploration of 'new archives' and the reworking of 'old archives' highlighted the evolution of short fiction at the intersection of print cultures, archival practices, and digital literary studies. The thesis also explored the materiality and ephemerality of short fiction published in popular print magazines and on digital platforms, with particular attention to their respective archival practices. The study argued that the representation and archiving of everyday life are closely linked, with both processes deeply intertwined with power dynamics, cultural biases, and subjectivity. Neither process is neutral, as they each construct and contest perspectives and interests. Stuart Hall (1997, p.15) has posited that representation "has come to a new and important place in the study of culture." New modes of representation create spaces for marginalised narratives to emerge, destabilise dominant discourses, and enable a pluralistic analysis. The examination of short fiction, particularly through its depictions of everyday life, plays a crucial role in cultural and archival processes. These short stories function as testimonials and contemporary commentaries, revealing how they reflect and challenge prevailing societal norms and power structures. My study examined selected short stories to elucidate how contemporary Zimbabwean writers have leveraged the short story form to depict quotidian experiences in post-2000 Zimbabwe. The decision to focus on short stories published in

the post-2000 period is a deliberate one, arising from the recognition that this timeframe has been marked by significant upheaval and transformation within Zimbabwe. Particularly, this study highlighted how writers have responded to and reflected on these economic and socio-political upheavals. The closure of traditional bookstores and some independent publishing houses, coupled with the rise of digital media, has redefined the publishing culture in Zimbabwe. Writers have adapted to these changes by embracing new forms of expression and alternative means of distribution. This transition has not only provided a means of survival for writers but has also opened up new possibilities for creativity and engagement. Popular short stories published on digital platforms represent a crucial subset within the rapidly expanding domain of digital literary studies. These stories challenge traditional notions of literary production and consumption. Digital platforms allow for immediate publication and widespread distribution, enabling writers to bypass gatekeeping and logistical and financial barriers associated with traditional publishing. Additionally, the interactive nature of digital media fosters a sense of community and dialogue among writers and readers, enriching the literary culture.

The prevalence of survival as a recurring theme in post-2000 literature highlights the profound existential crisis and lived realities faced by both writers and their compatriots during this period. This thematic focus reflects the profound sense of precariousness, vulnerability, and the constant struggle to maintain one's footing in a rapidly changing environment. The deliberate focus on everyday life and the downplaying of overt political themes in the short stories analysed in this dissertation can be seen as a strategic response to the complex interplay of editorial controls, self-censorship, and widespread disillusionment among both readers and writers. Some of the short stories were originally published in popular print magazines, where editors often wielded considerable influence over the narratives and themes deemed acceptable for publication. In such environments, writers were compelled to avoid overtly political or controversial subject matter in favour of more mundane, 'safer' themes that were less likely to draw the ire of censors.

Moreover, the rise of self-publishing platforms, such as blogs and social media, has introduced new layers of self-censorship. Writers, cognisant of the demands for sensationalism, have consciously chosen to focus on the social and economic issues that resonate more closely with the everyday experiences of their readers. This strategic avoidance of overt political commentary can be viewed as a pragmatic response to the evolving expectations of an increasingly fragmented and polarised audience. The trend towards the mundane and the quotidian in these

short stories is not solely the result of external pressures or constraints but the disillusionment of both readers and writers with the perceived shortcomings of transformative political change. This disenchantment with the grand narratives of social and political transformation has led to a tactical shift in literary production, where writers prioritise portraying the ordinary, the relatable, and the subtly subversive. I also demonstrated that the foregrounding of everyday forms of agency, coupled with the depiction of social and economic realities, plays a crucial role in reshaping the narrative of survival in these texts. The focus on the mundane yet significant actions of characters in the selected stories challenges idealised portrayals of heroism, instead emphasising the nuanced strategies they employ to navigate oppressive environments. This approach challenged the traditional, romanticised view of agency, presenting it as a complex and multifaceted response to socio-economic constraints. The social and economic realities that these characters faced were not merely background elements but were integral to understanding the depth of their agency. In this sense, the selected texts not only reflected the harsh conditions of their settings but also revealed how these conditions shape the characters' choices, moral dilemmas, and survival tactics.

Chapter Two examined circular migration patterns, specifically intra-rural, peri-rural to urban, and urban-rural mobilities, as depicted in three popular print magazines, namely, *The Sunday Mail Magazine*, *Moto*, and *Parade.* My analysis claimed that these representations highlight how cultural identities, familial obligations, and shifting economic conditions shaped migration decisions. Rather than portraying migration as a straightforward, unidirectional process of urbanisation, the chapter reveals the recursive nature of these movements. It examined how migration between peri-rural and peri-urban areas generates complex socio-spatial relations that influence notions of belonging and escaping limitations. These shifting socio-spatial dynamics impacted how characters form relationships, access resources, and maintain cultural connections. These characters frequently navigate between rural and urban areas in pursuit of livelihood opportunities, comfort, and a sense of belonging, driven by a desire to escape the limitations of their current environments. Conversely, urban to peri-rural and rural movements may reflect a quest for a return to simpler, more meaningful lives or a response to the challenges of urban living. While these short stories address migration, they often gloss over the significant displacement caused by electoral violence and the post-2000 chaotic land seizures. Nonetheless, these stories subverted gatekeeping by using satire, urban legends, and mythopoesis to subtly challenge dominant power structures, illustrating that the personal is inherently political.

Chapter Three analysed the making-do practices and survival strategies in the city depicted on the *Ztorie Bhuku* blog. One of the key ways in which these short stories challenged traditional moral boundaries is by humanising and giving voice to the diverse experiences of characters engaging in swindling, hustling, touting, cattle rustling, cohabiting, repurposing things and spaces, debauchery, transactional sex, cohabiting, infidelity and suicide. The chapter's framing of the "making do" practices, referred to as kukiya-kiya, is a multivalent concept that encapsulates the coping mechanisms employed by characters to get by. Central to the chapter's analytical thrust is the assertion that the urban space, as depicted on *Ztorie Bhuku*, is a site of perpetual contestation and adaptation, where dominant ideals of morality and the pragmatic necessities of survival intersect and collide. The concept of kukiya-kiya, with its nuanced undertones of agentic interventions, marginalised urban residents negotiate, resist, and even subvert the hegemonic structures that govern their lived realities. The stories contain explicit authorial commentary within the main text, which clarifies, interprets, and provides additional context, guiding the reader to interpret or understand the message. It can appear in various forms, such as footnotes, parenthetical statements, or explicit authorial commentary within the main text.

Chapter Four illustrates how the characters' desperation drives them to seek extreme and supernatural solutions to transcend the physical, social, and political constraints imposed by their realities. Incorporating supernatural elements functions symbolically, allowing writers to explore themes of freedom, hope, and resistance. These fantastical aspects serve as a means of surpassing the limitations of current economic and social conditions, facilitating the creation of idealised societies that contrast sharply with the harsh realities the characters face. The quest for occult economies provides an imaginative escape and a critical commentary on envisioning futures unbounded by scarcity, high living costs, and hyperinflation. These narratives critique the failings of contemporary economic structures and present alternative possibilities for societal organisation. Again, the use of postmodernism, magical realism, and mythopoesis in short stories published in popular print magazines and on digital platforms emerged as a strategic response to Zimbabwe's political and economic downturn. These genres afford writers creative tools to address complex and sensitive issues indirectly, making their critiques both impactful and accessible. Through these innovative approaches, writers effectively navigate the constraints of censorship and editorial controls, providing a platform for nuanced and resonant commentary on the socio-political landscape.

The growing acceptance of short fiction published in popular print magazines, blogs, and on *Facebook* illustrates how these works are gaining mainstream recognition. This trend signifies a transformative shift in how traditional and digital platforms converge to foster a more inclusive and diverse literary culture. The expansion of the literary canon, coupled with the adaptation to modern reading habits, a wider range of perspectives, themes, and styles ensures that short fiction continues to thrive and gain acceptance across various platforms. Recognising and valuing the contributions of marginalised writers serves as a powerful and necessary intervention to actively challenge and disrupt the dominant narratives and canonical structures that have historically marginalised their voices.

A re-evaluation of what is considered canonical challenges the gatekeeping practices that have upheld the status quo and broadened the scope of what is deemed important and worthy of study. This re-evaluation seeks to dismantle entrenched biases and open up the literary canon to underrepresented voices by questioning traditional criteria and inclusivity standards. An urgent consideration of digital short stories written in chiShona and isiNdebele short fiction would necessitate engaging with complex linguistic and cultural translation questions. In turn, this would contest the dominance of English as the primary language of literary production and circulation.

Much of the criticism against the influx of self-published works in Zimbabwe is that it lacks editorial rigour, which can undermine the established benchmarks of literary excellence. Nevertheless, Irene Staunton (2016, p.1) observes that it would be overly simplistic to dismiss the entire self-published works as a harbinger of 'middlebrow mediocrity.' Sarah Thorne (2020) argues that numerous experimental works leverage text generation technologies. This shift towards artificial intelligence (AI) authorship carries profound implications for the literary world. The growing fascination with the capabilities of AI to produce coherent and creative texts should be explored to assess how works generated by AI are increasingly capable of mimicking human writing styles, themes, and structures, hence challenging traditional notions of authorship. Such an inquiry needs to raise questions about the authenticity and originality of AI-generated narratives.

Further research could address the current writings on platforms such as *Wattpad, X* (formerly known as Twitter), and *Instagram* and the circulation and promotion of books on *TikTok* known as BookTok. BookTok has emerged as a powerful platform for book promotion through viral trends and book-related content. The platform's algorithm-driven visibility and the influence of user-generated content significantly impact a book's circulation and readership. Future research

should examine how BookTok's unique dynamics affect book marketing and discoverability and how authors and publishers leverage the platform to reach new audiences.

The rise of user-generated content and algorithmically driven visibility on platforms like *TikTok* have fundamentally disrupted traditional book marketing and discovery models. *TikTok*'s unique dynamics, including its powerful recommendation algorithms and the virality of user-generated book-related content, have profoundly impacted how readers engage with and discover new literary works. Examining how authors and publishers leverage these platforms to reach new and younger audiences would shed crucial light on the evolving nature of literary consumption and promotion in the digital age. Analysing how book-related trends, such as BookTok and other forms of user-generated content, shape reader perceptions, influence purchasing decisions and challenge established notions of literary legitimacy and cultural capital is crucial. These contemporary platforms disrupt traditional hierarchies and redefine what is considered valuable in literature. Understanding their impact is essential for revealing how they question established norms.

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