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**Emerging from Crisis: Representation of Childhood Identities From Selected
Zimbabwean Short Stories of the *Third Chimurenga* Era**

By

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(2014195073)

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis is the result of my own unaided work. It is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of Doctor of Philosophy English at the University of Free State. I have not previously submitted it in any other university for any degree or examination. I have fully acknowledged and referenced any sources that I have used or quoted.



Primrose Rufaro Mawire

28 November 2024

Abstract

This study interrogates representations and reconfigurations of childhood identities in selected short stories from Zimbabwe in the context of the Zimbabwe crisis and the *Third Chimurenga*. Various fictional and non-fictional writers have dealt with the subject of the Zimbabwe crisis in different ways. This thesis adds to the multidisciplinary debates regarding the Zimbabwean crisis through examining the nature of childhood identities emanating from the crisis. Literature produced on the backdrop of the said crisis captures the people's lived experiences. Using the New Historicism conceptual framework, which emphasises the role of historical context in analysing literary texts, I examine notions of childhood and how its representations in the selected texts reveal economic, political and social realities of the crisis in Zimbabwe. I locate my study in the *Third Chimurenga* era, which marked the beginning of the land reform programme, and argue that literature deploying child focalisation offers insight into how childhoods were affected by the land redistribution, an angle which is not visible in the grand narratives of the Zimbabwe crisis. The *Third Chimurenga*, characterised by the land reform programme, ushers in a new political, economic and social landscape in which childhoods can be used to view new trajectories in national discourses and history. The thesis examines representations of various forms of social and economic deprivation experienced by child characters and their impact on their sense of self as they navigate the crisis. The study shows that the land redistribution exercise is a contested socio-economic, cultural and political terrain where childhood identities collide, reassemble and reconfigure. The study inevitably alludes to issues that include children's rights, abuse and neglect, among others. However, in my analysis of issues affecting children's rights, I do not view them (children) as mere helpless victims. I acknowledge the body of scholars who advocate for the agentic nature of children, whereby they should not be viewed as perpetually vulnerable, but as capable of taking independent action. At the same time, I strike a balance between agency and situational constraints which may hinder children from exercising their agency as is the case in most of the literature under study. The study ends with a recommendation calling for the need to advocate for more action by relevant stakeholders to protect the health, safety, future and rights of children in Zimbabwe to enable these children to forge positive childhood identities contrary to those depicted in the literature emanating from the selected period.

Keywords

Crisis, Childhood, Third Chimurenga, Identity, Land Reform Programme, Child Abuse

Dedication

To my beloved departed parents, who left in the midst of my undergraduate degree, but believed in me.

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Chapter 1: Introduction – Alternative history, imagined childhood identities and *Third Chimurenga* era in Zimbabwe

1.0 Introduction

Conceptions of childhood, and childhood identities continue to undergo transformation and reconfiguration as a consequence of economic, socio-cultural and political dynamics. Debates on childhood livelihoods, care and development occupy much of the centre stage across several academic disciplines. The driving factors on discourses about childhood are usually classified under developmental pillars such as early development (Manas, 2020) rights, health and health care (UNICEF, 2022), food security, and education.

This chapter lays the foundation of this research by introducing the study. In providing the introduction, central pillars marking the call for an alternative history in Zimbabwe's unending crisis are given. A substitute historical appreciation of the epoch is systematically placed on invoking the voices of children from selected short stories as they struggle to construct childhood identities. The context of departure is the Zimbabwe's *Third Chimurenga* or fast-track land reform programme, temporally located in the decade-and-half period from 2000 to 2015. The main purpose of this chapter, therefore, is to contextualise the crisis, comment on the land question *vis-à-vis* childhood identities and locate childhood within the history of the nation in postcolonial Zimbabwe. This provides a foundation for the analysis of the selected short stories to establish new meanings embedded in the discourses on the *Third Chimurenga* in Zimbabwe.

1.1 Background

Changes in the social structure of any society or the rise of deprivations, and violations, owing to various factors, have profound psychosocial and physical effects on the children (Ovurtrup, 1994). Boakye-Boaten (2010: 105) indicates that “childhood should be understood within a cultural and social context [...], children are social beings whose world is constructed within a historical and cultural frame of reference.” Writing on how adolescents develop views on democracy, for instance, Nieuwelink et al., (2018: 295) notes that expectedly, people develop interest in social and political issues “to become more strongly aware of the social interactions in civil society” to which childhood and adolescent stages of human development are key,

despite attitudinal changes towards politics, and democracy, throughout one's lifetime. As such, "the foundation for these attitudes is laid during adolescence and young adulthood" (Nieuwelink et al., 2018:295). In addition, Abendschön and Tausendpfund (2017) affirm that children's knowledge of their rights and associated politics is pinned on aspects of socialisation. However, for this study, the child in question is exposed to crisis-stricken postcolonial realities where children's rights, such as the right to shelter, food, education and health are exposed to constant violation and in that way undermining the children's experiences of and awareness of democracy and development.

Scholarship on matters of childhood, and by extension adolescence, expresses desire to counterbalance, and classify children or the youth as helpless victims or ruthless perpetrators of violence within conflict-marred socio-cultural contexts. Against such, peacebuilding initiatives are suggested and advocated for with "adaptive and agentic responses such as youth prosocial behaviours" (Taylor et al., 2018:2) fronted, in some cases based on the Altruism-born-of-suffering theory (ABS) (Staub and Volhardt, 2008 in Taylor et al., 2018). Staub (2003) coined the term Altruism born of suffering, to describe how individuals who have suffered may become particularly motivated to help others – not only despite their difficult experiences, but precisely because of them (Volhardt, 2009:53). This study, which is located in the Zimbabwe crisis period, draws on the above, and other relevant ideas on children, childhood and adolescence as discussed by scholars such as Khan (2001), Almeida et al., (2021), Englund (2021) and, Adonteng-Kissi (2023) in examining representations and reconfigurations of childhood identities in selected short stories from Zimbabwe in the context of *Third Chimurenga* (a period in the Zimbabwean social and political imaginary that starts after 2000 and is marked by the fast-track land redistribution and the anti-Euro-American imperialism). Imperialism has been defined by Vijay (2017) as a policy or ideology of extending the rule of a nation or empire over foreign countries, or of acquiring and holding colonies and dependencies, and he goes on to say that the process involves the subjugation of other nations or people. This is typically by economic, political, military or cultural means.

This research endeavour is a direct response and a contribution to the growing debate on child narrators and protagonists, rightly described by Englund (2021) as a recurring feature of much of the Zimbabwean literature produced in post-2000. Of significance in this study is the ultimate semantics posed by the representations, and/or reconfigurations, most of which address the question of nation building post-2000 and the socio-political, cultural as well as

historical ramifications in Zimbabwe. By extension, re-reading of the short stories with such a focus places the study at the centre of political knowledge among children (Abendschön and Tausendpfund, 2017) in the country – a theme that is under-researched or completely ignored in contemporary Zimbabwean literature, especially that of the *Third Chimurenga*.

For years, discussions on political knowledge have concentrated exclusively, in research and practice, on adults with scant attention given to children. This elides the fact that youths are agents of their circumstances (Abendschön and Tausendpfund, 2017). However, the short stories examined are narrowed down to those produced during the decade of crisis (Wild, 2016) in post-independent Zimbabwe, dubbed by the ruling Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front (ZANU PF) parlance, the *Third Chimurenga* period. This is notwithstanding the realisation that Zimbabwe has had decades of crises dotted within the period 1890 to the present with a major historical moment being the 1966 to 1980 guerrilla warfare that engulfed the country. The other crisis moments include the period 1980s *Gukurahundi* era, described by Alexander (2021:763) as “a period of state repression...” during which an estimated 20 000 people from the Midlands and Matabeleland were massacred by the then Robert Mugabe Korean trained 5th Brigade (CCJP, 1997; Gusha, 2019; Scarnecchia, 2008; Alexander, 2021). Later, there is post-2000 period that is connected to the fast-track land reform programme (Mkodzongi, 2013; Mutopo et al., 2014; Chiweshe et al., 2015; Ossome and Naidu, 2021; Chipenda, 2022) and the changing political dynamics subsequent to the formation of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) in September of 1999 (Alexander, 2010; Hlatywayo et al., 2014; Chipaike and Bischoff, 2019; Hlatywayo and Mangongera, 2020; Shumba et al., 2020; Ossome and Naidu, 2021; Bhatasara and Chiweshe, 2021; Chitando and Taringa, 2021).

The selected stories reflect on or are set in these crisis contexts. The selected short stories describe experiences that are linked to the historical, socio-economic and politically charged contexts. As such, the stories mirror the traditions in Zimbabwean literary landscape. Englund (2021) observes that postcolonial novels in Zimbabwe, for example Dangarembga’s *Nervous Conditions* (1988), Bulawayo’s *We Need New Names* (2013), and *Unfeeling* scrutinise the state of the nation. These novels use central themes to capture the end of white rule, and more recently, the violent nature of the land reform programme post-2000. In most cases the central themes are catapulted by children living in the then Robert Mugabe unstable socio-economic periods.

In this regard, childhood is used to embody national foundational principles. These principles are cultural signifiers of identity, social order, morality, and knowledge forming the basis of the social order of the societies in general (Scheper-Hughes and Sargent, 1998; Abendschön and Tausendpfund, 2017; Almeida et al., 2021). Hence, childhood is an integral part of the definition, maintenance and continuation of any society. In this study, political and private spaces, actions and policies (in this case, policy on the land reform from the turn of the New Millennium), are considered fertile ground for initiating new strategies towards selfhood, and the elaboration of the sense of identities. This alone, warrants enquiry into emerging forms of imagined childhood identities in the wake of Zimbabwe's socio-political, cultural and economic crisis since the turn of the New Millennium.

1.1.1 Contextualising the 'Crisis'

The term crisis is very fluid and subjective. Its meaning, with reference to Zimbabwe, is fraught with debates. Fictional and non-fictional writers have grappled with the subject in diverse ways (Masunungure and Badza, 2010; Raftopoulos, 2014; Moore and Moyo, 2018; Chimhete, 2020; Matanzima and Saidi, 2020; South African Institute of International Affairs, 2021b). It has been common to handle the term crisis as prefixed by a defined context in each case that denotes a difficult problem. Therefore, reference to crisis in this study is synonymous with political crisis. Any reference to political crisis often points towards a downward spiralling in the economic development and growth patterns of a given country or region. Solimano (2005) states that all processes of development, such as economic growth, do not occur in a vacuum as these depend on "rules, institutions and social constraints that are mediated by a political process" (p. 1). In other words, when a country's political process is chaotic and social relations are characterised by conflict and violence, then such a country is undergoing a crisis.

At the turn of the 21st century, especially the first decade, Zimbabwe was characterised as a fragile country (Chigora, 2018). This was because of the economic, political and socio-cultural turmoil. Chigora (2018:12) describes the country's crisis conditions as marked by:

[...] increased levels of politically motivated violence, lack of the rule of law, increased political corruption, lack of transparency and accountability, an electoral environment characterised by fraud and lack of trust in institutions running the elections, and overall lack of trust [in] politicians.

In summary, the above indicates that Zimbabwe was undergoing a political crisis. Preceding Auer (2016), Hermann states that a political crisis is “[a]n organisational crisis [that] threatens high-priority values of the organisation [...] presents a restricted amount of time in which a response can be made, and is [...] unexpected or anticipated by the organisation” (Hermann (1963: 64 in Auer, 2016: 120). The definition, though very common and old, is biased largely towards the private sector institutional activities, and less applicable to the political context at hand, related to issues of the “breakdown of the constitutional machinery” (Dalei and Mishra, 2009: 4 in Auer, 2016: 120) witnessed in Zimbabwe in this case. The crisis in this study is considered as:

...a serious threat to the basic structures or the fundamental values and norms of a social system, which –under time pressure and highly uncertain circumstances –necessitates making critical decisions. (Hart, 1989: 10)

The above view by Hart (1989) highlights the need to view a crisis or political crisis as a feature of governance. This is a concept that relates to the “quality of relationship between the government and the citizens whom it serves and protects” (Maiangwa and Musa-Peter, 2018:633). As a result, a political crisis is understood as an orchestration by a political class that would have deviated from “democratic ethos and principles of good governance” (Maiangwa and Musa-Peter, 2018: 633-634). In addition, the signifiers of such a crisis include insecurity, political violence, corruption, migrations, and increases in crimes, drug abuse and alcoholism. By extension, the existence of a political crisis results in serious existential crises among the children and this is marked by conditions such as living in squalor and wallowing in precarity arising out of bad governance.

The *Third Chimurenga*, a Zimbabwean context that is read within the provisions of the political crisis as explained above, was, and remains, a central signifier of the crisis. It is mainly a political crisis which had various social and economic ramifications. While Maiangwa and Musa-Peter (2018), rightly identify good governance as a measure of democracy, the *Third Chimurenga* is too complex a phenomenon to underpin it under such a simplistic contextualisation of governance and political crisis.

1.1.2 Zimbabwe’s Literary History

This thesis considers the works of fiction, specifically the short story genre, which focus on historical realities in Zimbabwe's Third Chimurenga and their impact on children. It is pertinent from the onset to appreciate the literary history in the country to understand further the context and nature of the thematic concerns in the literatures of the period post-2000. The *Third Chimurenga*, in fictional terms, is a literary zeitgeist in that it builds from the first and second generation writing in Zimbabwe. Hence, a brief scan on the literary history helps to show how the short story genre emerged and appears to have become prominent in the *Third Chimurenga*. An analysis of the three phases characterising the Zimbabwe literary landscape would ideally need more attention, however, for this study a summary is given to provide an appreciation and point of departure.

Flora Veit-Wild offers a critical examination of the development of Zimbabwean literature, exploring how literary traditions in the country have been shaped by social, political, and cultural forces in her book *Teachers, Preachers and Non-Believers: A Sociological History of Zimbabwean Literature* (1993). The book provides a comprehensive social history of Zimbabwean literature, focusing on the roles played by three generations of authors in shaping literary production from the colonial period to post-independence. Veit-Wild (1993) posits that many of Zimbabwe's early writers (first generation) were teachers, a significant portion of whom were educated in mission schools during the colonial era. These educators used literature as a means of expressing their frustrations with colonial oppression while also seeking to preserve and promote African culture and identity. They played a vital role in developing the early corpus of Zimbabwean written literature, both in English and in African languages, and were instrumental in creating a literary tradition that blended indigenous and Western literary forms.

Veit-Wild goes on to identify the second generation of authors as being made up of preachers mostly. These were mostly made up of missionaries and religious figures also had a significant influence on the development of Zimbabwean literature. While often promoting colonial agendas, they also provided the tools - namely, the English language and Western literary forms - for local writers to express themselves. Preachers were important in the dissemination of Western education and literacy, and many early African writers, such as those involved in the *Christian* mission schools, engaged with missionary literature. This influenced their writing, leading to the emergence of a literary tradition that often dealt with issues of spirituality, morality, and colonialism.

Lastly, the third generation of authors, those referred to as "non-believers" in Veit-Wild's title, are individuals and groups who rejected both the religious and colonial ideologies imposed by missionaries and the state. This category encompasses writers and intellectuals who sought to distance themselves from the constraints of missionary education and Western ideas. These "non-believers" often embraced indigenous knowledge and oral traditions, resisting colonial narratives through their works. Their resistance and critique of colonialism, along with the search for a new national identity post-independence, became central themes in the literature produced by these writers. It is under this generation that the short story emerged, as compared to the first and second generation authors, who mostly used the novel form.

The link between the first- and second-generation writing is that writers hovered over the colonial experiences of the past to express their sentiments in tracing the African problems largely. Whether there were issues in or of education (Dangarembga, 1988; Mungoshi, 1980), identity and culture (Hove, 1988), gender relations (Dangarembga, 1988), politics (governance) (Hove, 1996, 2002), and so on, the contemporary and past were weaved together in a bid to explain the future. The past referred to in this case is either the colonial, liberation struggle or attainment of independence itself as historical realities. In essence, historical realities are the benchmarks defining the literary tradition.

Similarly, the *Third Chimurenga* era, generally the post-2000 period, witnessed a historical turn as symbolised by the fast-track land reform programme. Contextually, the post-2000 land reform programme was propagated to correct the injustices of the past. It is this era that informs much of the selected short stories under study with specific focus on the short story genre on one end while considering childhood experiences during the same period. The link between the *Third Chimurenga* (generally providing the impetus of the third-generation writers), and the first, and second generation is that they all make reference to the colonial past and injustices, as both perpetrated by the colonial and independent governments that have pervaded the period dating back to 1890.

Ignatius Mabasa, a Zimbabwean novelist, poet and scholar, later on leans on Veit-Wild's analysis and summarises the Zimbabwean literary phased-history quite clearly, maintaining that the Zimbabwean literary writing in three generations –the first generations were:

...the teachers, educated in missionary schools, writing with didactic zeal; the second generation wrote to praise the second chimurenga, the civil war of independence –and then dealt with post-independence

disappointments; the third are the “born frees.” They are emerging from the chrysalis of the 20th century, blinking, self-consciously modern, hoping the world will pay them some heed (*The Mail & Guardian*, 4 March 2006).

What one draws from the above submission is that the three eras characterising Zimbabwe’s literary history are tied to the history of colonialism in the country. Zimbabwe was colonised in 1890 and gained independence 90 years later. Amid this period, the livelihoods, culture, socio-political structure governing the colonised Africans, and well as relations were altered. Hence, the first-generation writers, notably Solomon Mutsaers, Charles Mungoshi, Dambudzo Marechera, Chenjerai Hove, Stanely Nyamufukudza, to mention but a few, who from the cohort of educated individuals battled with themes and perspectives based on the condition of the colonised African, and the call for decolonisation. The prominent genres were the novel, followed by poetry.

The second-generation literary culture in Zimbabwe is therefore noted as being marked from 1980 when the country gained its independence from colonial rule. This is the literary tradition generally referred to as the post-independent or postcolonial. Major thematic aspects characterising these literary traditions involve reflections of the *Second Chimurenga* paradoxes and outcomes; misplaced euphoric stances on independence, neo-colonialism, and re-imagining independence. The postcolonial literature in Zimbabwe touched base with the resultant challenges Africans faced due to the colonial encounter, the effects of the liberation struggle, governance and group relations. Emerging aspects during this period were gender and cultural issues. The novel remained a dominant genre, with poetry becoming generally visible as well.

Notable anthologies were in the poetry genre, one of the major ones being the Kadhani and Zimunya (1981) *And Now the Poets Speak* as well as prominent poets such as Musaemura Zimunya, Dambudzo Marechera, Julius Chingono, Chenjerai Hove and Freedom Nyamubaya coming into the creative space. For noting in this explanation is that writers of novels also contributed written poems as well, with some contributing even short stories in the case of Charles Mungoshi’s (1980) *Some Kinds of Wounds and Other Stories*.

In this regard, the writers are celebrated as conscious to these historical realities from which they draw various themes that highlight the experiences of specific individuals or population groups of people such as women and children. The other take and point of difference regard

the choices of genres that have been used mainly by the third generation of writers, notably the short story genre, which during the first- and second-generation traditions did not receive considerable attention. Later in the study, a detailed discussion clarifies aspects and development of the short story genre.

It follows, therefore, that in all this, whether first, second or third generation, Acheampong (2022) believes that all African writers, despite their generation or ideological orientation, demonstrate “how African literary figures contribute to the decolonisation” (p. 140) of the continent, notwithstanding the divergences in terms of thought patterns as well as providing colonial and political realities. By extension, the dynamism of the third generation, referred to as *Third Chimurenga* of literary tradition in Zimbabwe, exemplifies to some extent, the de-colonial turn (Acheampong 2022). The de-colonial turn regards the theoretical and epistemological interventions reflected in literary studies acting to counter western thought. The era in question, generally referred to as the 21st century, is noted as justifiably the age of insurgent and resurgent decolonisation (Acheampong, 2022; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2020).

As has been indicated, the first and second generations over-subscribed to the novel and poetry genres, the short story has emerged very strongly and crafted by mainly emerging writers most of whom Ignatius Mabasa describes as born frees. In other words, the third-generation of writers in Zimbabwe represent what Manase (2014) has termed the “new voices”, while commenting on the “post-independence Zimbabwean trajectories” (Manase, 2014 p. 5). These new voices do not directly impact the values of Christian mission education that defined earlier generations

Manase (2014) in his article "Lawrence Hoba's Depiction of the Post-2000 Zimbabwean Land Invasions in *The Trek and Other Stories* provides an insightful analysis of how Hoba's narrative work represents the socio-political landscape of Zimbabwe during the land invasions that took place in the early 2000s. In doing so, Manase positions Hoba's works within the broader context of Zimbabwean literature, specifically in relation to the idea of third-generation writing. Manase (2014) positions Hoba's work as part of this third generation, which includes authors who respond to the post-2000 political climate and engage with the aftermaths of the land reform programme aimed at redistributing land from white farmers to black Zimbabweans, which caused economic and social turmoil. Third-generation writers, including Hoba, often critique these events, presenting a nuanced exploration of the consequences of these policies.

Manase's article underscores that third-generation writers, like Hoba, serve as a mirror on contemporary Zimbabwe, reflecting the nation's internal struggles and contradictions. Unlike earlier generations, who focused on fighting colonial oppression, third-generation writers like Hoba focus on exploring the internal dynamics of the postcolonial state. This generation interrogates the flaws in the promises of liberation and the social, economic, and political challenges of a newly independent society.

Thematically, the third-generation writers in Zimbabwe have not abandoned the land question, recalling that the land issue is topical in the Zimbabwean literary archive. The short story genre itself serves as the vehicle for this creativity. As discussed in detail later, the short story has had advantages of being short enough to deal with well-focused themes. In other words, there are visible thematic continuities placing *Third Chimurenga* writers along an intergenerational continuum.

1.1.3 *Third Chimurenga* and the History of the Nation

Zimbabwe is a former colony of Britain, and unlike other countries such as Ghana, Botswana and Zambia that negotiated their independence, the country gained political independence in 1980 after more than a decade of armed struggle. The armed guerrilla warfare, between 1966 and 1980, was dubbed The *Second Chimurenga* against the backdrop of the *First Chimurenga* of the 1890s that occurred after the land between Zambezi and Limpopo Rivers had been colonised by the British South African Company (BSAC) owned by Cecil John Rhodes (Beach, 1997, 1979). Ironically, the BSAC made the great track, all the way from South Africa to occupy Matabeleland and Mashonaland, in more or less the same way that we then see the narrator's family in Hoba's "The Trek" (2005) making the journey in their scotch cart to go and occupy the white man's farm during the Land Reform Programme. The white colonialists subdued the natives, forcibly took their land, cattle and named the country after Cecil John Rhodes to Rhodesia (Beach, 1979). Prominent spirit mediums, Sekuru Kaguvi and Mbuya Nehanda, who provided both spiritual and military guidance during the *First Chimurenga*, were executed by the white settlers at the time. Both Nehanda and Kaguvi feature prominently in ZANU PF's narratives of the Chimurenga in colonial and post-independent Zimbabwe. Nonetheless, the *Second Chimurenga* has its fair share of celebrated heroes and heroines and these include Joshua Nkomo, Herbert Chitepo, Robert Mugabe, Joyce Mujuru and Sally Mugabe.

The surviving heroes and heroines of the *Second Chimurenga*, popularly known as the war veterans in Zimbabwe, have been used by the ZANU PF government as architects of the *Third Chimurenga*. This war veterans' role is reflected through a character named Chimoto in Hoba's "Specialisation" (2007) that describes experiences during the post-2000 land redistribution (2007) (*Laughing Now: New Stories from Zimbabwe*). More importantly, and in contextualising this study within the political crisis in Zimbabwe, the *Third Chimurenga* represents a very complex political crisis that stretches as far back as the 1890s when the indigenous communities lost their land to white settlers. While the *First Chimurenga* could be appreciated as a war of resistance to occupation, the *Second Chimurenga* could equally be taken as having been waged by locals to reclaim political and economic power. All the three *Zvimurenga* (1st, 2nd and 3rd *Chimurenga*) are intertwined around the struggles over land, representation, political power and generally, democracy (Mararike, 2018). In other words, they symbolise, and represent Zimbabwe's unfinished business that dates back to the 1890s and in that way confirm that the struggles for land are a continuous trope of Zimbabwean politics (International Peace Academy, 2002).

Zvimurenga define the nation's processes of becoming a Zimbabwean, and denote the broad realm of decolonisation, neo-colonialism, and decoloniality within which the ruling ZANU PF government alluded to, ideologically and in practice. Despite the atrocities committed against its own citizens, especially during the election times of 2000, 2002, 2008 and the 2005 Operation *Murambatsvina* (Operation Restore Order), the ZANU PF government still presented the land reform programme as a success despite the existence of certain schools of thought that contested this. That is, those operating on the winning side found the land redistribution programme as a bold commitment to redress the colonial legacies while those who opposed the programme and were perceived as the losers by the ZANU PF and its supporters characterised it as a total failure.

There is no election from 2000, to date in Zimbabwe which passed without its credibility as free and fair challenged. That is, all election results since 2000, especially presidential, were contested in the political spaces, courts, legislative forums and even international platforms wherein ZANU PF has been accused of using state apparatus, intimidation, vote-buying, rigging, massaging the ballot and even violence to remain in power. Of the hotly contested political decisions, the 2008 was the worst of them all following Morgan Tsvangirai of the

Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) defeating Robert Mugabe (ZANU PF) in the presidential ballot. Tsvangirai's victory was trifled in that it was declared less than the constitutionally required 50 + 1% threshold. The result triggered a run-off, but the uneven, violent and intimidatory political terrain, and other factors characterising the run-off election forced the opposition MDC to pull out. A few months later, a Global Political Agreement (GPA) between ZANU PF, and other opposition political parties, was agreed upon and ushered into a government of national unity that ran between 2009 and 2013.

The ZANU PF government sought solidarity and presented itself to the international community as a government under siege from neo-colonialism. This posture was used to justify, in some cases, the government's heavy-handedness against political activists and the opposition. The MDC party, non-government organisations, and other civil society groups who either countered or exposed the government's human right violations or merely questioned or demonstrated against the government's economic policies for instance were characterised as stooges or agents of the West bent on reversing the gains of independence. The opposition and human rights activists were accused of being puppets of the West and desecrated as totemless, gays and lesbians driving a regime change agenda. Robert Mugabe, the then president of Zimbabwe, was very confrontational and provocative with reference to Western countries and their perceived interference in Zimbabwean politics. In his speech covered by the BBC News in 2010, Mugabe claimed that the West sought to undermine his government and instigate regime change in Zimbabwe as a result of his government policies, particularly the land reform programme which involved the redistribution of land from white commercial farmers to black Zimbabweans. Mugabe also showed his unapologetic defiance when he addressed Tony Blair directly, declaring: "*Blair, keep your Britain, and I will keep my Zimbabwe*" at the 2001 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Abuja, Nigeria. This speech which was broadcast on BBC news became one of the most memorable moments of Mugabe's tenure as it was direct, forceful, and emblematic of his defiance against Western imperialism, particularly Britain's role in Zimbabwe's colonial history and its subsequent criticisms of Mugabe's government, especially regarding land reform. This phrase was both a challenge and an assertion of Zimbabwe's sovereignty. Mugabe rejected British interference in Zimbabwe's domestic affairs, particularly the land reform programme, which he defended as a necessary step to rectify the colonial injustices of land dispossession. In all this, the police and army were used to push the ZANU PF agenda and the ZANU PF led government's declarations. Resultant effects of the impasse between the ZANU PF government and its stakeholders, at home and

abroad, have been a high unemployment rate and state of joblessness, liquidity crisis, vagrancy and alcoholism, shortage of food and other goods such as fuel. Various novels and short stories, such as “These are the days of our lives” (Chinhandu, 2005), “A Land of Starving Millionaires” (Chinyani, 2007) and *We Need New Names* (Bulawayo, 2013) among others, describe the experiences of citizens under post 2000 crisis conditions.

Therefore, the above provides a glimpse of the fundamentals defining the political crises in Zimbabwe. These characteristics provide the social, political, economic and cultural context of the selected short stories under study. The above further expresses the multidimensional nature of the Zimbabwean crisis and alludes to the need for multidisciplinary approaches to analyse and comprehend the literature as well as the primary and secondary contexts under representation. I concur with the view of Derman and Kaarhus (2013:1) who note that the “2000s were a decade of combined political and social crisis.” It is no accident that civil society organisations such as the eponymous Crisis Zimbabwe Coalition (CZC) were formed at the time as a direct response to the socio-political and economic emergency in Zimbabwe.

In his foreword to Chiumbu and Musemwa’s seminal text *Crisis! What Crisis? The multiple dimensions of the Zimbabwean crisis*, Mlambo (2012: ii) appreciates the multidisciplinary approach of the anthology and highlights that such:

approaches are to be encouraged if there is to be a nuanced and more grounded understanding of the forces that have shaped and continue to shape the Zimbabwean experience.

Thus, my research is a response to the call for multidisciplinary debates regarding the Zimbabwean crisis. I adopt a literary approach to examine how imagined childhood identities (personal, social and national) in literary works have evolved in crisis-ridden Zimbabwe. I also consider the way literary childhood-centred studies in the era of land redistribution, offer alternative understandings of the subject of land, identity and the history of the nation. In my engagement with history and childhood, I draw on Loomba’s observation (1998:40) that “literary criticism no longer examines history as simply a background but as an essential part of textual meaning and fundamental to the creation of culture.” This study, therefore, dwells on the representations of childhood identities in the era of the post-2000 land redistribution programme that is popularly known as the fast-track land reform in Zimbabwe. It critically

explores how emerging childhood identities have contributed to telling the (hi)story of the Zimbabwean crisis.

Different narratives are woven out of the political, social and economic crisis in Zimbabwe. At the centre of this crisis is the land question and the symbolic language of political weaponry used by the ZANU PF to defend its ideology and relationship to its citizens. One notes the way the narrator-poet in Mupfudza's "Forever Haunted by Rita's Eyes" (2005) (*Writing Now: New Stories from Zimbabwe*) uses Rita's merciless gang-rape by those supposedly trusted to protect the citizen as a metaphoric indicator of how some citizens were treated during this period. Thus, fictional and non-fictional narratives have, and continue to, emerge because of the ongoing crisis. For instance, prominent historian, Terrence Ranger, identifies the emergence of a new historiography, in the post-2000 era, which he refers to as patriotic history. Ranger (2005: 220) defines patriotic history as:

Different from and narrower than the old nationalist historiography which celebrated aspiration and modernisation as well as resistance. It resents the 'disloyal' questions raised by historians of nationalism. It regards as irrelevant any history which is not political. And it is extremely antagonistic to academic history.

Ranger explains further that patriotic history through the lens of the ruling party ZANU PF has the potential to generate too much or too little history, if a single, narrow historical narrative gains monopoly and is endlessly iterated. Therefore, it is important at any time to offer a plural history. Similarly, Mushakavanhu (2013:128) observes that:

...the everyday Zimbabwean finds his [sic] representation in imaginative literature in short stories, in plays, in novels and in poetry. The inspiration for the new literature being written by Zimbabwean writers is in the everyday experiences of ordinary people.

By extension, Mushakavanhu observes that fictional works have the ability to capture the peoples' lived experiences and record history in the process. The assertions by Mushakavanhu align with Bakhtin's concept of the literary chronotope, which focuses on the study of space and time in art and literature. Bakhtin (1981: 84) avers that:

In the literary artistic chronotope, spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole. Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, and becomes artistically visible; likewise,

space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history. The intersection of axes and fusion of indicators characterises the artistic chronotope.

By extension, Bakhtin advances the chronotope as a way of analysing how descriptions of time, and space are related to each other differently, and in different genres and periods. As such, literature has the potential to make scholars appreciate that in the course of history, transformations of time concepts and spatial representations can reflect radical changes in people's lived experiences. It is, thus, my argument that some of the post-2000 Zimbabwean literature that focuses on child experiences offer insights into how childhoods were affected by the land redistribution. The *Third Chimurenga* context, complex as it is, and influenced by the fast-track land reform programme, affected children's sense of belonging – an absent angle in the grand narratives about the Zimbabwean crisis. Consequently, I trace shifts in childhood representations during the era of fast track land reform in Zimbabwe by foregrounding the world of the child in the text, amidst discourses of identity, history and the nation.

It is vital to note that childhood identity is fluid and influenced by contextual, cultural and economic factors. This is evident in narrated childhoods in the stories selected for this study. Here, the child characters' identities are transformed and shaped by the Zimbabwean crisis and thus, an examination of how the land redistribution and the economic, political, and social crisis that accompanied it impacts and reconfigures childhoods add further to existing discourses on childhood identities as well as to the *Third Chimurenga* discourses in general. The bias towards childhood identities is very deliberate, given that most discourses and imaginaries about the *Third Chimurenga* generally characterise and deliberately position children as appendages to their parents. As such, the children are generally positioned as innocent victims of circumstances whose stories are eventually told by their mothers, NGOs or civil society organisations meant to advance good governance in the country. Approaching this literature from a child or adolescent perspective helps establish the dynamics of the *Third Chimurenga* crisis in Zimbabwe.

Hammar et al., (2003) point out that the Zimbabwean crisis is far-reaching and multi-layered. The period 2000 to 2009 was the subject of intense reflection and heated debates. Raftopoulos (2009) acknowledges these multiple ways in which the crisis is manifested. Confrontations over land, property and human rights, relevant to my study, reflect contestations over the history and meanings of nationalism and citizenship, as well as cultural representations of the

crisis in contemporary Zimbabwean literature. Therefore, this study analyses representations of childhood identities in selected short stories influenced by the land reform as part of a larger critique of post-independent African states in general, and Zimbabwe in particular, to shed light on Zimbabwe's political, economic and social trajectories.

The study builds upon previous studies on the literary representations of Zimbabwean childhood. Scholars such as Robert Muponde, Tendai Mangena and Kizito Muchemwa, have laid the foundation for this study. For instance, Muponde advances the argument that:

...instead of seeing childhood in romantic or idyllic terms, it is possible to see it as a contested space. One in which the larger tensions of the society manifest themselves (Muponde, 2005: ii).

Muponde (2005) demonstrates how literary representations of childhood bear questions of history, politics, resistance and memory. Regarding childhoods in literature, Muponde remarks that it:

...provide[s] a counterpoint to the nationalist discourse...making it possible for us to start thinking about the ways in which these narratives contest, disrupt and threaten national discourse (Muponde 2005: 260).

As such, I take the debate further by examining notions of childhood representation in short stories written by both black and white authors during, and after the fast-track land redistribution period. I further examine the way childhood identities feed into the continued larger national discourses which are inevitably tied to the colonial legacies and quests for decolonisation and decoloniality. I also examine notions of childhood, and how its representations are portrayed in the selected short story-texts revealing some of the political, economic and social realities of the crisis in Zimbabwe.

Here, I am guided by the understanding that literature plays an important role in the formation, and construction of various forms of social identities, in this case national, religious and childhood identities. In this regard, the *Third Chimurenga* is treated as an era in which socio-economic, cultural and political realities, and experiences where individual and collective childhood identities collide, reassemble and are reconfigured. This way, my study augments existing debates on Zimbabwe literary criticism. This study, thus, examines literary manifestations of various forms of social and economic deprivation of children, and their

impact on the realities, and sense of self that the children constitute as they live in a crisis-stricken country such as Zimbabwe.

Mangena's (2011) study on literary studies of children is also significant to this study. Mangena dwells on the complex nature of childhood and calls for the need to explore the various issues that influence childhood identities. As a result, I analyse the way in which the *Third Chimurenga* impacted the childhood identities in the selected literature. Muchemwa (2007) takes an interesting dimension by indirectly exploring childhood in literature through an analysis of the role of fathers on childhood identities. The importance of this dynamic lies in the reality that African society is generally patriarchal and male dominance has a bearing on the socialisation of the child. It is through the father figures that parenthood is projected in relation to representation of childhood in the selected short stories. Therefore, I analyse the nature of fatherhoods produced by the crisis to determine its impact on representations of childhood identities in Zimbabwe.

Ultimately, my study explores Zimbabwean literary depictions written in English that focus on childhood experiences from the period 2000 to 2015. In the discussion, I start with an analysis of literature produced from the year 2000 because it marks the beginning of the *Third Chimurenga* land re-distribution in Zimbabwe, which ushered in a new political, economic and social landscape where childhoods are used to view new trends and trajectories in national discourses and history. The *Third Chimurenga* is a phase of the Zimbabwean post-independence, and postcolonial history which brought with it complex, and major socio-political, and economic turmoil that impacted on literary depictions of childhoods. The period's major turning point is on the fast-track land redistribution programme.

Some studies underscore how the fast-track land reform programme was hinged on *jambanja* (violent episodes of land grabbing) while others are more interested in the political context. This context, shaped by the land reform, led scholars (Cliffe, Alexander, Cousins, and Gaidzanwa, 2011) to argue that the program revealed the nationalist ZANU PF government at a time when its 20-year rule was facing its first serious challenge from the then nine-month-old MDC. Cliffe et al. (2011) indicate that the panicking ZANU PF regime reacted by using a string of repressive laws, thuggery, corruption, injustices and authoritarianism to remain in power. Mushakavanhu (2013: 9) notes that the "*Third Chimurenga* was characterised by land invasions, as such, was labelled as the last phase in Zimbabwe's quest for absolute

independence.” Failure by the minority whites to cooperate with the ZANU PF government to redress what ZANU PF termed the unfair possession of land, led to a growing unrest among the black population.

Other studies note that *jambanja* or sporadic land grabs was adopted by the ZANU PF government because it placed the government, then facing stiff opposition, at an advantage. Chiweshe, Sifile and Matopo (2023) argue that the war veterans instigated the land reform as a part of the ZANU PF official campaign strategy for the 2000 elections. Such a move also exposed failure on the part of the ZANU PF government to resettle the majority of the landless population at independence. At the time, the resettlement policy was market driven (Mabaya, 2005) as it was premised on the willing-buyer-willing seller principle. The agitation among the landless citizens as well as the political advantage that seemingly came with it, contributed to the complexity of the Zimbabwean crisis.

Therefore, a re-reading of the *Third Chimurenga* establishes that it was also a war that may have been triggered by ordinary villagers, the Svosve people from Marondera District (Mkodzongi and Lawrence, 2019; Chimhowu and Woodhouse, 2008), and the opposition MDC then led by Morgan Tsvangirai after its formation in 1999. Thus, the ZANU PF government faced an existential crisis in the political space, such that it hijacked the ideational aspects of the programme (Chiweshe, Sifile and Matopo, 2023; Mkodzongi and Lawrence, 2019; Cliffe et al., 2011). Cliffe et al., (2011) believe the war veterans were co-opted by the ZANU PF party and emerged as a critical political support-puzzle in the politics of development in Zimbabwe (Kriger, 2003). Under the leadership of the late Chenjerai Hunzvi, the war veterans unleashed chaos, leading groups of ZANU PF supporters in the invasion of arable land and farms, most of which were legally owned by white farmers but politically claimed to belong to the indigenous people. This is in line with Robert Mugabe’s proclamation that in his opinion the land reform programme was a political issue that needed no debate or questioning by the judiciary (Selby, 2006). However, apart from being politicised, the land resettlement programme eventually became a subliminal process of self-land provisions (Mbaya, 2005; Booysen, 2003).

There were, however, other equally competing questions of national concern which called for guarantees of good governance (Booyesen, 2003). These were aggravated by other factors, which had resulted in the declining of economic conditions in the 1990s. For example, War

Veterans maimed and jailed during the *Second Chimurenga* guerrilla war, questioned, for the first time since the country's political independence in 1980, the fruits of their sacrifices and openly demanded land and compensation from the Robert Mugabe government. Chimhowu and Woodhouse (2008) hold the view that the 1997 War Veterans protests threatened to split ZANU PF, and this compelled the government to concede to compensating the so-called War Veterans using unbudgeted-for national resources (Booyesen, 2003).

At the same time, genuine questions regarding the socio-economic conditions and governance of the country were raised. The 1997 government-war-veterans hasty pay-outs, involvement of the economically troubled country in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) civil war, and a host of other problems put a huge strain to the Zimbabwean economy and politics (Hammer, et al., 2003; Jones, 2010). The MDC, also in a dire need of political relevance, took every opportunity there was to expose the ZANU PF's political, social and economic shortcomings. Ultimately, the economy of the country kept dwindling as the nation entered the new millennium, and the more the political playfield became uneven, the dire the economy became (Kriger 2003; Booyesen, 2003).

1.1.4 The Land Issue and *Third Chimurenga*

It was perhaps the people of Svosve village (Marondera District) (Chimhowu and Woodhouse, 2008; Booyesen, 2003) who:

Determined to reclaim their ancestral land expropriated from their forefathers by the settler regime [in 1998] ignited the land invasions that gave in to the fast-track land reform exercise. (*The Herald*, 30 July 2015)

This gave impetus to the war veterans' violent occupations more so when considering that the government did not to stop the Svosve land invasions. In essence, the Robert Mugabe and ZANU PF regime took a political stance to support the invasions, and "The seeds of The Third Chimurenga had been sworn" (*The Herald*, 30 July 2015). Hence, Hammer, Raftopoulos and Jensen (2003) conclude that these were part of the multiple origins of the crisis in Zimbabwe.

The waning support for ZANU PF triggered the party's desire to manipulate the long overdue land redistribution issue and this acted as a trump card to appeal to the voters as the 1998

elections beckoned (Hammar, et al, 2003; Nyawo, 2012; Krigger 2003). The land redistribution was also used to counter the growing opposition voices which culminated in the formation of the MDC in 1999. Nyawo (2012: 177) chronicles “the correlation between politics, economics and land allocation in Zimbabwe” in the following:

From the year 2000, starting with the Zimbabwean government’s failed February referendum, the political and economic dimensions of the Zimbabwean land question rose to great prominence. In the name of survival, with the rise of the MDC, the shrinking of the economy and fall-out with the international donor community, the ruling ZANU-PF could not just stand and watch political power slipping out of their grip. To re-arm themselves they had to manipulate the land question.

Riding on the black citizens’ seething anxiety about the un-addressed land question, ZANU PF re-sold the hijacked idea that redistributing land to black people was the only way to empower them economically. Therefore, the *Third Chimurenga* involved a militant process of violent repossession of land from the few white commercial farmers by the majority black people. Booyesen (2003) suggests that this may be because of the fast-track land reform programme being commanded outside the president’s office. The national security organs including the Central Intelligence Organisation (CIO) were instrumental in leading the land reform programme.

Hoba’s story, “Specialisation” (2007) illustrates some of the violent ways in which land seizures were done by the landless who had all of a sudden realised that their actions would not be questioned by any law or authority in the country. Most of those involved in re-acquiring or occupying the land had been employees to the same white commercial farmers from whom they took the land they had worked on as farm workers. The narrator says:

So, all we had needed to do was to wait for Baas Kisi to go to the city, as he always did every Friday, and then telephone him and say, ‘You white kaffir, don’t bother showing your nigger farse here because we will do your ace meat with a sharp panga. The farm and everything on it, is now ours. We the sovereign sons of the soil.’ Chimoto had written down the statement so that I would not forget a word he wanted said (71).

Hence, from the year 2000, the ZANU PF government carried out the land reclamation (Nyawo, 2012). Whether or not the land redistribution exercise achieved the desired results to economically empower the previously landless black Zimbabweans is a question the selected

stories under analysis address from the perspective and voices of children. The selected stories explore the subjectivity of the matter and extend the crisis debate beyond the confinement of adulthood voices, and participation to institutional positions and reports, political party gimmicks and political rhetoric.

1.1.5 Childhood Representations in the Context of *Zvimurengas*

This study explores the literary representations of black and white childhoods in selected Zimbabwean black and white authored short stories, published, and mostly set, in the period 2000 to 2015. I decided to end on stories produced by 2014 to give the study definite boundaries for practical purposes. The short story genre was chosen because it is a neglected literary form as compared to the novel, particularly within African literature in general. The short story is handy and surmountable and has the capability to contain the world in its short but compact form. The way the short stories have been used by the authors draws one's attention to issues that define, and affect, the everyday lives of people, in this case, that of the children, and young people in general.

A full categorisation of the selected short stories is available in the chapter overview at the end of this chapter. The first chapter comprises the following stories: "The Trek" by Lawrence Hoba (2005) which is found in the anthology *Writing Now: New Stories from Zimbabwe*, "Specialisation" by Lawrence Hoba (2007) in *Laughing Now*, "These are the Days of Our Lives" by Edward Chinhandu (2005) in *Writing Now: New Stories from Zimbabwe*, "A land of starving millionaires" by Erasmus Chinyani (2007) in *Laughing Now*; "Pay Day Hell" by Christopher Mlalazi (2005) and "Rukudzo" by Andrew Aresho (2005) both in *Writing Now: New Stories from Zimbabwe*. This set of stories offers a fertile context for one to understand the anomic conditions during the period under study. This chapter is thus centred on the challenges children confront in their quest for selfhood in a society marked by crises.

The second set of stories, which makes up chapter three, is themed *Gendered childhood spaces*. The following stories are analysed: "Mainini Grace's Promise" by Valerie Tagwira (2008) in *Women Writing Zimbabwe*; "Forever Haunted by Rita's Eyes" by Stanley Mupfudza (2005) in *Writing Now* and "Tomorrow is not another day," by Julius Chingono (2006) in *Not Another Day*. Chapter four examines white childhood identities in the aftermath of the land reform programme. The stories analysed are: "Christmas" by Bryony Rheam (2007) in *Laughing Now*

and “The Situation” by Donna Kerstein (2011) in *Writing Free*. In Chapter 5 I analyse stories which configure the responses of childhoods marked by prolonged suffering, by examining the following stories: “The Winning Side” by William Saidi (2003) in *Writing Still*; “Tables Turned Over” by Adrian Ashley (2005) in *Writing Now* as well as “Eeish!” and “Dancing with Life” by Christopher Mlalazi (2008) in *Dancing with Life*.

The analysis of the selected short stories reveals the nature and nurture of Africa’s national independences, particularly that of Zimbabwe. It should be noted that aspects of injustices along racial lines as resources such as the land lay mostly in the hands of the former white colonialist minority (Chimhowu and Woodhouse, 2008; *The Herald*, 2015), are quite topical and literature of all genres capturing these is in abundance. For instance, Marechera’s (1978) *House of Hunger* is one such novella capturing a sense of a lost generation of youthful Zimbabweans. In addition, Kadhani and Zimunya’s (1981) *And Now the Poets Speak*, is a collection of Zimbabwean poems focusing on the armed liberation struggle, the *Second Chimurenga*, and by extension the *First Chimurenga* under eight broad themes. These themes are The Heritage, The Colonial Scourge, Black man’s burden, Chains, Shackles and Goals, The Clouds Gather Chains, Shackles and Gaols, The Storm, Tribute and the People Celebrate. A quick survey of the poems’ themes suggests that they tell a story of the phases, reactions and activities linked to the Zimbabwean crises dating back to the 1890s. Thus, the short stories chosen for this study follow a similar trajectory, with a particular focus on the reconfiguration of childhood identities in the context of the realities of the Third Chimurenga in Zimbabwe.

It follows that the 1990s in Zimbabwe gave rise to the major factors that defined the calamities linked to declining economic and living conditions of the people (Hammar et al., 2003), and the deterioration of democracy, human rights and political turmoil in Zimbabwe. The 1990s’ determinants of the socio-political and social turmoil include the government’s misplaced adoption of the World Bank’s and International Monetary Fund’s (IMF) structural economic policies popularly known as Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) which other Southern African countries such as Zambia rejected. The ESAP-induced economic policies added weight to the baggage of political and socio-cultural problems already weighing down the nation. As a result, citizens bore the ultimate brunt, with children suffering the most because of the programme’s effect on the social and economic sector.

More importantly, ESAP resulted in the closure of most manufacturing industries in the country. The closures led to massive jobs losses, a rise in the cost of living, and a high inflation that eroded the value of the wages of those few workers who remained in employment (Chimhowu and Woodhouse, 2008). The adverse economic conditions led to protests with the major one being the food riots of 1998 organised by the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU). These protests culminated in the formation of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) in 1999, which arguably posed the greatest challenge to ZANU PF rule to date. The support base of ZANU PF began to dwindle as citizens faced hardships and got attracted to alternative voices from a strong opposition party. In addition, the unfulfilled land promises which remained an issue for many years worsened by the hardships arising from the late 1990s failed economic policies.

The ZANU PF government and its sympathisers were quick to conclude that the land reform programme would bolster their chances of election success. Manase (2016) remarks that ZANU PF expressed its vision of successes that would arise from agrarian reforms enshrined in their 2002 election campaign slogan ‘The land is the economy and the economy is the land.’ This implied that land ownership was synonymous with economic prosperity and independence. This discourse continues to find ways into the ZANU PF patriotic history, which seeks to glorify the gains of the agrarian reform programme.

In some cases, the land redistribution exercise resulted in crises within a crisis. For instance, some resettled individuals ended up being resettled again or forced to move out of the farms they had been allocated or grabbed to pave way for well-connected individuals in government. The Svosve villagers who had in 1997 invaded settler-owned farmland in the Marondera District were ironically evicted by the same government in 2020. Close to 200 beneficiaries of the fast-track land reform programme of 2000-2002 were reportedly evicted from their previously self-allocated land (The *Newshawks*’, 18 June 2021). Therefore, the overall response to and evaluation of the Land Reform Programme can be seen as having been, to some degree, racialised.

Nonetheless, ZANU PF and its sympathisers consider the fast-track land reform as a success. This contrasts with views by critics, journalists and the opposition who labelled the agrarian reform as chaotic, violent, draconian and a violation of property and human rights. Richardson (2005) and Moyo (2011) have written extensively against the land reform programme in

Zimbabwe, expressing the view that the Land Reform Programme was not justified. At the same time, Cliffe et al. (2011) and Scoones (2015) acknowledge that there was a need to address land disparities in Zimbabwe, and yet condemn the way it was done especially that the evicted white commercial farmers were not offered compensation.

Most of the critics to land reform in Zimbabwe ignore the glaring land ownership disparities which perpetuated the impoverishment of the majority of the native blacks. Of particular interest are white narratives' outcry over the violation of property rights as the violent displacement from their farms. These removals may be ironically compared to the violent removal of the black people from their native land throughout the colonial era. The world was called upon to sympathise with the evicted white farmers. There were also calls for compensation and demands that the Robert Mugabe ZANU PF regime be arraigned before the International Criminal Court for violation of human and property rights during the land reform. Although I do not condone the violence of the Third Chimurenga carried out by the ZANU PF government and war veterans, the violence inflicted during the 1890s and much of the 1900s by the BSAC and white settlers seems to have been reversed in the post-2000 era, yet colonial violence was neither acknowledged by the white victims of the land reform nor referenced in their narratives.

There is, in this regard, a general attempt by most scholars to take a reductionist approach in classifying critics as either pro or anti-land reform. A third splinter voice makes reference to democratic principles involved in the land question. Pilossof (2008: 270) rejects the narrow and reductionist reading of the Zimbabwean, and refers to:

two different reactions to the land reform of the 2000s: those against them (reforms) and those for them. However, within these two camps, there are competing voices and approaches that warrant further investigation.

Overall, critics regard the land reform as both necessary and long overdue, but they question the way it was implemented. The violent approach exacerbated the crisis, which had already started in the 1990s. For instance, Hammar, Raftopoulos and Jensen (2003: 1) note that the land redistribution exercise was carried out in response to the hegemonic and increasingly authoritarian rule of Robert Mugabe and his ruling nationalist ZANU PF party. In a way, it is portrayed as precipitating dramatic shifts in the country's political, economic, social, cultural

and spatial landscapes. These shifts and their ongoing dynamics and extensive effects have come to be termed the Zimbabwe crisis or Zimbabwe's unfinished business. Reacting to the above Manase (2016: 13) sums it in the statement:

Pilosof's views indicate that the impact of the post 2000 land invasions and the causes of the Zimbabwe crisis are complex and need to be examined from the specific historical developments in Zimbabwe in addition to the country's relations with Britain and other Western powers.

I draw on the above summary in my analysis of the imagined childhoods borne out of crisis, in order to understand how black and white children negotiated their identities, sense of belonging and unbelonging in the context of land redistribution of post-2000 in Zimbabwe.

In the end, most scholars converge on the point that the land reform was justified (Manase 2011, 2016; Mlambo, 2013; Magosvongwe, 2013, 2015), given the long history of land ownership disparities, which left vast tracks of fertile land in the hands of a few minority white people while the majority of blacks were landless. However, the decade of crisis that followed requires a wholesome analytical approach to comprehend the forces that continue to drive Zimbabwe's political, economic and social landscape in the aftermath of land redistribution. Hence, this study engages in a rigorous exploration of literary representations of childhood in post-2000 Zimbabwean fiction, and seeks to answer the question, where do children find themselves during the crisis in Zimbabwe?

An analysis of the imagined experiences of the child enables one to trace the shifting notions of childhood identity formation. This is especially so in a moment of national crisis where broader questions of national identity and belonging arise. Such an approach adds new dimensions to the analysis of the history of the nation, a dimension which may not find expression in patriotic history, given through the lens of childhood. This is also important in societies where children are seen and not heard as exemplified by stories such as Hoba's "The trek" (2005) that describes the way childhoods were affected by land invasions. One can interpret the representations of the child's feelings as he is dragged through all the processes, and how his life is affected by all that is happening around him. Children symbolise the continuation of societies and, although debatable, are vulnerable members of the community who require care and nurturing. Boakye-Boaten (2010: 104) asserts that:

The continuous existence of any society depends on the ability of the society to socialise its children in the art of survival and cultural perpetuation ... The future of any society is determined by the quality of its children and by the level of commitment towards the protection of its most vulnerable members, the young and the old.

Considering the above, it is crucial to note that the narrator's life in "The Trek" is a typical representation of a childhood caught up in the political and economic melee of a nation in a deep crisis. The representations of the narrator's childhood give a broader understanding of the dynamics involved in the process of the land redistribution and how the process transformed the social structure, and institutions of the Zimbabwean society.

As evidenced in Alexander (2007), Manase (2011; 2016) and Magosvongwe (2013; 2015) national identity has long been tied to the land. Therefore, an exploration of the imagined childhood identities during the land redistribution phase involves inquiry into how the turn of events (land redistribution) address the question of representations of national identity in both the black and the white child. The questions considered here include:

- How does the black child negotiate their sense of belonging in relation to the broader sense of national identity in a period when land is now in the hands of the black majority?
- What kinds of imagined personal and social identities are witnessed from the same child in the period of crisis following the land redistribution?

There are also white authored fictional narratives that describe the whites' perspectives regarding the land redistribution and trace the experiences of white characters. These white narratives show the identity dilemmas of the white man and his children. For example, the narrator's father in Rheam's "Christmas" (2007) staunchly identifies himself as Zimbabwean and does not understand why the white people who fled the country during and after the *Third Chimurenga* would refer to themselves as former Zimbabweans.

These identity dilemmas permeate white authored narratives and make for a rich subject of inquiry to understand the possessions, dispossessions and repossessions of land between the black and white races in Zimbabwe. The focus in this study is on the impact of belongingness

and non-belongingness of the white child. Much as there was a proliferation of black authored fiction, which captures the period of crisis, the same surge in fictional output is witnessed amongst the Zimbabwean white population. For some of them, their sense of national belonging lies with their home countries in Europe. Yet, the moment they are removed from the land, they suddenly want to claim their Zimbabwean-ness and justify why they are also the rightful owners of the land. The narratives -assert justifications for ownership of the land to counter that of the Africans that their ownership is ancestral and native.

Hove's *Bones* is one such a text that provides a glimpse on connections between the African, the land, and "symbols of dignity, identity and belonging" (Madondo, 2018 in *The Herald*, 12 February 2018). Murume in *Bones* is considered the voice of Nehanda –the revered Shona spirit medium of Nehanda Nyakasikana, a heroine of the *First Chimurenga*. He embodies the deep relationship that an African individual has to the land. Dick Turner and his wife, Mary, in Dorris Lessing's *The Grass is Singing* (1950) fail the identity test as they could not belong to the land. Their livelihoods on the Rhodesian (now Zimbabwe) farm are barren and tantamount to their existence which is contrasted to the fierce beauty of the land to which they are oblivious. Although the cited narratives are distant from portraying childhood identities, as this study intends, and the issues raised are presented in a novel format rather than the short story form being examined here, they are still relevant, as they highlight the white man's reaction to the land question. Lessing (1950) suggests that whites had a rapist relationship with the African land as symbolised by Charley Slatter. At the same time, the protagonists of *The Grass is Singing* either end in death or mentally deranged and Africa emerges a victor. It is no surprise that in Lessing's *The Grass is singing* (1950) the voice of the white child is literally non-existent as the Turners are even childless.

To argue that a white settler was born in Zimbabwe, and that the land a white farmer had had not been inherited but purchased (Buckle 2000; 2003), is to miss the holistic history around it and the embedded politics therein. For instance, Mary's origins (Lessing, 1950) are traced to South Africa and as such she is a migrant in the then Rhodesia. Manase (2016) explores white narratives and analyses several novels, and memoirs, by former white farmers in Zimbabwe to establish how they expressed their responses to the land reform programme of post-2000. Manase focusses on the sentiments of the white farmers, and this study addresses the white childhoods during the same period.

A whole chapter is dedicated in this study to discuss white authors' depiction of specifically, white children, and their livelihoods during the *Third Chimurenga* or in crisis Zimbabwe. It is not only black children whose identities were affected by various circumstances that emerged due to the *Third Chimurenga*. White children also deserve equal attention to provide a holistic appreciation of childhood identities at the height of the Zimbabwe crisis post-2000. The focus also enables one to comprehend how the white child characters negotiate new identities in the face of the changing circumstances regarding the land.

Reading Rheam's "Christmas" offers insights into how white children were affected in comparison to the older white generation (see Chapter 4 of this study). In essence, the younger white generation still grapples with building their futures, hence some of them relocated to Europe in search of sanity and greener pastures. At the same time, the older white generation remained behind to spend their last days in Zimbabwe, with the little resources after losing farmland. It follows that the land redistribution exercise or *Third Chimurenga*, became a turning point in the history of land ownership in Zimbabwe. The new circumstances are ironic in that the whites are presented as victims of land seizures while the blacks are perpetrators of the violence. It was as if the 1890s land grabs had been metrically reversed in post-2000 period. As it were, this study explores how imagined black, and white children negotiate their sense of belonging.

I also examine how a poverty-ridden society shapes the lives of child narrators and child characters in the selected short stories. The analysis draws on observations by Coe (1984) who contends that a particular socio-historical experience produces a particular childhood that is marked by, and partakes, of that history. The state of the political and economic affairs in the period under study is best summed up by Alexander and McGregor (2014: 749) who note that:

...the decade of change that culminated in the political violence of 2008, hyperinflation, and deindustrialisation and, collapsing services and mass impoverishment have prompted scholars to engage in wider debates in African studies.

As a result, there has been a proliferation of fiction that captures the crises prevailing in Zimbabwe. Among the literary works that have emerged are some which focus on the effects of the economic, social and political crisis on childhoods. To that effect, Ngugi (1993: 76) notes that, "if you want to know the future of a society, look at the eyes of the children. If you

want to maim the future of any society, you simply maim the children.” This underscores the centrality of childhood in the imaginaries of the well-being and future of any society. This centrality of childhood as a pointer to the wellbeing or otherwise of a society has also been highlighted by Muponde (2005; 2015) who views childhood as a contested terrain in which the larger tensions of society manifest themselves. Therefore, this study traces how childhoods are created, and imagined, within the context of the *Third Chimurenga* or crisis in Zimbabwe, with a view to understanding the dynamics of the Zimbabwean crisis from a literary perspective.

The narratives that emerged after the Land Reform Programme are reflective of the dire economic crisis that continue to worsen in Zimbabwe. The study’s selected period is, according to Muchemwa (2002), a period wherein the negotiation with and writing about the land in Zimbabwe reflected an urban[sic] dystopia symptomatic of failure in both culture and politics as an offshoot of the theme of land and belonging. This dystopia was characterised by such elements as violence, corruption, exploitation, control, poverty and survival, as depicted in the selected short stories. Similarly, Raftopoulos (2009: 202) describes the post 2000 period as a period which resulted in:

the rapid decline of the economy, characterised by, among other things: steep declines in industrial and agricultural productivity; historical levels of hyperinflation; the informalisation of labour; the dollarization of economic transactions; displacements; and a critical erosion of livelihoods.

In addition, Muchemwa (2002) notes that the current literature in Zimbabwe often reflects a breakdown in the traditional family and the emergence of children, in the role of mothers and fathers replacing parents lost to AIDS, and children experiencing domestic abuse or grinding, humiliating poverty. It is, therefore, interesting to note that childhood representations in this study are examined at a time when the traditional conceptions of family have been complicated by the challenges brought about by the crisis. These include challenges resulting from the HIV/AIDS pandemic as described by Muchemwa; failure by fathers to provide for their families due to the debilitating economic hardships; and the emergence of the matriarch as the main figure trying to keep the family afloat (and thus challenging traditional gender roles). The negotiation of social and personal identities in such cases is complex and persistently linked to culture, gender, family, history and race.

The selected short stories show that the literature under study is produced against a backdrop of harsh socio-economic, cultural and political conditions birthed by the continued unresolved crisis, which gripped Zimbabwe as far back as the 1890s, and resurfaces quite critically in post-2000 era. For example, in Mlalazi's "Pay day hell" (2005) the author depicts a scenario reminiscent of a crumbled economy. Therefore, this study investigates the nature of childhood identities constituted from such harsh economic situations to add new dimensions to the study of childhood identities. This is achieved through a consideration of the implications of the history of the nation under different political and historical circumstances when most of the land was owned by the white minority people.

1.1.6 Land, Childhood and Identity

I identified the *Third Chimurenga*, marked by the fast-track land redistribution exercise, as a major turning point on how childhoods are represented in the post-2000 Zimbabwean literature. Prior to this, Zimbabwean literary representations of childhood identities were mostly informed by the colonial history of the nation. As such, scholars such as Muponde (2015) locate childhood identities within the discourses of history, politics, resistance and memory. The question of how black and white children negotiate their sense of belonging, and identity, in relation to their new circumstances regarding the repossession and dispossession of the land for all children, is never fully answered. Whether the black and white child relations are interlinked to the beginning of land redistribution in 2000 or traditional aspects, is exposed and shown in the analyses. My analysis is carried out in the context of the crisis and the selected short stories under study. I am aware that there is a very thin line between children's negotiation of their sense of belonging and identity both during the colonial period and the *Third Chimurenga*. Nonetheless, it is clear that children in the Zimbabwean narratives are affected by one *Chimurenga* or another or both or the three of them.

A brief analysis of some of the literary texts is instructive. Deployed in a novel form, Marechera's *The House of Hunger*, (1978) reflects how children such as the unnamed protagonist, his friend, 'The Poet' and the girl, Cynthia, negotiated for identity and belonging at the height of resistance to colonial subjugations. At the same time, the uniqueness of the narratives is that they are pinned on traditional conceptions of key children-linked themes that include innocence, violence, physical hunger and education. However, the children battle to negotiate the world of adults within a context where the moral fibre of the society has been

seriously compromised by the realities of colonialism. Rape, sex, violence, alcoholism, stifled relations and physical hunger typically pervade much of the novella, and the same is noted in Mungoshi's (1980) short story, "The Brother" (*Some Kinds of Wounds and Other Stories*). In all the cases, the protagonists resort to flight or at least leaving the home.

However, there is a difference between the *Second Chimurenga*-linked narratives and the current study. The difference is that the selected *Third Chimurenga* short stories describe children's struggles as they negotiate belonging and constitute identities that are directly linked to the land. There is an indisputable link between land and identity depicted in the selected stories. This study examines black and white Zimbabwean short stories published in English between 2000 and 2014, which represent the lives of black and white children and how they negotiate national, social and personal identities in the post-2000 land redistribution era.

The study also deliberates on how perspectives on childhoods and identity continue to shift in response to the history and politics of the land. For instance, there are emergent childhood identities that are constituted and these are not childhood identities marked by resistance against colonialism, as discussed earlier. These emergent identities are marked by suffering and survival in the face of a complex and deepening crisis generally flagged as the *Third Chimurenga* in Zimbabwe. Various scholars have explored the link between identity and the land. Manase (2011) discusses the importance of history and cultural significance of the land in the formation of personal and social identities in his examination of perceptions on the land and identities in post-2000 Zimbabwean fiction. Alexander (2007) and Magosvongwe (2013) weigh in on the debates on the legitimacy of the land reform programme, and both emphasise the importance of the ties between land and identity. Alexander (2007: 183) reflects on a number of factors in which land is significant to people, pointing out that land:

...is about identity as well as production and class formation; it is about aesthetic values and spiritual meaning, as well as being central to the constructions of institutions of the state; it fires political struggles and violence alongside the literary imagination; and it is the basis for both building and breaking a host of social relationships.

Alexander's discussion on the link between land, identity, production and class formation, resonates with Magosvongwe's view (2013: 4) that:

by alienating the indigenous inhabitants from their land, the new system undermined their self-sufficiency and also fractured and distorted relationships and identities [...] dignity, social status and identities that individuals and communities acquire are based on their relationship with the land.

The above explains why the pre-independence Black nationalist discourses centred on the land question. As a unitary factor, land pushed Black nationalists to take up arms and fight against colonialism. Alexander aptly points out that the land drove the political struggles, illuminating the anticipation observed in the euphoria of independence by the black Zimbabweans. Their vision of independence meant having the disparities concerning the land ownership addressed. They knew that repossession of their land would be synonymous with regaining identity and dignity, and sense of belonging to their native land. It also meant regaining their means of production and reconnecting spiritual ties with the land of their ancestors.

Alexander's (2007) reference to the land being tied to aesthetic values and spiritual meaning connects with Magosvongwe's (2013: 4) observations that the loss of one's land impacts on their "un/belongingness, being, self-image, self-worth, and self-confidence, including guiding principles that may affirm or negate active participation and contribution in life." This means that the black people's loss of their land displaced them from a spiritual grounding, which is fundamental in every African person's life. Hove's *Bones* (1988), explores this position. Consequently, the ZANU PF narrative invoked the spirits of Shona Nehanda and Kaguvu during the *Second Chimurenga*. These, as earlier alluded to, were two spirit mediums who inspired the Zimbabwean revolution during the *First Chimurenga* war against British rule in the 1890s.

During the *Second Chimurenga*, ZANLA forces, the ZANU PF military wing, reportedly operated under the guidance of two spirit mediums to find grounding and purpose in their quest for liberation from the oppressive white colonial rule. When Chimoto, Baba Nina and the narrator in Hoba's "Specialisation," visit *sekuru* (traditional diviner) to get divine intervention after encountering failures on the farm they had grabbed from a white settler, one clearly sees connections to the spiritual realm that was used during the *Second Chimurenga*. However, the fractured and distorted relationships mentioned above can be traced to the race relations between blacks and whites during and after colonialism. In the same vein, Alexander (2007) says the land is the basis for both building, and breaking, a host of social relationships. I, therefore, examine shifting notions of identity after the land redistribution to find how the

fictional children from both races negotiate national, social and personal identities under their new circumstances regarding the land.

1.1.7 Surviving the Crisis: Child Abuse and Neglect in Post-2000 Zimbabwean Fiction

A review of scholarly literature on children is critical as a study of this nature alludes to issues that include the violation of human/children's rights, child abuse/neglect and child labour. The crisis and violation of children's rights, and how this relates to the Zimbabwean situation deserves analysis. The study's examination of different fictional forms of abuse that children are subjected to offers the possibility of a reconstruction of the civil and legal rights of children. This is done by examining how the land reform policies have impacted on the plight of children represented in the selected literary works.

The Preamble to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) states that:

Recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world....

As a result, the Preamble should also act as a guiding principle in childhood studies, especially in assessing whether the representations of childhoods under study eschew the values of human rights broadly and children's rights in particular. This study reflects how representations of childhood during the decade and half of crises highlights the violations of children's rights and the kind of childhood that emerges as a result. McClennen and Moore (2015) note that the concept of human rights is an idea, a legal practice and a political claim. Hence, this study considers the link between the deteriorating living conditions, which lead to neglected childhoods observed in some of the selected stories, and the ruling party of the day.

It is crucial to acknowledge the efforts that governments throughout the world have made to place children's issues on their agendas. This has culminated in various conventions and declarations such as The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1990), and the African Charter on the rights and welfare of the child (Freeman, n.d). Part of this study entails analysing how the Government of Zimbabwe sustains the values of the protection of children amidst the land reform programme through an examination of the imagined childhood identities emerging from the Zimbabwean crisis. The imagined childhood identities in the

selected literature provide an idea on the extent to which children's needs are met, based on the consideration that the role of literature is to reflect the events taking place in the larger society.

The case of the position of Nordic countries amid the Covid-19 pandemic is important here in a study on the significance of considering children's rights. The Nordic region drew on its long history of promoting the rights and well-being of children in its emphasis on the right of children to be heard and involved in matters that involve them (Nordic Welfare Centre, 2023). The conception here is that crises at times challenge human rights, and if the Covid-19 pandemic compelled the Nordic countries to affirm children's rights as noted above, then the *Third Chimurenga* in Zimbabwe, should not have trampled on the children's rights during post-2000 period as depicted in some of the selected stories. The Covid-19 pandemic witnessed the enacting of laws which restricted human mobility as governments tried to protect the population from the Covid-19 virus. In addition, schools and recreational centres were closed (Nordic Welfare Centre, 2023), and as such the fulfilment of the children's rights to education and recreation (through play) was trampled on. Comparatively, during the *Third Chimurenga*, instead of having restrictions on human mobility, the opposite was true wherein the resettled families were forced to move from their traditional areas, or home (Hoba's "The Trek") where social amenities were present such as schools, and healthcare centres, to new farms where the same did not exist. In Hoba's "The Trek" (2005: 118), the child protagonist narrates the experiences of their family following his father's allocation of a commercial sugarcane farm by the government, and declares:

There is no school here. There are no other children. They all went away with their parents when Baba couldn't pay them.

The short story ends with the family returning to their traditional peasant homestead, described as "home" (Hoba, 2005:120) where some child rights are upheld. Hoba (2005:120) narrates, "But we are heading for home now... There will be school for me."

The above discussion shows how the Zimbabwean crisis trampled upon children's rights in various ways. Children seemed to have been overlooked, with their welfare and rights regarded as secondary. The declaration that "Children and young people have the right to be heard, seen and involved in matters that involve them" (Nordic Welfare Centre, 2023: 5), is a regulation of

the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1990). Nonetheless, the declaration was mere rhetoric in the *Third Chimurenga* case and as such, children became automatic victims of the crisis.

1.1.8 Conceptualising Child Abuse and Neglect

A re-reading of the crisis that focuses on the experiences of the children and young people compels one to concentrate on children's reconfigured identities. The identities of these children are symbolic and imbued with assertiveness, and in some cases, they express a demand for agency in matters concerning their rights. The anti-land reform programme critics' perception of the *Third Chimurenga* as chaotic and a violation of human rights reflects that the topical issue and emphasis was on adult rights to property and justice. There was no agency in placing children's rights as equally needing attention. In other words, there was no policing nor implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The government simply ignored its mandate, hence, conclusions that there was no longer rule of law in Zimbabwe.

The representation of Zimbabwean children in imaginative literature in general, and the selected literature in particular, shows evidence of childhoods fraught with problems. This underscores the significance of examining some of the circumstances surrounding the troubled childhoods, one of which is the violations of children's rights, as depicted in the selected stories under scrutiny. This is necessary as it allows an appreciation of the circumstances, systems, and ways that result in the multifaceted forms of child abuse in the context of a crisis, and the emerging childhood identities represented in the narratives. It is no surprise that the African Union (1999: 7) notes that:

the situation of most African children, remains critical due to the unique factors of their socio-economic, cultural, traditional, and developmental circumstance, natural disasters, armed struggles, exploitation and hunger....

According to the WHO World Report on Violence and Health, (Krug et al., 2005) child abuse has for a long time been recorded in literature, art and science. Child abuse, which is viewed as child maltreatment (Font and Maguire-Jack, 2020), is complex with millions of children affected globally. Scholars such as Krug and Dahlberg (2002) warn that it is important, when handling matters linked to child abuse, to ascertain exactly what one means because child abuse

or child maltreatment has drawn the attention of governments, child rights movements, and academics, among other stakeholders, given that child abuse is part of a child welfare system.

There is evidence that child abuse is a global problem. It occurs in a variety of forms and is deeply rooted in cultural, economic and social practices. The WHO World Report on Violence and Health notes that solving this global problem requires a much better understanding of its occurrence in a range of settings as well as of its causes and consequences in these settings. This is why this study analyses the nature of social interaction by the characters in the selected short stories to understand the problems affecting children and affecting childhood identities.

The lack of adequate data on issues affecting children has also been noted by Chinyangara et al., (1997) in their publication on indicators of children's rights. They acknowledge that the data on social security provision for children are scant and not children centred. In addition, there has been no study linking the effect of recession and structural adjustment directly to the economic situation of children. In Zimbabwe, the subject of economic exploitation of children is a recent debate, and therefore, there is a serious dearth of literature. This alone indicates the need for more research in this field, and this study considers these issues from a literary perspective.

Child problems take various forms. These include child abuse (both emotional and physical), neglect, child labour and economic deprivation. In this study, I examine these because of government actions, and particularly the impact of the events of the *Third Chimurenga* on the imagined childhoods. Krug and Dahlberg (2002) discuss the prevalent forms of neglect, such as physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse and neglect. This discussion helps us to understand issues of child abuse that are prevalent in the short stories under study. Both scholars define physical abuse as “those acts of commission by a caregiver that cause actual physical harm or have the potential for harm” (Krug and Dahlberg, 2002: 60). Sexual abuse is described as “those acts where a caregiver uses a child for sexual gratification” (Krug and Dahlberg, 2002: 60). Another form of abuse occurs at the emotional level as described thus:

[it is] the failure of a caregiver to provide an appropriate and supportive environment, and includes acts that have an adverse effect on the emotional health and development of a child. Such acts include restricting a child's movements, denigration, ridicule, threats and intimidation, discrimination, rejection, and other non-physical forms of hostile treatment. (Krug and Dahlberg, 2002: 60)

In addition, Krug and Dahlberg (2002: 60) point out that neglect refers to:

...the failure of a parent to provide for the development of the child... in one or more of the following areas: health, education, emotional development, nutrition, shelter and safe living conditions.

The above definitions provide a guide on how the selected stories are examined to assess the emergent childhood identities represented in those stories in the context of crisis. This is notwithstanding the fact that other scholars have dealt with the issue of troubling and troubled childhoods and abuse. For instance, according to Chinyangara et al., (1997). The International Society for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect compared definitions of abuse from 58 countries and found some commonality in what was considered abusive. The society drafted the following definition that:

Child abuse or maltreatment constitutes all forms of physical and/or emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect or negligent treatment or commercial or other exploitation resulting in actual or potential harm to the child's health, survival, development or dignity in the context of a relationship, trust or power. (ISPCAN, 2008:17)

Therefore, my explorations of representations of childhood identities considers the aforesaid as child abuse. There are cultural acts which western scholarship view as instances of child abuse. Finkelhor and Brown (1985), also consider child abuse matters in their article titled, "The traumatic impact of child sexual abuse." They argue that child sexual abuse leads to feelings of betrayal, powerlessness and stigmatisation. I draw on these findings in my analysis of imagined childhood identities in the selected literature and period.

Children's perceptions and aspirations in life as considered by Mella (2012), in a study on homeless children's lives in the streets, are marked unfulfilled dreams as a result of the difficult and impossible conditions that they live in. In this research, I examine how the actions and behaviour of adults impact the future aspirations of their children, including the imagined emerging childhood identities. For instance, in "Mainini Grace's Promise" by Valerie Tagwira (2008) in *Women Writing Zimbabwe*; the child is turned into a caregiver when her mother succumbs to HIV/AIDS at the expense of her own aspirations, which she continues to nurture until she realises the futility of it all. The child's fate is equated to that of adult characters in Patterson's (1964) novel *The Children of Sisyphus*, mainly Solomon, Dinah, and Cyrus, who

struggle to find meaning in their lives. While Cyrus holds on to Rastafarianism as a coping mechanism, the child in the short story “Mainini Grace’s Promise,” has no such luxury and as such fails to explain her own misfortune. Thus, society is held accountable for the emotional torture as shown in the conditions of ailing Mainini Grace after her return from the diaspora, too frail to assume her duties as a parent.

Nyandiya-Bundy’s (1996, 2000) work on child sexual abuse and childcare practices in Zimbabwe comes in handy in this study. Nyandiya-Bundy’s (1996, 2000) views such as how societal norms and traditional practices influence both the occurrence and response to child abuse, are considered in the analysis of the selected literary texts. Focus is on the representations of the violations of children’s rights with reference to sexual abuse in stories such as “Tomorrow is not another day” by Julius Chingono (2006). Similar studies have also been carried out elsewhere in Africa. For instance, Capo-Chichi and Agboadannon’s (2015) provides some insights into my analysis of representations of childhood identities in selected short stories of the *Third Chimurenga* period. Guarino and Basuk’s (2010) also presents important points of departure in relation to this study as it borders on the violation of children’s rights.

Child labour is another phenomenon that is examined in this study. There seems to be divergent schools of thought regarding child work/child labour. Freeman (n.d) avers that different societies have different understandings of childhood, and that there are different views on questions regarding whether children should work or be involved in the worst forms of labour. To this effect, Scheper-Hughes and Sargent (1998) contend that childhood integrates both a biological and social process. As a result, a child’s biological development involves learning about adult responsibilities without having to deal with adult responsibilities. At the same time, Qvurtrup (1994) observes that childhood transcends beyond the notion of just a period in the lives of children. It should be perceived as part of the social construct of everyday society where children affect and are affected by the changes that occur in their societies, and how changes in the economy affect the children in the society.

In this study, some of the stories portray extreme conditions of poverty that in some cases force children to work to provide for themselves and their families. This phenomenon is examined in this to identify the abuses linked to child work as portrayed in the selected stories. This is designed to ascertain whether child work infringes on the rights of the same children.

Bourdillon (2006) suggests that it is vital to understand the continuities between the various stages of childhood and the adult world in the conceptualisations of childhood to see children as active agents of their own developments. Bourdillon (2006) seems to suggest that there is a way in which child's work may not be such a negative thing. Hence, in my analyses of selected stories I attempt to distinguish between the rightness of child work associated with child development, and its wrongness when it borders on the infringement of the rights of the same children.

It should be underscored that children, as observed by Pearce (2010), constitute over half of the world's population, and thus, cannot be treated as a homogenous group. Pearce (2010: 171) notes that "in a situation of extreme and unexpected hardships the rich exploit the poor, and the poor exploit the poorer." In addition,

...the poorer and most powerless are the children who have at least this in common: they are physically smaller than adults and they are dependent, both economically and emotionally on the adults who raise them." (Pearce, 2010: 172)

Thus, Pearce alludes to the vulnerability of children, which makes them susceptible to increased exploitation in a time of crisis. I add to this that, the children in any society or in a crisis for that matter, are also affected by the powers that govern them. The actions of the political leaders beget a certain kind of childhood as investigated in this research.

Finally, Pearce (2010: 173) observes that Bourdillon's (2006) work on child labour, for instance, "is another indication of the extent to which social and moral values that work well for earlier generations can no longer help families in situations of intolerable poverty." Thus, this study is important in its exploration of how childhood identities are represented in a different environment from which the likes of Bourdillon carried their studies.

1.1.9 Intersectionality and childhood identities

Intersectionality is a critical sociological framework used to explore how different axes of identity such as gender, race, class, age, and other social categories intersect to shape individuals' experiences, particularly with regard to how systems of oppression and privilege work together. Originating in the work of Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), intersectionality allows

for an analysis of how overlapping forms of marginalisation impact individuals differently. In the case of childhood identities during the Zimbabwean crisis, this framework helps to understand how various social, political, and economic factors such as gender, poverty, political instability, and the collapse of social structures interact to shape the experiences of children living through tumultuous times.

The Zimbabwean crisis, particularly following the turn of the millennium, created a perfect storm of economic, social, and political upheaval. Hyperinflation, land reform, political violence, and the breakdown of social systems led to widespread poverty, displacement, and loss of basic services. Children in Zimbabwe were among the hardest hit by the crisis, and their emerging identities were deeply affected by these intersecting challenges.

Judith Butler, a renowned gender theorist, has made significant contributions to the understanding of intersectionality, though she is more commonly associated with the development of gender theory and the concept of performativity. Intersectionality, as initially developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw, focuses on how various social identities (such as race, gender, class, and sexuality) intersect to shape individual experiences of discrimination and privilege. Butler's work complements and expands on this by emphasising how these intersections are not just additive but relational and performative in nature.

Butler's concept of performativity plays a central role in how intersectionality is understood in her framework. She argues that gender (and by extension, other identities) is not an inherent, static characteristic but something that is *performed* through repeated actions, behaviours, and language. This idea is primarily explored in her seminal work, *Gender Trouble* (1990). In her view, gender is a social construct that is enacted by individuals through their behaviours and the expectations placed upon them, rather than something biologically determined.

Significance of intersectionality on Zimbabwean crisis childhood identities

To understand the significance of intersectionality in the context of childhood identities in Zimbabwe during the crisis, it is crucial to contextualise the broader challenges that children faced. The economic collapse led to the widespread collapse of education, healthcare, and family structures. Children were forced to take on roles traditionally reserved for adults, especially when parents and caregivers were either incapacitated by illness (such as HIV/AIDS), economically unable to support their families, or affected by political violence.

Moreover, children found themselves caught in the intersection of multiple factors: gender, class, geographical location, and familial roles, all of which shaped how they experienced and responded to the crisis. In many instances, these crises were disproportionately felt by certain groups, with girls, orphans, and children from disadvantaged families bearing the heaviest burdens. The stories of children during the Zimbabwean crisis reflect not only the economic hardships they faced but also how intersecting issues of gender, age, class, and political conflict compounded their suffering and shaped their identities.

Gender is one of the most prominent axes of intersectionality that shapes childhood identities. In many cases, girls in Zimbabwe, during the crisis, faced heightened vulnerability due to traditional gender norms that expected them to take on caregiving and domestic roles from an early age. Stories such as “Mainini Grace’s Promise” (where Sarai is forced to care for sick parents) illustrate how girls are disproportionately tasked with household responsibilities, often at the expense of their education and well-being. Girls also faced increased vulnerability to sexual violence, a consequence of the societal breakdown and lack of state protection. The abuse, neglect, and exploitation of young girls during this time is a key aspect of how gender shapes their experiences and identities in crisis conditions.

In addition, gendered expectations of girls in crisis situations often conflict with their emerging childhood identities. Girls like Rita in “Forever haunted by Rita’s eyes” and Fungai in “Tomorrow is not another Day” are not only physically vulnerable but are also often forced into situations that shape them into sexual commodities, as seen in Rita’s gang rape and pregnancy and Fungai’s sexual abuse by vaHove in exchange for food. In these stories, intersectionality provides insight into the unique suffering of girls, who are subject to a confluence of societal expectations, economic hardship, and political instability.

The intersection of age and socio-economic status during the crisis is another key factor that shapes childhood identities. Poverty is rampant during the crisis, and many children, especially those in rural or marginalized urban areas, face extreme deprivation. Stories like “Tomorrow is Not Another Day” by Julius Chingono, in which Fungai and Masimba, two orphans, struggle to survive on their own, highlight how poverty and the lack of social support networks thrust children into survival modes that are typically outside the bounds of childhood innocence. Fungai, for example, suffers sexual abuse as a result of her poverty, which is exacerbated by the absence of protection from caregivers or the state.

Political violence and instability, marked by the government's land reform program and its subsequent economic policies, also intersected with children's experiences during the crisis. The state, in many ways, failed to protect children from the impacts of the crisis, and this failure contributed to the formation of childhood identities rooted in resistance, alienation, and survival. In stories like "The Trek" by Lawrence Hoba, where the child narrator witnesses the violent re-eviction of farmers from their land, the intersection of politics, state violence, and childhood experiences is evident. Children, witnessing or being directly involved in protests or politically motivated violence, emerged as both victims and agents in these circumstances. Their identity formation was shaped by the failure of the state to provide security, stability, and opportunities. The state's role in creating and perpetuating an environment of fear, instability, and violence placed children in situations where their identities were directly influenced by the political realities of the time. They were not only victims of violence but also were socialised into accepting or resisting the political climate, as seen in the ways in which children and youth characters, like The lanky teenager who throws the first stone in "Tables Turned Over" by Adrian Ashley, take to the streets in protest.

Intersectionality, therefore, provides a powerful framework for analysing how individuals' multiple identities shape their experiences within complex systems of power and oppression. By taking into account the intersection of race, class, gender, sexuality, and other factors, it offers a more comprehensive understanding of social inequality and helps to uncover the experiences of those who may otherwise be marginalised in traditional analyses. The application of intersectionality to the analysis of childhood identities in the context of the Zimbabwean crisis provides a nuanced understanding of how various social and political factors intersect to shape the lives and experiences of children. Gender, class, political instability, and family dynamics all play a role in the emerging identities of children during the crisis, resulting in complex and often painful lived realities. These intersecting factors illustrate the compounded nature of suffering that children face in such an environment, and how their identities are shaped by these intersecting forms of oppression. Through intersectionality, we see that the childhoods of these children are not isolated from the broader social, political, and economic crises but are deeply influenced by these factors. The intersection of these forces provides a framework for understanding the complex identities children forge in response to the multiple challenges they face. In the Zimbabwean crisis, children were not just passive victims of circumstances but actively engaged in navigating the complex realities of their world, whether by adapting, resisting, or surviving.

Further to the notion of intersectionality, language can also be added to the different axes of identity like race, gender, age, class and other social categories which intersect to shape individual's experiences. Quentin Williams and Christopher Stroud's *Linguistic Citizenship: Language and Politics in Postnational Modernities* (2015) explores the concept of "linguistic citizenship" in the context of globalised and postnational societies. They argue that language plays a crucial role in how individuals engage with political and social power, particularly in postnational settings where traditional notions of citizenship—tied to the nation-state—are becoming increasingly complex and fragmented. This concept highlights how language, as a social tool, can shape people's access to power, inclusion, and participation in social and political processes. In postnational modernities, where identities are no longer solely based on the nation-state, linguistic citizenship becomes crucial for marginalised communities. The authors suggest that individuals may find belonging, agency, and empowerment through their languages, especially in multi-ethnic, multicultural, and transnational environments. In these spaces, language may serve as a marker of both identity and resistance.

The book addresses the political implications of language use, highlighting that linguistic rights and access to language can often be tied to power structures. In some cases, those who control dominant languages may suppress or marginalise minority languages, impacting individuals' ability to fully participate in public life. As a result, the authors discuss how language can become a tool for social and political exclusion or inclusion. Linguistic citizenship, in this sense, is not only about linguistic competence, but also about how language contributes to one's position within society, shaping issues like access to education, political participation, and cultural expression. The authors examine how language shapes the experiences of individuals who live in liminal or transitional spaces, such as migrants, refugees, or individuals in postcolonial contexts, where language is closely tied to issues of power, identity, and social justice.

In the context of the Zimbabwean crisis, Williams and Stroud's work on linguistic citizenship can be seen in how language plays a significant role in the socio-political dynamics of postcolonial societies. In Zimbabwe, the intersection of language, politics, and power is evident in the way the English language has historically been the language of authority, while indigenous languages are often marginalised. The dominance of the English language is unpacked by Phillipson (1997) who defines linguistic imperialism as the dominance of one language over others, which results in the marginalisation, suppression, or even extinction of

other languages. He explores how English, in particular, has emerged as the dominant global language, not only due to its utility in international communication but also because of historical processes of colonisation and ongoing global power structures. This is supported by Skutnabb-Kangas (1996) a prominent scholar in the field of sociolinguistics who introduced the concept of linguicism as a way of understanding the oppression of individuals or groups based on language. Skutnabb-Kangas' work draws attention to how linguistic inequalities are structured within societies, focusing particularly on how speakers of minority languages or non-dominant languages are marginalized, discriminated against, and excluded from various opportunities in education, employment, and social integration. As Zimbabwe experiences a period of crisis and transformation, linguistic identity becomes a key area of contention, as those who speak the dominant languages of power may continue to wield influence, while those who speak minority or indigenous languages may find themselves excluded from key social, political, and economic opportunities.

This above explains the agony expressed by protagonist in the selected stories such as the narrator in "The Trek," Sarai in "Mainini Grace's promise" and Ndlala in 'Eeish" over their lack of opportunity to get an education. This will exclude them from possessing the dominant language. This will impact their ability to participate in economic and public life. Thus, the concept of linguistic citizenship provides a framework for understanding how language intersects with issues of power, inclusion, and identity in Zimbabwe's socio-political landscape, particularly in the context of children's experiences during the crisis.

1.2 Literature review

Scholars, locally and globally, have undertaken literary childhood studies with different outcomes. Zimbabwean scholars such as Muonde (2004, 2005, 2006); Mangena (2011) and Muchemwa (2002), have grappled with the subject of representations of childhoods with each having their own angle of focus, as discussed further in this section. Previous studies differ considerably in focus from the current niche on emerging childhood identities in the post-2000 Zimbabwean fiction.

Throughout his works on childhood studies, Muonde (2004, 2005, 2006, 2015), dwells on how literary representations of childhood bear upon questions of history, politics, resistance and memory. Muonde also remarks on how childhoods in literature:

provide a counterpoint to the nationalist discourse...making it possible for us to start thinking about the ways in which these narratives contest, disrupt and threaten national discourse (Muonde 2015: 3).

These remarks project childhood as a critical discourse vital for the continued and sustained critical examination of colonialism and its effects on the African continent. Childhood tropes, and how childhood continues to inform Zimbabwean trajectories of politics, history, the land and identity provide fertile ground for critical engagement. Prior studies in the field of literary representations of Zimbabwean childhood have mostly been characterised by both “colonial and anticolonial struggles” (Muonde, 2005: 6). For instance, Muonde traces the evolution of the image of the child from 1972 to 2000. This brings yet another difference between existing studies and this one which is based on fiction published in post-2000.

Consequently, the different timeframe settings speak to different analytic variances. Muonde’s (2015) interrogation of childhood studies is mostly informed by resistance to colonial hegemony, while my focus is on emerging childhood identities as a result of the Zimbabwean crisis, particularly the *Third Chimurenga*. However, given that this is not a comparative study, I show how imagined childhoods in the post-2000 Zimbabwean fiction, reflect earlier representations, since the crisis in this study has its roots in the colonial and pre-colonial legacies. The legacies include the discrepancies in land ownership, which have not been redressed after the attainment of political and flag independence in 1980, hence, the land invasions of 2000 triggered by the Svosve villagers of Marondera District (*The Herald*, 2015).

One of the major ideals surrounding childhood is the need to protect the physical and emotional integrity of children from harmful practices (Boakye-Boaten, 2010). While this is the ideal, Mangena (2011: 205) observes that “a closer reading of post-independence Zimbabwean short stories shows that childhood is more complex than its traditional conceptions.” The traditional conceptions here entail a scenario where children are protected, and their social, emotional and economic needs are met. As such, Mangena’s assertion underlines the significance of exploring the diverging childhood depictions in literature.

There are various factors that render childhoods different from the above-noted traditional conceptions. Oavourtrup (1994) concedes that the country’s economic status is one of these various factors. Since the late 1990s, Zimbabwe has been embroiled in a serious economic crisis that adversely affected the living conditions of people in general, and children in

particular (Mella 2012; Nyandiya-Bundy 2000). These problems affect children at the economic, political and psychological level. De Wet and Ewemade (2018: 96) observe that

...from young ages, children and youth are dealing with adult problems such as poverty and food security. For this reason, children and youth enter the labour market earlier than expected, compromising their scholastic performance and future earnings if they drop out of school.

Thus, children such as the girl child in “Mainini Grace’s Promise,” are expected to complete their education and then enter the labour market even if it means offering care to the sick. However, community and societal challenges bar children from this expectation and they end up assuming dual tasks of having to work and learn, more often than not with detrimental effects on their education as children, and the youth, or dropping out of school completely. Therefore, this study analyses how the community and societal forces contribute to the plight of child characters in the selected short stories under study.

1.2.1 Overview of Literary Studies on Childhood

Studies on childhood have also been carried out elsewhere in Africa. For instance, Ouma’s (2011) study on Nigerian fiction (which he later developed into a monograph where he expands some of his ideas) explores childhood as an alternative source of memory and archive as diasporan Nigerians grapple with Nigerian identities, and understanding the transnational and multinational identities after migrating from Nigeria to Western countries. However, Ouma’s (2011) study differs from the current research in terms of content and context. Where my focus is on childhood identities emerging from the Zimbabwean decade of crisis, Ouma (2011) addresses diasporan and migration challenges. Furthermore, Ouma (2011) focuses on how migration challenges on childhood identity formation are deployed using the novel form, whereas this study focuses on the short story form or genre.

I examine notions of childhood representation in literature after the post-2000 land redistribution phase (the *Third Chimurenga*) in Zimbabwe, and how children negotiate for space in the larger and alternative national discourses. Thus, the study assumes that the representations of childhood in the post-2000 era paves way to new engagements with history, land, identity and nation building. This takes us back to the sentiments echoed by Coe (1984), regarding the way a particular socio-historical experience produces a particular childhood that

is marked by and partakes of that history. More so, Sutherland (2019) observes that there is need to appreciate representations of postcolonial African childhood to “destabilise narrow comprehensions of childhood and understandings around the never-ending effects of colonialism” (p. 65).

Nabutanyi’s (2013) study on troubled childhoods in African literature is also significant here. Nabutanyi (2013) defines troubled childhoods as the experiences of children who are exposed to various forms of violations including physical, psychological, sexual and emotional abuse. Part of my own study, like Nabutanyi’s, explores the susceptibility of children to various forms of abuse, violence, neglect, and exploitation. However, my study focuses on childhood identities marked by different forms of abuse emanating from Zimbabwe’s decade of crisis. This speaks to a specific, political and historical context, which is, the post-land redistribution era in Zimbabwe. The aim is to examine how the portrayal of childhoods in that period helps to understand the broader question of land, identity and the history of the nation. In addition, Nabutanyi focuses only on novels with child narrators/ protagonists. This is unlike in the stories I examine, which have both child narrators, and other stories that centre on the child/children, even if the stories are told in the third person narrative technique. However, where the child narrator is used, such as in Lawrence Hoba’s “The Trek” (2005) and Bryony Rheam’s “Christmas,” (2007), employing the same technique resonates with the idea that “authorial use of child narrators or protagonists offers an intimate use of children’s experiences in contexts of socio-political crisis” (Nabutanyi 2013: 3).

There are advantages associated with understanding the children’s experiences as viewed through their lenses. I am nevertheless aware of the challenges associated with having an adult author representing the child protagonist. As such, most stories leave us wondering whose voice to listen to. The representation dilemma is articulated by Gorup (2000: 71) who posits that the “adult imagination cannot access a child’s consciousness and the experiences of a child are lost to the adult.” Gorup (2000) explains that, on the one hand, the child is aware of her experiences and reality but lacks the language to express it, while on the other hand, the adult writer has the language but does not have access to the child’s consciousness. As a result, the child-narrator only serves as an extension of the adult author’s views and perspectives. In my opinion, what is important is how well an adult author can portray the fictional child’s

experiences while giving credible insights into how children experience the circumstances that they describe as child narrators.

Manase (2016: 14) has done a sustained exploration of the land question in Zimbabwe and acknowledges that “the Zimbabwean state and its citizens have been severely affected by the social, political and economic crisis that began in 2000.” Manase’s focus is on a particular sector of the affected Zimbabwean population, precisely the displaced white commercial farmers, their families and their workers. The choice of texts for Manase (2016) only includes white narratives and representations of the post-2000-land invasions. My study, which is also situated in the same context, is specifically drawn to the portrayal of black and white childhoods in the post-land redistribution short stories. These reflect how children from the two racial groups negotiated their identities in relation to matters to do with the land, belonging and the nation. However, despite Manase studying effects caused by the land issue, his focus is on the adult figure, whereas I have centred the child in my studies of the post-2000 land invasions and the impact that the invasions have had on identity formation.

In this study, I use crisis childhood tropes to shed more light on the Zimbabwean literary and historical trajectories. Ranger (2005: 217) contends that:

...nationalism as a movement, or set of movements, and as an ideology, remains central to contemporary Zimbabwe and still requires a great deal of rigorous historical questioning.”

The above assertion shows that prominent historians such as Ranger, approach the discourse of nationalism from a purely historical perspective. However, I approach the same subject from a literary perspective as I look at representations of childhood identities in the selected period to unearth an alternative history of the nation in crisis. This enquiry has also come about because of Muponde and Primorac’s (2005: xiii) observation that “patriotic history both builds from and departs from previous nationalist narratives, through a series of omissions, additions and simplifications.”

1.2.2 Representations of Childhood Identities

My study unearths some of the omissions and provides a new perspective regarding the representations of childhood identities. It maps and re-maps nationalism in contemporary

Zimbabwe through childhood representations in literary texts. This entails examining the conditions of suffering within the private lives of children represented in the texts, and how these can be reconciled with the overall conditions existing in the nation at large. This in turn shows how imagined childhood identities have altered in the course of history, particularly because of the land reform policy and the way in which it was implemented. This is a dimension that is not present in the writing of patriotic history referred to earlier. A tendency of this history is to report on what is positive for the government of the day. Therefore, I explore the emerging childhood identities in the selected period as part of the larger critique of post-independence Zimbabwe.

In my explorations of the consequences of the government policies on the land reform programme, I consider Chan's (2006) reference to a traumatised Zimbabwe and a traumatised Zimbabwean in the analysis of how the state appears to have carefully institutionalised tyranny in post-2000. My engagement with the factors that provide for the susceptibility of children to various forms of abuse, neglect, exploitation, violence and trauma seeks to contribute to the current debates on childhood studies and their place in the history of the Zimbabwean nation in crisis. This is done by offering different perspectives which allow for the unearthing of an alternative history of the nation drawn from the imagined personal lives of children.

Existing literary studies on African childhood also deliberately focused on the girl child in attempt to unearth the patriarchal ramifications in the society to explain the origins of the oppression of women in Africa. For instance, Pasi (2015) examines childhoods in African literature with a bias towards the girl child's experiences. In her analysis of Mahachi-Harper's (2004) novel *Echoes in the Shadows*, Pasi emphasises that her study navigates the contours of the notion of the girl child as the subaltern or the other. Whereas in my case, there is no desire to privilege one gender as the study considers both male and female imagined childhoods during the post-2000s.

Thus, a consideration of the above-mentioned representations of childhood indicates that the shifts in childhood representation are critically traced in this study by bringing in new critical paradigms in the postcolonial contemporary space. In this regard, Said's *Orientalism* helps frame the dehumanising effects of both colonial history and contemporary political struggles on childhood identities in Zimbabwe. The crisis exacerbates the marginalisation of youth as they face extreme hardship, while also complicating their sense of self within the broader

context of postcolonial tensions and identity formation. Edward Said's concept of *Orientalism* (1978) explores how the West perceives and represents the East as exotic, backward, and inferior, often constructing these identities to justify domination and colonial control. While Said primarily focuses on the relationship between the West and the Orient, his ideas can be applied to the context of childhood identities in Zimbabwe during the crisis.

In the context of Zimbabwe, especially during and after the 2000 land reform program, there is a similar dynamic where certain groups, particularly the youth, may be marginalised, viewed through an essentialised lens, and stripped of their agency in ways akin to the colonial othering described by Said. For the black children and youth in Zimbabwe, their identities are shaped by the trauma and dislocation of the crisis, but also by the lingering colonial mind-set and economic instability. The emerging childhood identities in the Zimbabwean crisis are caught between the residue of colonial oppression and the struggles for self-definition in the postcolonial era. Much like how the Orient was constructed in opposition to the West, the crisis forces Zimbabwean children into complex identities where they must navigate the legacies of colonialism, current state oppression, and their survival within a fractured society. I, therefore, position the land redistribution programme as a contested cultural, social, economic and political terrain where individuals, and collective childhood identities collide, reconfigure and reassemble.

1.3 Theoretical Framework and Methodology

In this study, I rely on more than one literary theoretical framework but have located the study within the discourse of New Historicism as amalgamated to postcolonialism. This is because the major tenet of the New Historicism field of enquiry places emphasis on the fact that every literary work is a product of the historic moment that created it (Greenblatt, 1980). According to Felluga (2002), Stephen Greenblatt's studies of the Renaissance have established him as the major figure commonly associated with New Historicism. Indeed, his influence meant that New Historicism first gained popularity among Renaissance scholars, many of whom were directly inspired by Greenblatt's ideas and approach.

1.3.1 New Historicism

New Historicism is a branch of historiography (Lyu, 2021), traced to the opening up of literary criticism in the 1980s to experimentations. New Historicism emerged after the cultural and political fermentations of the 1960s, and the rise of the 1970s feminist and gender identities against the new socio-political realities of the 1980s. It became an alternative literary criticism theory that placed more emphasis on merging historicism on one end, and literature on the other (Williams, 2011). In other words, the social and historical conditions obtaining in a literary work gave rise to the New Historicism. In a way, New Historicism, to which the dynamics of its origins will not be discussed in detail here because of its dense and variable-linkages to historicism – also has a long historical development of its own.

Nonetheless, New Historicists employed the Foucauldian concept of discourse, construction of knowledge, power and analysis of the human subject to locate literary texts of various genres, and literature in general in their historical and cultural contexts (Williams, 2011). In addition, Tyson (2011) offers an insightful way of considering New Historicism in his consideration of the difference between the questions that traditional historians raise and those that new historicists produce. Traditional historians usually ask what could have happened noting how the event may be saying about history. In contrast, new historicists, as articulated by Tyson (2011), are interested in how the event is interpreted, noting what the interpretations tell us about the interpreters. In other words, New Historicism resists the notion that “...history is a series of events that have a linear, causal relationship: event A caused event B; event B caused event C; and so on” (Tyson, 2011: 278).

In this case, my focus is on the question of what the selected stories reveal about childhoods in the context of the Zimbabwean crisis. I examine how the writers have captured the moment of crisis, and how that sheds light on childhoods represented in the selected short stories. It draws one back to the idea of the role of the author in recording history using fictional works to mirror society. Hence, an examination of the selected stories is likely to establish how the selected stories offer a clearer understanding of the emerging childhood identities during the *Third Chimurenga* in Zimbabwe. After all, and in Okot p’ Bitek’s (1986) *Artist the Ruler* conception, for the African, the struggle, whether political or economic, is a condition of a cultural struggle. This directly fits into New Historicism in that, literary appreciation, which is the task at hand here, is broadly a form of cultural analysis wherein the literary texts, or selected short stories in this case, are cultural products actively participating in a historical context “with reference to power relations operating within the society of its time” (Hickling, 2018: 54).

1.3.1.1 New Historicism and Literary Criticism

There are several approaches to literary criticism, depending on the genre, era, philosophical, cultural and other variables existing in the society or in the nature of the work of art itself. The application of the approaches has been very deliberate. That is, their choice for use in literary criticism has either been linked to thematic concerns of artists, their psychological, social or otherwise circumstances, or the experiences of characters or the environmental realities triggering behaviour, and actions of the people or ideas represented by various characters in each literary work. For instance, scientific theories of the mind such as Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis (Haekel, 2017), have been used to express underlying episteme in statements linked to human behaviour within literary texts. Hamlet's actions and attitudes towards his mother in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* reflects and are as a result of the Oedipus complex, he suffers from. Hamlet is in love with his mother, and her marrying his uncle, Claudius, following the death of his father, the King Hamlet of Denmark, is tantamount to betrayal. Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers* provides another instance of a literary work where Freud's psychoanalysis is reflected. Kumari (2016) notes that Connie's suppressed desires came out as an emotional outburst and driven by libido she established a sexual affair with a lower-class male servant, thereby revealing a moral dilemma out of her superego. Although *Hamlet* (Shakespeare) is a play and *Sons and Lovers* (D.H. Lawrence) a novel, both are works of art and a similar approach is used to appreciate the texts with phenomenal results. In Zimbabwe, Nyoni (2011) also alluded to psychoanalysis to appreciate Marechera's *The House of Hunger*, *Mindblast* and *The Black Insider*. Any serious literary critic, therefore, cannot, afford to live in a vacuum; they have to choose an analytical approach or underlying philosophy as a launchpad to their criticism. As such, every literary epoch, endeavour or practice has resulted in philosophies and literary theories being propounded and popularised as lenses to best appreciate literary texts. It is this basket of theories or approaches that have influenced both literary critics and writers alike.

This study investigates notions of childhood and how these, as represented in the selected short story texts, reveal economic, political and social realities of the crisis in Zimbabwe. Notions representing the economic, political and social and social realities of the crisis in Zimbabwe are part of the literary texts under study, which makes new historicism and postcolonial theories

“not as something external to, but as a self-reflexive aspect of, literature itself,” (Haekel, 2017) especially in Zimbabwean literature. That is, what is at stake is the critique of the Zimbabwean literature, and the basic question would be on the set of assumptions or practices that best capture the political and social realities of Zimbabwe

The 1980s witnessed new historicism as one of the many approaches that received attention in the criticism of literary studies. Lyu (2021) observes that its concepts and procedures are an assisted form of “various post structural theories” (1075). The fact that the approach is prefixed with new, means it is a relatively recent approach as well as the bedrock lying within the bowels of historicism as a whole that created the Stephen Greenblatt’s 1980s version. In other words, there is in historicism first- and second-generation new historicisms, all of which are pinned on the “idea that life can be understood historically” (Bervir, 2014:228). As a result, Hickling (2018) notes that New Historicism is a new interpretive strategy alluding to a form of cultural analysis that considers literature as a cultural product interacting with, and participating in its historical context with reference to power relations operating within a given society of its time.

Insko (n.d.) points out that there are significant differences between the first and new generation to historicism, and despite these substantial differences there is a thinking that “...phenomenon, including cultural expression like...literature, are best understood historically...” (Insko, n.d.: 182). This means that the process of historicising or placing literary texts into contexts provides the foundational aspects of carrying out critical literary criticism. Thus, on the one hand, the first generation to New Historicism was dominated by scholars who represented Western colonial powers and stories produced by white, Anglo-European voices that focused on their technological accomplishments and territorial possessions (Hickling, 2018). This generation also includes Greenblatt's 1980s version of historicism, which examines the exotic writings of the Western world, particularly those related to Columbus’s texts, showcasing encounters with what would later evolve into the colonial world, displaying

...the marks of the early stages of this process of assimilation, since their authors are wrapped up in amazement and wonder at the sight of new worlds and unknown peoples. The dialectics that Greenblatt presupposes to be operative in such narratives strongly determine his interpretation of Mandeville's *Travels* and Columbus's letters. (Veenstra, 1995:179)

Furthermore, Veenstra (1995) rightly observes that Greenblatt's approach assisted in the analysis of Christopher Columbus' accounts of his journeys to the new world. This version of the approach does not dismiss the imperialist ideas represented by Columbus. Instead, Greenblatt seeks to temper them (despite the acquisition of new lands and the promotion of the slave trade) by attempting to explain the underlying motives behind imperialism. The take home message in all this is that a text is determined by its socio-historical context. In other words, "a socio-historical context conditions its textual representations and likewise a text informs and sometimes even conditions the historical process" (Veenstra, 1995:180). Therefore, Greenblatt's version of New Historicism is confined largely within the borders of cultural materialism.

On the other hand, the second generation, attempted to reconceive history on the model of literature to engage power relations operating in the society of its time. In other words, critics of the Stephen Greenblatt's version of New Historicism moved beyond the boundaries of cultural materialism to consider themes of fundamental concern that include "epistemology, human agency and ideological hegemony" (Lonchman and Pieters, 2004:501) which impacted on humanity. It should be noted that literary works are linguistic-based, and as such, a departure from structuralist interpretations meant that the new historicist choices made in presenting the text to the reader was designed to instil meanings or reveal the symptomatic power dynamics existing in society at large. Therefore new historicism beyond Stephen Greenblatt poses that there exists an in-depth cultural analysis and texts are an embedment of identifiable as well as sophisticated historical contexts "inflected...with a noticeably Foucauldian theory of power" (Drakakis and Fludernik, 2015:498).

Generally, New Historicism is closely associated with Greenblatt, and it is selected for this study because it offers a fresh approach to appreciating and reinterpreting literary texts. This is premised on the desired paradigm shift to appreciate literary texts from western-inclined ideologies of the empire. Traditional historicism was proved by the new historicism as having dwelt too much on considering texts as autonomous entities. This in turn conditioned literary criticism to be structural based as such focusing on "articulating the meaning and the literariness of a text in terms of its intrinsic language-system" (Veenstra, 1995:176). Resultantly its links or references to the environment sidelined authors, readers and critics alike (Veenstra, 1995). A structuralist-based point of departure would have been inadequate in my

attempts to gain a better appreciation of the selected short stories that dwell largely on childhood representations in a crisis-stricken country.

The selected short stories qualify as historical narratives given that they attempt at revealing childhood lived experiences in Zimbabwe during the historical moment of the third *Chimurenga* era. As such, there is anecdotal evidence that the authors did try not to re-cast the *Third Chimurenga* events but sought to deconstruct existing narratives that perpetuate the silencing and side-lining notions of childhood during the crisis. Following Drakakis and Fludernik's (2015) thinking, one realises that from a new historicist perspective, a single short story in a grand matrix of Zimbabwean experiences, is a "representative of a larger structure" (p. 498) and focus is not on a leader or the elite to explain their rule

New Historicism, therefore, re-configures literary criticism in that it enables the symbiotic relationship between text and meaning to co-exist. The basic take is that, as Veenstra (1995: 177) notes, "texts constitute very important, and sometimes, they are the only sources of historical and literary re-search." As a result, focus is placed on conceptualizing texts within New Historicism, viewing them as valuable sources for both historical and literary research. Veenstra (1995: 177) found text as "a discrete and isolated object in a universe of objects," meaning that, it is much more than a written linguistic phenomenon produced by humans "radically informed by all the forces that condition and shape our societies and histories." In other words, Greenblatt and followers reject essentialist humanism by subscribing to the notion that the human self is a product of its "particular historical moment, [and] human experience as constituted by social and ideological structures..." (p. 177).

Therefore, I used the second generation of the New Historicism in order to fully examine notions of childhood and how its representation in the selected texts reveal economic, political and social realities of the crisis in Zimbabwe. The reasons behind this include its ability to facilitate an engagement on power relations operating in Zimbabwe during the fast-track land reform programme and how these impact on children in a crisis-stricken society. Quite often, the analysed short stories reflect the vitality of the context in which children negotiate for space while questioning the *status quo*. Following Greenblatt's movement in literary criticism, it also means Zimbabwe in the period following the land reform programme is a social world constantly being reshaped by works of art and in this case, these are the literary works in the short-story genre.

1.3.2 Why New Historicism?

The use of New Historicism is justified in that it facilitates a re-reading of the past through the present. The focus on reconstructing the past and providing meaning leads to the construction of history as told by ordinary and vulnerable members of the society, and not a mere focus on heroes and heroines who usually are elite political figures. In this regard, and through New Historicism, the take is that there is a “real social world that is constantly being shaped and reshaped” (Hickling, 2018: 54) by the narratives of vulnerable social actors such as children in this case. In addition, the aim is to appreciate, and locate, childhood identities during the *Third Chimurenga* in Zimbabwe, because the historical events of the time are not devoid of the reality within which they occurred as captured, in this case, by the experiences of the children. The recognition of children as vulnerable and marginalised places them squarely within Spivak's concept of the subaltern. In her theory, the subaltern refers to groups who are politically, socially, or economically oppressed to the point of being silenced and rendered invisible. These groups, which include various marginalized populations such as women, indigenous people, and the poor, often struggle to have their voices heard within the dominant societal and cultural frameworks. Gayatri Spivak's work, particularly her essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (2009) and her later writings such as *In Other Worlds* (2006), have significantly contributed to postcolonial studies, particularly in terms of understanding power dynamics, subalternity, and the politics of representation. In *In Other Worlds*, Spivak engages with the notion of the subaltern, referring to groups who are marginalized, oppressed, and rendered voiceless in both historical and cultural discourses. She asks whether the subaltern can ever truly "speak" or represent themselves, given the dominant power structures that continually silence and erase their voices.

In the context of childhood identities under crisis in Zimbabwe, Spivak's concept of the subaltern is extremely relevant. During the Zimbabwean crisis, children in marginalized communities often become subaltern figures in a number of ways, facing systemic and structural disadvantages due to the economic and political instability that plagues the country. This is especially true for children who, due to factors such as poverty, displacement, and the impact of HIV/AIDS, find themselves in situations of extreme vulnerability. Spivak's analysis suggests that the dominant social, economic, and political forces often fail to recognize the subaltern's struggle for self-representation. In the context of Zimbabwe, the policies

surrounding land reform, the widespread economic collapse, and the neglect of child welfare exacerbated the plight of these children. Their suffering is rendered invisible, and their attempts to express their experiences are often thwarted by the larger structures of power that control their lives.

By applying Spivak's theory of the subaltern to childhood identities in the context of Zimbabwe's crisis, I recognize that children, particularly in such volatile environments, occupy a liminal position where their vulnerabilities are compounded by factors like age, gender, and social status. Their status as subalterns means that they are often excluded from the structures of power that might offer them protection, opportunities for self-expression, or the right to participate in decisions that affect their lives.

In his responses to the New Historicism conceptual framework, Fineman (1989) draws a link between history and anecdote, whereby anecdote involves narratives that focus on people's lived experiences. He therefore contends that New Historicism is based on representation. This means that one needs to understand the historical circumstances under which a literary artefact was produced to understand it. By extension, this study acknowledges that literary texts are situated within institutions such as family and culture, social practices such as abuse and child neglect, and in discourses that constitute the overall cultural energies and codes of a socio-political and economic reality (Hickling, 2018). An examination of the selected short stories in this regard becomes far much more than commenting on the representations, but an understanding of the nexus between "the text and the intended social, political, and economic conditions in which it was written" (Bart, 2014: 15).

The foundation for the New Historicism theory was laid by Greenblatt (1980) as noted earlier. Greenblatt and other early New Historicists, such as Catherine Gallagher, were inspired by the works of Michel Foucault, Clifford Geertz, and Raymond Williams. Ultimately, Greenblatt sought to show the relationship between history and literature, art and history, anthropology and literature while demonstrating that there is a thin line that separates different disciplines from one another. Hence, Salkeld (2008) concludes that New Historicism is porous as it borrows freely, and quite extensively, from cultural history, psychoanalysis, Marxism, theories of language and semiotics, discourse and social anthropology. In other words, there is a realisation that history and literature have a relationship that is symbolic in nature. Onwuka, Uba and Fortress (2018:1) indicate that such a symbolic relationship is:

...most visible in the writer's deployment of ... art to document experiences of the past and their impacts on the feelings and well-being of ... people in the periods represented in the work(s).

It follows that trauma, which for instance enjoys much attention in medical or psychological fields, is expanded to recognise all forms of violence relating to the experience of the same and thus, shifting from being an existential experience to an identity crisis, and eventually leading to victimhood even. Nyoni (2011) demonstrates this reality in a study of Marechera's *The House of Hunger*, *Mindblast* and *The Black Insider*, where he shows the link between violence in the home and mental health problems.

The selected short stories draw upon children's livelihoods in the crisis-laden context of the *Third Chimurenga* to depict how children are traumatised by their surroundings, and in that way define their existential crisis. For example, Rita in Mupfudza's "Forever Haunted by Rita's Eyes" (2005), endures a gang-rape in which one of the perpetrators is her trusted person, bears a child out of the traumatic experience and lives for years in silence. The question is how does a girl child survive such an experience, and how does one unpack the literature capturing such traumatic historical realities typical of the *Third Chimurenga* events? Therefore, the independent and dominant fields used to explain human behavior throughout history, including art, are encompassed under the umbrella of New Historicism. As such, New Historicism offers a practical way to understanding the role of historical context in the interpretation of texts and thus, makes it suitable for this study that examines emerging literary childhood identities in the Zimbabwean post-2000 land reform and post-land reform periods.

Brizee and Tompkins (2011) have put together various questions, which the New Historicism theory attempts to answer, and these questions guide this study. Critics suggest that the reader should ask themselves what language, characters or events present in the work reflect the current events of the author's day. As a result, I analyse how representations of childhood in the selected works reflect the events typical of the actual land redistribution and post-land redistribution era. New Historicism also underscores the importance of considering the author's role in critiquing the leading political figures or movements of the day. This is one of the aims of my study, which is to explore how the representations of childhood in literature fall within the context of policies crafted and enacted by the political leaders of the day. I examine how

the intersection between the politics of party-nationalist survival and the Zimbabwean land reform impacted the lives of children and the identities that emerge as a result.

Another question, which characterises this chosen theory considers how the literary text functions as part of a continuum with other historical or cultural texts from the same period. This is partly the rationale behind choosing stories from various authors, and other secondary texts to determine how the different stories (texts) give insights into childhood identities from the selected period. Lastly, and more significantly to this study, is the question on how one can use a literary work to map the interplay between traditional and subversive discourses circulating in the culture in which that work emerged and/or the cultures in which the work is interpreted. This last question emerging from New Historicism, helps to address one of the main concerns of this study, which is an examination of notions of childhood as a creation of society and how a study of childhood identities contests the political, economic and social realities from the way childhoods are represented in those works.

Parallels can be drawn between the chosen approach, New Historicism and Bakhtin's concept of the chronotope that focuses on how time and space are related to each other, differently and in different genres, and periods. In this case, I analyse childhood identities stemming from the crisis period, and the prevailing environment of harsh economic conditions. A rigorous exploration of the nature of literary representations of childhood adds a dimension to the history of the nation, which may not find expression in the new historiography.

1.3.2.1 Postcolonialism

. New Historicism remains influential in contemporary literary studies, even after being applied to re-read classical literary works. For example, Hamilton (2004) uses Historicism to explain the theory and practice of New Historicism, trace the history of the term and its applications, and explore its relevance to current debates, including postcolonialism, feminism, and globalisation. This enables literary scholars to understand and apply historicist approaches in their own studies. Thus, over and above my use of New Historicism as the theoretical framework for this study, the nature of my enquiry also falls under the broad category of postcolonial literature. Quayson (2002:2) contends with regard to postcolonial discourses that:

all the criticism and theory on the term and concept postcolonial however seems to converge at the idea that postcolonial involves an engagement with colonialism and its after effects in the past and the present as well as global developments that are viewed to be the after effects of the empire.

The assertion by Quayson (2002) places this study under the postcolonial theory of enquiry since postcolonial theory examines how the legacy of colonialism continues to affect former colonies, especially in terms of economic inequality, land ownership, and cultural identity. The *Third Chimurenga*, which is the setting of my study, sought to address these historical injustices and restore land to the African majority, reflecting the postcolonial goal of dismantling colonial structures and reclaiming agency over land and resources. I, therefore also employ postcolonial theory as I analyse imagined childhood identities in the post-2000 Zimbabwean fiction.

Another insightful understanding of postcolonial criticism, also informing this study, is noted by Gilbert (1997: 12) in his view that postcolonial criticism is:

a set of reading practices [...] preoccupied principally with analysis of cultural forms, which mediate, challenge or reflect upon the relations of domination and subordination – economic, cultural and political.

In other words, Gilbert sees the prevailing economic, cultural and political condition in the formerly colonised nations, as informed by the colonial period. Postcolonial theory and New Historicism are two critical frameworks deployed to analyse texts and cultural artefacts, but they approach the past, power dynamics, and historical context in different yet complementary ways. Both postcolonialism and New Historicism focus on power structures and how history is shaped by these dynamics. Postcolonial theory often emphasises the historical domination of colonised peoples by colonial powers, while New Historicism examines how literature (and other cultural artefacts) reflects and responds to these power dynamics, exposing hidden ideologies and discourses from a specific historical period. I therefore use both theories in this study. Ramadan (2019) notes that in a crisis-laden context, such as the *Third Chimurenga* in Zimbabwe, political, social and cultural factors are never in a static position. These factors are constantly changing, while power remains inevitable, as some individuals hold power over others. As such, the “the culture of any society is an amalgam of different... groups where some are at the centre and others on the margin” (Ramadan, 2019: 30).

The postcolonial theory is part of efforts by intellectuals to find a lasting solution to former colonised worlds and Africa's crises. The colonial project of civilising Africa, traced as it were, to the Columbus era of European explorers who defined Africa as a barbaric, dark continent devoid of history, culture, religion, knowledge or education and hence, qualifying as a space for European civilisation. Thereafter, a systematic replacement of all that was African with what was considered civilised from the white world followed. European intellectuals also played an important ideological role in this mission. As a result, people from the former colonised worlds and particularly African people lost their land, economic resources, dignity, self-rule, culture and agency in the continent's development. This explains why Zimbabwe deliberately embarked on the *Third Chimurenga*, and the undertones linked to colonial exploitation. Thus, the era in Zimbabwe was depicted as an effort to rectify the injustices of the colonial past.

Therefore, postcolonialism regards theories or approaches to literary criticism that are linked to the experiences of the African and the diasporan, who experienced colonialism and its effects. Khanal (2012) describes it as a body of academic study drawing on critical theory to appreciate how Africa and other Caribbean territories lost power, their identities and culture following domination by Europe as a conquering power. Thus, postcolonialism is associated with the history of Western colonisation, imperialism as well as decolonisation of Africa, India, Asia and Latin America (Khanal, 2012). Fanon's (1952) *Black Skins, White Masks*, Fanon's (1961) *The Wretched of the Earth*, Said's (1978) *Orientalism*, Freire's (1968) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, and Rodney's (1972) *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, among the prominent postcolonial works, challenge traditional value systems as well as epistemologies fuelling western philosophies responsible for the underdevelopment of Africa.

Postcolonialism, viewed this way, is based on historical colonial realities and how African intellectuals responded to imperialism in general. The first preoccupation was to physically evict colonialists:

...from Africa's power space; with the credulous hope that the consequent and subsequent shift of power would translate into a more meaningful existence for the generality of the African peoples (Etim and Omobowale, 2020:8).

Negritude and Pan-Africanism became the rallying aspects of postcolonialism meant to organise the oppressed towards nationalism. The Negritude movement draws from and encourages Africans to regain lost faith, pride in their history and heritage, and literary experience was encouraged to take this philosophical trajectory while Pan-Africanism aided movements to strategise in the fight for independence in Africa. But as Africa gained political independence, with some countries such as Zimbabwe waging a guerrilla warfare to win independence, the first phase of postcolonialism was fulfilled. However, Neo-colonialism began to settle in soon after thereby defining the disillusionment with political independence in Africa. Etim and Omobowale, (2020:8) conclude that:

...the battle for the soul of Africa branches into many fronts: literary, linguistic, cultural, political and economic, among others. In the neo-colonial African state, not only are the writers and critics up against the sad legacies of colonisation, they also find themselves pitched against fellow black leaders bent on lording it over their subjects, the same way the colonial masters had done. The failings of African leadership have been identified as one of the factors that hinder Africa's rapid development.

The second phase of postcolonialism, based on the above, is that the post in the postcolonial, while assumes the end of colonisation and imperialism (Khanal, 2012). Postcolonial theory stresses "not the passage of time" (p. 2) following the liberation of former colonies, but "reinforces the need to examine the changes that resulted from colonisation and de-colonisation" (Khanal, 2012:2). The changes in this case relate to the identities of the colonised, unequal distribution of wealth symbolised by abject poverty, disease, droughts and hunger; attempts to recentre knowledge and ways of knowing; and to reveal the incompetencies, corruption and greediness of the new leadership among the many vices.

The observations above evoke Bhabha's concept of the third space, where he suggests that identity is not static, but rather fluid, ever-changing, and shaped through the negotiation of various cultural influences. Homi Bhabha, a prominent postcolonial theorist, is best known for his concept of "the location of culture," which addresses the complexities and contradictions in cultural identity formation, especially in postcolonial contexts. Bhabha's ideas are crucial for understanding how childhood identities are shaped in times of crisis, particularly in postcolonial societies like Zimbabwe, where histories of colonisation, political instability, and economic collapse have a significant impact on identity development.

In his seminal work *The Location of Culture* (1994), Bhabha introduces the idea of "cultural hybridity," where identity is not fixed but fluid, constantly in flux and subject to negotiation between different cultural forces. He critiques the traditional understanding of culture as something that is stable and homogeneous, and instead argues that culture is always in a state of negotiation. Cultural identities, especially in postcolonial societies, are formed in the space of what Bhabha terms "the third space." This "third space" is a liminal space of in-betweenness where various cultural influences, colonial, indigenous, and others, interact and form new, hybrid identities that do not fit neatly into established categories. Bhabha's work challenges the notion of a singular, authentic cultural identity and highlights the tensions that arise when colonial legacies intersect with postcolonial realities. For children growing up in Zimbabwe during the crisis, these tensions are critical in shaping their identities, as they are subjected to competing cultural influences, including the remnants of colonialism, national liberation, and the harsh realities of economic and political instability.

In the context of Zimbabwe's socio-political and economic crisis, the idea of "the location of culture" becomes an important tool for understanding the ways in which children's identities are shaped. The breakdown of social, economic, and political structures creates a space where traditional and colonial identities clash, and the consequences of this clash are especially visible in the lives of children, who are often more vulnerable to changes in cultural and social norms. The economic crisis, marked by hyperinflation, unemployment, and the collapse of state institutions, introduced a new cultural reality for children. The collapse of schools, healthcare systems, and family structures meant that children were forced into survivalist modes. This situation created a hybrid identity for these children, one that was influenced by both the past (colonial and postcolonial ideals) and the immediate challenges of the present (economic hardship, political instability, and violence).

This second phase of postcolonialism reflects the challenges of theory which, according to Etim and Omobowale (2020), was preoccupied initially with writing to the centre and ignored writing to itself. The other observation is that the theory has largely relied heavily on literary data, required historical foregrounding to be meaningful and has been accused of mystifying and moralising the African crises and in that way explaining lack of sustainable development in Africa. In this regard, postcolonialism could not be alluded to single-handedly in this study given its many loopholes. Hence, combining postcolonial theory with New Historicism became

a way of repositioning theory to accommodate emerging discourses and realities such as the complex childhood experiences noted during the *Third Chimurenga* in Zimbabwe.

The *Third Chimurenga* is loaded in its history, with a black and Negritude philosophical outlook that is tied to Pan-Africanism. Pan-African nationalist movements, like the ZANU(PF) and its ruling elite, advanced the postcolonial agenda to both explain and obscure their failures as a government, while justifying the forced repossession of land for redistribution in the spirit of unfinished business of the *First* and *Second Chimurenga*. Amidst such realities, childhood experiences have been missing in the socio-political and economic discourses of the time. As a result, discourses of development in Zimbabwe and existing narratives have typically overlooked or marginalized various childhood stereotypes, which are challenged in the selected short stories.

1.3.3 Methodology

This study is a qualitative study, an analysis of literary texts of the short story genre. The short stories were purposively selected based on their publication during and their focus on the post-2000 period in Zimbabwe. The stories were also selected because they depict child characters reflecting their experiences in ways that are unique to the historical contexts in which the stories are set. In this case, the case study was considered as an ethnographic undertaking with its capacity to generate new knowledge. Case study research is constantly labelled as a flexible form of qualitative analysis suitable for a holistic and comprehensive investigation of complex issues. In this context, the short stories themselves serve as case studies of childhood identities emerging post-2000, as well as the various representations of these identities.

1.3.3.1 *The short-story form*

The short story as a literary form is regarded by some scholars as a genre which is gaining its place in literary studies. Brevity is the main ingredient of a short story as a literary form. In other words, it is regarded as a work of fiction or prose that is shorter in length than the novel (Raval, 2019). Short stories usually exhibit shortness in length and thus, focus on one plot and sometimes one character. Literary criticism focusing on the short story has not received considerable attention in the Zimbabwean literary landscape. This could be attributed to the

major focus on the poem, play and novel which are well represented in the Zimbabwe literary scape. The short story genre has gradually emerged from the funding availed to encourage its adoption by writers (this is discussed in much detail below). Murray (2018) rightly describes a similar situation with regard to the South African short story genre. Murray (2018:4) notes that:

...the short story has often been relegated to a minor, marginal, second-class, non-normative form, overshadowed by the novel's impressive capacities for narrative sweep and depth, its powerful combination of cultural totality and individual psychology, in cultural and geographical contexts on the margins of mainstream cultures and worldly affairs, the adaptability of the short story as an outsider configuration has served it well, and seen it foray into service for multiple imaginative engagements with marginality.

The existing first- and second-generation writers who produced literary works in Zimbabwe have, as it were. Conveyed the narratives of colonial experiences. For instance, Phimister (1988) provides a historical context to the literature of Zimbabwe, particularly the works of the first-generation writers who, like Mungoshi and Dambudzo Marechera, addressed the colonial struggle and its aftermath. Phimister's work provides insight into how political realities, including the struggle against colonialism and the transition to independence, have shaped literary production in Zimbabwe.

The thematic preoccupations indicate that much of the writing was postcolonial. Most of the writers of literature in English, such as Dambudzo Marechera, Chenjerai Hove, Charles Mungoshi, Stanely Nyamufukudza and Tsitsi Dangarembga, produced writings from the margins to the centre/ the empire. These writings were largely the play, novel and poem.

Nonetheless, Edwin (2016: 2) describes short story writers as the third generation of African writers and "a new group of writers who are yet to receive their due in literary criticism." However, this is not to attest that the short story genre has not existed in the past. Instead, this indicates that the short story genre has not received considerable attention and thereby justifying the deliberate move in this study to examine short stories focusing on the post-2000 Zimbabwean dynamics. The dearth in literature advancing short story criticism may explain the gaps in the development of the genre to which Western sponsors have come in with awards to promote short story writing in the country.

Therefore, this study considered the short story as the best genre to carry the voice of the children in Zimbabwe's post *Third Chimurenga* period. This is not to say that the short story

genre does not have its downside as evidenced by the criticism levelled against it. Some scholars contend that the issue with the short story genre in Africa stems from the writers themselves, who are criticized for writing about anything, from anywhere (Edwin, 2016), largely because many live and work outside of Africa while gaining global visibility. The criticism against the genre in question is that the short story genre has been receiving sponsorship reflecting how Europe has tried to promote the genre by using money and awards. As a result, the genre is now considered as being open to sponsored short stories. Edwin, (2016:3) exclaims:

There is not much to write hope about, trust me, because...where a writer lives and who she writes for, tell us little about the voice of the short story itself, its themes or its author's ideas, failing also to touch upon the short story's critical and literary impact.

Hones (2010:474) also notes that the short story genre makes sense only "... if the reader is involved in bringing in spatial knowledge," despite being inherently ageographical. However, this criticism appears to be overlooked in the debate, as the fictional events arise from the spatial context. The literary geography offers evidence of the context which informs the fictional works.

The strengths outweigh the weaknesses especially when one considers that the short story genre is basically the "vehicle of fragment" (Heyns, 2005:167). The idea that short stories provide an urge to appreciate the dialogue that short stories bring out is propagated by Heyns (2005). In a similar manner, Hall (2022) uses 16 queer themed short stories to demonstrate that the themes of (in)visibility, silence and language can all be traced across the selected stories in different ways. In an anthology, Heyns (2005) indicates that a short story initiates a conversation with other stories in the collection that acquire the Bakhtinian heteroglossia. Thus, using the short story genre makes one realise that a selected story is incomplete in its appreciation if such evaluation is done in isolation to other stories. This is the reason why I chose some short stories with similar thematic concerns as examined in the different chapters. The only challenge Heyns (2005) suggests that the short story seems to be stretched or forced into assuming the status of a novel, from which it can be more fully appreciated.

A re-reading of the story shows that it contains its own absolute truth, and as a literary work, ought to be appreciated even independently from its anthological space. The typical focus of

the short story is on a single event and its effect, conveying the deeper meanings of things through storytelling. This naturally invites a comparison to oral literature in Zimbabwean literary traditions. Ironically, Horn (1994) challenges and dismisses the idea that Africa was an oral society without writing, arguing that this view undermines writing as a form of thinking and a significant political act in Africa. To write, he suggests, is to create law, which disregards the unique, subsuming it under the general, and the individual under the collective genealogy. Horn (1994: 78) says:

The symbolic power was always allied to writing, the archetype of the laconic is the law/inscription in stone, its subversive and powerless obverse is the graffiti, the inscription which can be washed off the walls of suburbia, whitewashed, even if this writing is never quite eradicated, always shines through the whitewash, palimpsest of a revolutionary writing which has been drenched in blood.

For this study, choosing the short story genre demonstrates how the selected stories reflect on the changing priorities and values as well as political realities as presented from the perspective of childhood. In the process, the desire is to note how the story itself changes its nature from something close to Walter Benjamin's notion of the storyteller as counsellor and sage to something more akin to the perplexity Benjamin associates with the novel as genre (p. 167).

The short story genre is a developing phenomenon in Africa. Kiguru (2021) attributes this to the local and global literary prizes for the short story which played a significant role in the promotion of the genre on the continent. Scholars have traced and linked the short story genre with orality and digital short stories that have become popular with the rise of the digital age. It follows that the short story can be seen as a form of oral communication that unveils various epistemological realities (Eigenbrod, n.d.), viewing orature, or oral storytelling (Sandberg, Tutenges, and Pedersen, 2019), as extending beyond just verbal art. Using the short story genre, one realises that it is more natural to humanity especially with references to orature. Sub-genres of the short story are also identified as drinking stories –told in the aftermath of drinking events. The stories often evolve into short stories within a short story, with common thematic elements such as sex, violence, bodily fluids, pranks, and crime.

There are traditional forms to the short story described by Murray (2018: 3) as having a “five-part structure of situation, generating circumstance, rising action, climax and denouement.” Murray further queries the traditional form by noting that the short story is not bound to

chronologies that govern the realist novel, in this case, which might be used to imagine the Zimbabwean's post *Third Chimurenga*. Research such as Homi K. Bhabha's "The Location of Culture" (1994) demonstrates that in literary criticism and experiences, narratives are never confined as their circulation in the society is ever-changing through coalescing into different genres. Bhabha examines how cultural narratives, particularly those in postcolonial societies, are hybridised and transformed. He introduces the idea of the "third space," a place where colonial and indigenous cultures interact and produce new forms of narrative. This emphasises that narratives evolve as they are shared across cultures and generations, continuously reshaping genres and social meanings. What distinguishes one genre from the other is the content and structure of the material presented, as well as the communicative purpose, style and emotional tone with which it is performed. Hones (2010:474) affirms that the short story "may tend to emphasise structure rather than agency"

The selection of stories examined here involved extensive desktop research and a review of fiction produced in post-2000 period. The reading of the fiction was also parallel to research on the recordings of day-to-day reports, activities and realities of the time on violence, crime, current affairs issues and other related recordings. This exercise was done to gain a fuller picture of recurring aspects characterising the *Third Chimurenga*.

Both expert and novice comments to daily happenings, as shared and retrievable from social media platforms were engaged to locate the themes as well as language used by various authors in the selected stories. Stories from the anthologies were selected based on the different authors, seasoned and budding. All stories were thus analysed using New Historicism as amalgamated in postcolonialism.

Edwin (2016) notes that short story writing in Africa has not developed extensively, with many of the efforts to promote the genre being driven by literary prizes. Barnsley (2022) highlights the Caine Prize, awarded annually since 2000 for an African short story, as "one of the foremost avenues for African writers to enter the global fiction scene" (Barnsley, 2022:287). The challenge with this is that it limits the range of themes, as funders may pressure professional writers to focus on specific topics. Consequently, sponsored short stories may be constrained, with writers unable to address other pressing issues like hunger, poverty, immigration, and political strife, in an attempt to focus on topics they are encouraged to write about by the funders.

1.3.3.2: *Short story and childhood*

A short story writer and literary critic, Diversi (1998), expresses how the short story medium was deployed to protest the killing of street children in Brazil. This occurred after the merciless killing of eight street kids while they were asleep in front of a church in the Rio di Janeiro in Brazil. This was not without a confession from the author/critic who states that:

I wondered how I was going to be able to represent the kids without losing their voices, the three-dimensionality of their humanness, and the mystery that surrounds their lived experiences. Early on, I decided that I did not want to represent these street kids' experiences from a theoretical perspective, for that would inevitably bury their voices beneath layers of analysis. Therefore, subscribing to current epistemological and methodological debates, I decided to transgress the boundaries of traditional forms of writing in the social sciences...to build one more bridge between the social sciences and the humanities...by representing the kids I met in my fieldwork through [medium] of the short story genre. (Diversi, 1998: 132).

In this regard, short stories were chosen for this study in accordance with childhood experiences in Zimbabwe's post *Third Chimurenga*. There is no doubt that all selected stories in this study were written by professional writers, and the authors (or writers), battle with coming up with short narratives that adequately represent the voices of the concerned children in the contextual period under discussion. Therefore, the short stories under examination highlight childhood agency within a context that also portrays their experiences in a country where land remains an unresolved issue.

In the same way Diversi (1998) found that the short story genre potentially rendered childhood lived experiences with more verisimilitude, the study's objective was to represent the historical realities bedeviling the post *Third Chimurenga* childhood rather than deviating from it. Traditional realist texts were found to be inadequate to meet this goal. Thus, elements like dialogue and descriptions—such as smells, space, or weather—are integral to short stories, as they have the power to move readers beyond abstractions, allowing them to see themselves within the human drama being portrayed.

1.3.5 The ghost of colonialism

Various characters depicted in works of fiction produced in formerly colonised states grapple with their identities in the wake of colonialism and its aftermaths. The stories under study are an example of such struggles of belonging amongst black and white children even in the post-land redistribution era. The period under study in this thesis is characterised by political, economic and cultural fissures wrought of colonialism which even years after political, and flag independence continue to be felt. The land ownership disparities between blacks and whites were unresolved 20-years after independence as Chimoto emphasises in Hoba's "Specialisation" (2007) thereby culminating in the 2000 land reforms.

The childhood identities examined in this thesis have their roots in colonialism. As such, re-reading of the selected Zimbabwean short stories in this period is also done through the postcolonial lens. The approach demands the reader to explore and analyse the effects of colonialism and imperialism and note their effects on nations. The dynamics of land repossession by blacks, violent loss of land by the blacks during colonialism, land possession by whites and then the 2000 land grabs and equally violent repossession by the blacks, warrant a closer reading of the effects on identity (in this case childhood identities) to appreciate the politics of belonging in both the black and white childhoods in relation to the land question.

As already established, New Historicism proffers the idea that literature should be interpreted and studied within the context of both the history of the author, critic and other circumstances linked to them. A New Historicist approach to literature in a wider historical context, allows us to examine how the writer's times affect the work and how the work reflects the writer's times and experiences, which in turn exposes the current cultural contexts that influence a critic's conclusions. Thus, in this study, analysis of the emerging childhood identities is undertaken on the historical phase represented in the selected literary works.

I chose this theory because studying the history reveals more about the text and studying the text reveals more about the history. Studying the historical context also helps one to understand the representations of the protagonists and narrators projected by the authors as they reflect that period in history. I therefore uncover an alternative history of the nation through studying the representations of childhood in the selected short stories. According to the New Historicists, history is not just a list of facts that are compiled for future references. Instead, history is narrated differently depending on whose point of view is being told. This indicates that there

may be different versions of history and as such, different ways in which it shows up in art or literature.

Therefore, New Historicism pays close attention to the historical context of literary works. In any case, art in general is a product of a specific time and place and critics cannot ignore those contexts, because art reflects the values of its culture, the specific time and place, and comments on those values. New Historicism enables literary critics to talk about politics, class and power, and to take an interdisciplinary approach to the study of literature. It is therefore the role of New Historicists to examine how literary representations reflect the social, political, economic, and cultural aspects of their time, and to analyse what they comment on or critique.

Thus, I chose the aforesaid theoretical underpinning as the framework of enquiry. This is because New Historicism breaks down distinctions between literature and historical context and enables an examination of the contemporary production and reception of literary texts. It includes the dominant social, political and moral movements of the time in its operations. I explore the nature of changing literary childhood representations emerging from a political scene. I begin by analysing the literature depicting the turn of events (the land redistribution exercise), which ushered in a different political context that was defined by different dominant ideas. These dominant ideas provide fertile ground for enquiries into new forms of literary representations of childhood and their place in understanding “the larger tensions of society” Muponde (2005: 106). I further consider how writers record the moment in the period under study, particularly the human consequences of government policies and the perpetuated class differences among Zimbabweans, as represented from the experiences and perspectives of child characters.

1.4 Chapter Overview

This thesis consists of six chapters. For purposes of this study, I have categorised the selected stories into sub-themes related to the nature of emergent childhood identities and their contributions to the metanarrative of the history of the nation. Content in each of the chapters is as follows:

The present chapter served to introduce the study and contextualise key issues such as crisis, land, identity, childhoods and history of the nation. The chapter also explores the link between

land and identity in relation to how black and white children (re)negotiate their sense of identity and belonging in the post-land redistribution era Zimbabwean fiction. It also unpacks how the representation of childhood identities in the post-2000 Zimbabwean fiction offers a new perspective of the Zimbabwean crisis. The chapter also reviewed literature related to the study focus, and introduces the theoretical framework and the methodology used.

Chapter 2 opens the study's textual analysis. It analyses stories categorised under the sub-theme *Childhoods under anomic landscapes*. These stories are, "The Trek" and "Specialisation" by Lawrence Hoba; "These are The Days of Our Lives" by Edward Chinhandu, "A Land of Starving Millionaires" by Erasmus Chinyani; "Pay Day Hell" by Christopher Mlalazi and "Rukudzo" by Andrew Aresho. These are read in the context of the violence perpetrated by the whites on blacks during colonialism and its replication by the black government as it institutes violence against its own people. The stories in this chapter also depict vulnerability, pain and suffering. They reflect a state of anomie, whereby, the social system values are no longer the same as they were and yet new values and systems have not yet developed. Such an anomic scenario produces psychological states characterised by a sense of futility, lack of purpose as well as emotional emptiness and despair as witnessed in the childhoods represented in the stories grouped in this chapter. I also explore how the child characters construct social and personal identities in the face of a collapsed economy. While the aspect of survival strategies is inevitably dealt with in practically all the chapters, it is in discussing the collapsed economy, which marks both the height of the crisis and the main subject of this particular chapter – that childhood resilience and survival matters.

Chapter 3 examines stories that fall under the theme *Gendered childhood spaces*. These stories are "Mainini Grace's Promise" by Valerie Tagwira, "Forever Haunted by Rita's Eyes" by Stanley Mupfudza and "Tomorrow is not another day," by Julius Chingono. These stories show the multifaceted challenges faced by the girl child in crisis conditions. For example, stories such as "Mainini Grace's Promise" and "Tomorrow is not another day" depict the effects of HIV/Aids in child-headed homes after the death of the parents. This is a new kind of childhood emerging because of the prevailing conditions in the post-2000 context.

Chapter 4 focuses on a set of stories thematised as *Zimbabwean or not? The identity dilemmas of the white child in post-2000 Zimbabwean short stories*. It considers white writings that describe how the white child's sense of belonging was affected by the land reform programme.

It also explores the identity dilemmas witnessed in white childhoods in the post-2000 era and how they forge new identities amidst their changing conditions where their families have lost land and possessions. The selected stories are, “Christmas” by Bryony Rheam, and “The Situation” by Donna Kerstein.

Chapter 5 examines stories under the sub-theme *Confrontational childhood identities amidst worsening economic realities*. The stories analysed in this category are, “The Winning Side” by William Saidi, “Tables Turned Over” by Adrian Ashley, “Eeish!” and “Dancing With life” both by Christopher Mlalazi. This last set of stories reflects the height of the crisis and the desperation amongst children, leading to the observation that there is a new breed of childhood developing from the prevailing historic conditions.

Chapter 6 concludes the study.

Chapter 2: Childhoods under anomic landscapes

2.0 Introduction

In this chapter, I focus on stories that epitomise the broader national crisis experienced by the average Zimbabwean family and, examine how the behaviour and actions of adults shape the kinds of childhoods witnessed in the crisis-laden period. This analysis links with this study's attempts to think about complexities of childhood especially that discerned from children's experiences while they are caught up in a national crisis.

2.1 Setting the scene: Zimbabwe's state of anomie

Dahlberg and Krug (2002:7) assert that “the prevailing political, economic and social circumstances surrounding a child influences their self-image, self-development, self-confidence and assertiveness.” In the context of this study, this suggests that a particular socio-historical experience produces a particular kind of childhood that is marked by, and partakes in a given history (Coe, 1984). This idea is supported by Veese (1989), a scholar who is widely known for his work on New Historicism. In the introduction to his anthology *The New Historicism*, Veese (1989) notes that the New Historicist pulls historical studies to the centre stage of literary analysis. With reference to American literary and cultural studies, Veese contends that one of New Historicism's appeal is that it allows writers and critics to “delve into questions of politics, power, and indeed all matters that deeply affect people's practical lives...” (Veese 1989: ix). This is the case in Africa in general, and Zimbabwe in particular, where this study is located. Most African communities experience difficult socio-economic conditions that accentuate the degradation of morals, family values and social and traditional structures (Capo-Chichi and Agboadannon, 2015). All this has implications for the education and socialisation of children and consequently their future lives as adults. Therefore, this chapter explores how expected moral and social values functioning in a normal political, economic and social environment can no longer apply to families that are torn apart by unendurable poverty and other abuses. This social fabric is adversely affected in societies undergoing vast political and economic challenges, as the case with the Zimbabwean crisis period under study. The difficult economic conditions that children experience as depicted in the selected short stories provide political commentary on the postcolonial Zimbabwe. The

crumbling economy, punctuated by a collapsing currency, evident in almost all the selected stories makes the reader question the decisions and choices of the postcolonial elite. Such a descent into the maelstrom generates difficult childhoods for the children in the short stories. The stories present a postcolonial Zimbabwe where the hopes and aspirations of the young generation have been ruined. The children yearn for school, food and a functional health delivery system which are out of reach as a result of the crisis.

A society characterised by conditions of instability such as the ones described above is said to be in a state of anomie (Durkheim, 1964). This is a state where common values and systems are no longer understood and acceptable while at the same time new values and meanings have not yet emerged (Deflem 2015a, 2015b; Blane 2017; Serpa and Ferreira 2018). Such an environment produces psychological states that are characterised by a lack of purpose, futility, despair and emotional emptiness. The state would, through its authority and state apparatus, try to create meanings, including their (state) version of the ongoing crisis. Interestingly, the crisis usually worsens as the state circulates its alternative narratives as noted in the way the Mugabe government's narrative inserted the land within the anti-British and American imperialism campaign. The anti-imperialist struggle intersected with a worsening of the crisis conditions during and after the land reform programme (albeit it was supposed to alleviate poverty). Fiction, and other writing forms, document the realities on the ground to the extent that literature becomes a space for recording national history. Representations of childhood identities, though literary arts, therefore, qualifies as sites through which nations can be understood.

2.1.1 The child figure in African literature

Various studies have examined childhood or the child figure in African literature. Akpome (2018) discusses child and youth protagonists in *Measuring Time* (Haliba 2007) and *Bitter Fruit* (Dangor, 2001). They illustrate how African writers deploy child and youthful protagonists to offer “nuanced and revealing perspectives on contemporary nationhood” (p. 4) in postcolonial countries, in this case Nigeria and South Africa respectively. The adult figure and voice in both texts are displaced to portray the postcolonial nationhood conditions pinned on the historical and socio-economic realities in the fictional countries from a childhood perspective. Akpome (2018:5) further observes central thematic areas that touch on family, the nation and childhood and these are conceived in a context where the “public sphere of the

nation and the domestic relations of the respective families are highlighted by the specific history and politics within which their individual filial interactions are framed.” The challenge is that the child protagonists’ voices shift as the textual events progress such that they end up assuming the adult voice to qualify aspects where childhood innocence is lost.

While Akpome (2018) focuses on childhood representations in literary texts that address crises based on the historical and socio-economic realities in Nigeria and South Africa, which to some extent are equated to the Zimbabwe’s *Third Chimurenga*, the differences lie in the art forms. Akpome (2018) locates complex childhood representations using a novel whereas this study uses the short story. This difference explains why the novel form goes further to deal with multiple issues such as rape, murder, drug abuse and family disintegration in a single narrative that suggests the conditioning of childhood to the historical realities involving military rule in Nigeria and the end of Nelson Mandela rule in d South Africa.

In another study, Ndlovu (2014) analyses two novels *Allah is not obliged* (Kourouma, 2000) and *Say you’re one of them* (Akpan, 2008) in which he focuses on the deployment of child figures as protagonists. Ndlovu (2014) considers the brutalisation of child figures and their roles as child narrators and links this to the removal of innocence in African contemporary literature. This is the archetypal representation we witness in the portrayal of childhood in Camara Laye’s *African Child* (1953). Therefore, childhood has already been betrayed in postcolonial Africa as conveying the long history of colonialism and neo-colonialism. The only difference is that, like Akpome (2018), the art form used as a vehicle for critique is the novel whereas this study focuses on the short story form.

The mainstream Western media has contributed much to the constitution of the image of an African child figure in postcolonial Africa. The media has tended to create a stereotypical image of childhood as innocent, vulnerable, hunger-stricken, diseased and needing western intervention. It reads in line with the civilisation discourses wherein Africa was characterised by missionaries, explorers and early western scholars and writers such as Joseph Conrad whose 1902 *Heart of Darkness* describes the journey into Africa along River Congo as an expedition towards the beginning of times. The image of the African child is thus used by the [western] media to magnify poverty in Africa from which the continent should be salvaged for an imperial domination (Barnsley, 2022). The image of the vulnerable child is deliberately used to characterise the magnitude of corruption, misrule, and crisis in developing African countries

such as Zimbabwe. Thus, there is a well calculated depiction of childhood, and by extension the child is directly linked to its mother (or women), justifying the philanthropic aid poured to rescue children on the continent.

There is a narrative regarding the child figure that writers of the selected short stories in this study contest in their depictions of childhood in Zimbabwe during the *Third Chimurenga*. The selected literary works question or attempt to decolonise the image that mainstream media has propagated and in this the short story writers help to advance this de-colonial notion by inscribing new historicist perspectives. The endeavour becomes “a postcolonial and de-colonial counternarrative” (Barnsley, 2022:284) process where the child figure in African, and more specifically Zimbabwean literature, is given agency and voice. The innocence of the child figure is represented differently to how mainstream media portrays it. However, the main task is to verify the extent to which the selected short stories provide alternative versions and images of childhood.

Ouma (2011) deals with childhood identities in Nigerian literature, an endeavour that draws much from the current study. The context of Nigeria considered in Ouma’s (2011) study is characterised by historical realities and experiences defined by a variety of complex issues that emerge as described in the following:

...the migration of Nigerians as a result of the turmoil caused by military governance, as well as the oil-related economic gains of the 70s. Indeed, as cultures made contact and bodies moved across national and continental borders, new concerns began to emerge, related to identity in view of an emerging postcolonial Nigerian diaspora in Europe and America (Ouma, 2011: 1).

In handling the aforesaid issues, Ouma (2011) observes that writers unearth memories of childhood to reflect their experiences using various symbols, figures and images to convey childhood consciousness in the literary works. In this regard the major themes revolving around the concept of childhood in literature relate to choices in identifying with Nigeria and diasporic consciousness and struggles to belong to the new spaces. Interestingly, childhood in such works appears as a central and powerful symbol of the history of ideas, allowing the handling “childhood as a category of critical analysis more than just a historical vehicle for socio-cultural and political debate” (Ouma, 2011:2).

Thus, African literature alludes to the child figure to advance several viewpoints largely to question state hegemony and challenge the status quo. This shows that literature has taken what Barnsley (2022) found as a humanitarian project in African literature to which the child is a representative. Barnsley (2022) also notes that African literature, in its portrayal of the child figure, depicts children as navigating the tension between crying out for rescue or escaping, on one hand, and growing up too quickly in a violent society, on the other. This view demonstrates that childhood innocence in African literature, if not handled properly, could easily fall within a “foil for white supremacy” (Barnsley, 2022: 285).

In addition, Okuyade (2015) observes that the child figure in African literature has become an eloquent marker that writers deploy to address pressing postcolonial concerns, which include violence, identity politics, migration, injustices and even parlous governance. This means that the role of literature in recording history cannot be understated. Gordimer (1988) maintains that the role of the writer is to maintain and publish to the world a deep, intense, private view of the situation they find in their society. This attests to p’Bitek’s (1988) notion of the artist as the ruler. Ngom (2018:604) reiterates the same in the statement that “[a] writer’s moral compass should shepherd him towards the penning of what he ... regards as the truth for the benefit of the common will.” It is in this light that I focus on how the post-2000 fictional narratives depicting representations of childhood identities have been influenced by the historical (including the history of land ownership), and political developments taking place in Zimbabwe.

This chapter provides a critical analysis on how the imagined lives of children reflect agency aimed at the reconstitution of social, personal and national identities in the face of a crumbling economy at the height of the crisis following the land redistribution exercise. The selected stories show severe and economically crippling conditions that are endured by child characters from an early age and thus, rendering them children without childhoods. The chapter identifies thematic patterns that arise in the representations of childhood in a context of crisis.

A notable factor is the idea that within the framework of contemporary childhood experiences, nothing is fixed about children’s identity. Rather, identities as participating subjects, whether child or adult, are constructed by dynamic processes of identification within human relationships and communities. Identities are multiple and self-transforming though the life course, constructed by participation in a diversity of social practices within a web of social

relationships in different cultural contexts (Kjorholt, 2004; Hove, 2014). This implies that childhood continuously grapples with (re)definition of family, culture, gender, history and nation, in a setting determined by adults.

In this study, I acknowledge that while children are active agents capable of charting their own destinies, they are also victims of numerous negative circumstances of the postcolonial. As such, my engagements with the selected literature in this chapter, in relation to childhood identities, include the following thematic concerns: the land question, contested histories, family, patriarchy and the postcolonial state; (re)configuring childhood identities in the face of shifting gender roles in the family, parenting influences on childhood identities, deprivation of children's rights, betrayed/neglected childhoods, suffering and expectations of innocent childhoods; and replicated childhood identities, resented childhoods, irresponsible fatherhoods (sired childhoods versus fathered childhoods), reinvented womanhood, and erosion of values. I begin by contextualising the notion of childhood identities in the face of changes in the social, political and economic structure of a nation.

The section that follows develops the discussion of representations of childhood identities, influenced by various factors. Notable factors under discussion include patriarchy and the shift in gender roles, loss of rights and the suffering of children, family and parental influence on the formation of childhood identities as well as morality. I conclude with a discussion of the overall effects of the Zimbabwean crisis on the construction of childhood identities, as imagined in the selected literature.

2.1.2 Negotiating the Zimbabwean crisis: Childhood identities amidst unstable socio-economic conditions

In chapter 1, indicated how my study builds upon Zimbabwean childhood studies by other scholars such as Hove (2014), Muponde (2005) and Muchemwa (2007). For instance, part of Muponde's work on childhood studies, as indicated earlier, focuses on resistant childhoods emanating from the violence associated with the colonial era, which ties childhood to the soil and war. Muponde (2005) refers to Wilson Katiyo's (1976) *A Son of the Soil* and Ben Chirasha's (1985) *Child of War* in his arguments regarding childhood, history and resistance. Hove (2014) argues that the waning tradition of telling – and re-telling – stories to children is construed as an adult gesture of framing culture(s) and, provocatively, the fantasy-realism

dichotomy that is meant to be the substance of children's literature becomes a telling indictment on the hegemony of the adult world. While the above literature depicts the anti-colonialism and anti-colonial regime in Zimbabwe, this study is set against the nationalists and mostly black government's rule particularly during the period beginning 20 years after the attainment of independence. This is the period that also coincided with the fast-track land redistribution otherwise known as the *Third Chimurenga*.

I explore the nature of emerging childhood identities in the decade of crisis as represented in selected short stories analysed "The Trek" and "Specialisation" (Hoba, 2005, 2007); "These are the Days of Our Lives" (Chinhandu, 2005), "A Land of Starving Millionaires" (Chinyani, 2007), "Pay Day Hell" (Mlalazi, 2005), and "Rukudzo" (Aresho, 2005). These offer an appropriate background to the period and show how violence perpetrated by whites on blacks during the colonial era is reinvented where the black government institutes violence against its own people.

There are other short stories in my selection that have been analysed from different perspectives than mine. I reconsider these in an attempt to analyse emerging childhood identities in the post-land redistribution era. At the same time, because I selected literature largely produced in response to the crisis, some of the fiction used in this study may not have garnered significant attention from critics at the time of its release, at least to the best of my knowledge.

Hoba's (2005, 2007) stories have ignited interest especially among scholars who concern themselves with literary studies and the land question. Hoba's "The Trek" (2005) has received considerable attention from critics that include Manase (2011; 2016) Nyambi (2013) and Musanga (2015). "The Trek" (Hoba, 2005), opens with the protagonist-child narrating the journey from an unnamed space, assumed to be his father's peasant homestead, to a sugarcane commercial farm grabbed from a white commercial farmer. The narrator refers to the moment that his father (Baba) was allocated the land: "One day he had come home, after he had been given a sugar-cane farm, together with the farm house" (Hoba, 2005: 117). The uncomfortable journey is undertaken on a sunny and hot day in an ox-drawn cart. The characters travel in a very old scotch cart which appears to have been inherited by Baba from his own father. The protagonist-child paints a gruesome picture of poverty, and hunger –from clothing to food provisions that all are either substandard. The journey reflects peasant livelihoods and tempts one to infer that Baba and his family undertake this journey in fulfilment of the politics of the

day, and adhering to the dictates of the *Third Chimurenga*. This is all in the hope that this would turn around their economic fortunes.

Through the eyes of the child-protagonist, we engage in the journey and the livelihoods of the resettled farmer on the new farm. The child protagonist exposes the fallacies about the land reform programme in general, and speaks volumes about the state of preparedness of the so-called new farmers to undertake commercial farming. There is no meaningful agricultural activity on the farm as soon as the new farmers arrive. The protagonist-child is actually surprised that Baba had been resettled notwithstanding the fact that as a child he "...had never known that Baba wanted to be a commercial farmer" (Hoba, 117). The journey ironically ends with the family returning to their familiar territories, this time without Baba, who had not worked on the farm at all. The stay at the occupied farm was a short stint as they had to relocate after well-connected politicians took over the farm. Ordinary landless farmers have been used by the government as marionettes while the real beneficiaries of grabbed farms are the powerful politicians who ruthlessly move in to displace the likes of Baba.

Unlike the earlier critics that focussed on how the story dwells on the dynamics of land reform, hegemony and counter-hegemony and the underlying aspects of the *Third Chimurenga* in general, my approach is to re-read the same story, tracing the way that the *Third Chimurenga* affected childhoods. I am particularly interested in how the young narrator is uprooted and dragged through the violence of the land invasions. I show how the protagonist-child lost education opportunities and play-mates for instance. His growing sense of belonging to the land formerly occupied by the white man, and his subsequent loss of the land to a more powerful black political figure "the man with a pot-belly" (Hoba, 120), all this affects his sense of identity.

The protagonist-child suffers an emotionally existential crisis. He detests the poverty in his family and around him and tries to make sense of the *Third Chimurenga* as a whole. The journey symbolises the mechanics of the *Third Chimurenga*, which to some extent provides hope that upon arrival at the destination, lives are expected to change. However, the hope itself is marred by scepticism as the protagonist-child does not have faith in his own father –Baba. Baba is described as a poverty-stricken misogynist. We are told:

Baba wears a pair of *manyatera*¹, and yellow overalls with 'NRZ' on the back. He never worked on the railways; he just brought them home one evening. Mother once asked how he got them and she ended up with a swollen eye (Hoba, 115).

Furthermore, the entire family is not happy in undertaking the journey. The mother is expressionless and does not smile to the child Chido who is gleefully playing. The atmosphere is tense notwithstanding the heat and hunger as well as cries from Chido that annoys the protagonist-child. This journey marks the general feeling and silent protest of the child against the whole exercise. He is powerless to stop the exodus. The journey is a forced one, which suggests that occupying the sugarcane plantation was forced on Baba to the detriment of the livelihoods of his children, his family, and ultimately his person as he disappears eventually. The protagonist-child says, "Baba still hasn't come back" (Hoba, 120) and there is no indication that he will return. His disappearance is metonymic of the erasure of agency, it is effectively anchored on the supplanting of the peasant by the pot-bellied man.

Given the degree to which the government of Zimbabwe used state apparatuses such as the police, the central intelligence organisation and courts to silence voices that rose to question its *modus operandi*, it may be assumed that Baba was a victim of the systemic crisis. Ngwenya (2019) indicates that the conditions of the period were defined by the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPA) of 2002, which is a repressive law used to silence any voices that openly criticised state and national events or programmes that included the *Third Chimurenga*. The mother in the narrative believes Baba may have been killed in beer-linked escapades: "Mama once said that beer will be his death. So maybe he has finally got himself killed" (Hoba, 119). This appears senseless to the protagonist-child especially when the mother heaps blame on *sekuru*. The character *sekuru* is a former employee to the white commercial farmer, and now employed by Baba and the protagonist-child narrator's family. The protagonist makes reference to her mother's attitude towards *sekuru*, thus:

She blames him for all misfortunes. She says it's all because he liked the *murungu* too much. So now he doesn't want us to become rich and is using his medicine to make our sugarcane fail to grow. (Hoba, 119)

¹ These home-made sandals made from used car rubber tyres. They are common with peasant farmers in Zimbabwe who cannot afford shoes. The tyre-sandals are all weather and durable.

Baba fails as a commercial farmer because he is lazy and does not have any knowledge and skills required to successfully undertake farming the way previous white farm owner did. The issue here is not racial, as this observation does not suggest that every white farmer was knowledgeable. Dick Turner, and his wife, Mary, in Lessing's *The Grass is Singing* (1958) is a failure as a white farmer while Baba is a failure as a black commercial farmer too. Both fail as farmers in different ways and epochs. Nonetheless, Baba's failure has a huge impact on the protagonist-child's psyche and opens opportunities for the abuse of his family. The protagonist-child concludes, therefore, "Maybe if Baba worked hard, he would get to take the *murungu's* things" (Hoba, 120). This leads to feelings of disappointment and betrayal for the narrator in "The Trek."

The story "Specialisation" (Hoba, 2007) complements "The Trek" in providing a graphic picture of the dynamics regarding land invasions management by new farmers and the aftermaths of the farming endeavour. The story opens with a very bold statement: "Suddenly, everything seemed to have gone wrong; but no one could tell what the cause was nor what had really happened" (Hoba, 2007: 69). The story consists of the narrator, who in this case is unfortunately an adult university graduate –generally considered in ZANU (PF) lingo as the youths and a new farmer called Chimoto who is has ties with the *Second Chimurenga* as a war veteran. The other significant protagonist is Baba Nina, who "had been the white man's driver." (69). The narrator is unemployed at the height of the *Third Chimurenga*, as such, he teams up with active forces on the ground to benefit from land reform exercise under some kind of consortium with the other two.

The story exposes the operations of the land rush where "everyone had wanted to take the closest entry into and onto the farms to grab the juiciest piece of ancestral soil they could find" (70). The trio also grabbed the farm in question by waiting for:

...Baasi Kisi to go to the city, as he always did every Friday, and then telephone him and say 'You white kaffir, don't bother showing your nigger farse here because we will do your ace meat with a sharp panga. The farm and everything on is now ours. We, the sovereign sons of the soil.' (Hoba, 2007: 71)

The reader cannot miss the fact that these three adults took over a commercial farm using the *modus operandi* the government appeared to support. In any case the *Third Chimurenga* is presented as driven by men of different specialisations to which,

...the country's war heroes wouldn't listen to anyone. They knew it all and being our MPs and old men, they spent most of their time arguing with the opposition, which had only toddlers and men with no liberation war history (except that of having been sell-outs) in parliament (Hoba, 2007: 71).

If one is to take the ZANU PF definition of the narrator, he is a youth who does not have any liberation war credentials but subscribes, at least on the surface, to the ZANU PF ideology. In principle, the reader is invited into the land reform where productive farms were grabbed and beneficiaries took and used all that was on the farm without realising that commercial white farmers were not just enjoying but took farming as a business, livelihood and career. The white farmers considered everything on the farm as an investment, while the new black entrants regard the farm as a site for plunder. The lack of preparedness, skills and farming knowledge among the new farmers leads to massive reduction in the production on these farms. In response, the war veterans recommended divine intervention, which leads to the visit to a spirit medium. Asked on what their purpose of the visit to the medium was, Chimoto indicates that "It's our farm. And it is dying" (74). In response, the *sekuru* assistant, described as well as another university graduate known by the narrator, retorts that, "Then go and work hard, *vazukuru*. Simply work hard" (Hoba, 2007: 74). This response shocks the new farmers in exposing them as lacking skills, knowledge and capital to fund their farming activities.

As indicated earlier, the narrator is a youth in terms of the ZANU PF definition and thus an adult considering that the UNICEF (2018) definition of a child is one who is less than 18-years of age. The narrator in "Specialisation" is actually an adult but in terms of the dictates of the *Third Chimurenga*, may be a toddler, at a political level and hence, a child. The government is exposed at various levels with farm occupiers themselves being shown as enactors of the ZANU PF government's model of land redistribution pinned on seizure and no compensation. Comparing the youths who had been voted into parliament on the MDC ticket as toddlers is to insinuate that the *Third Chimurenga* politics has no space to listen the opposition or consider alternative reasons as long as such complaints emanate from an oppositional MP. The story thus shows that children and youths yearn for recognition as they desire to own property. There is no meaning to life for the youths.

In "The Trek," the expression of pain, and the groping for meaning, sums up the emotional turmoil the protagonist-child experiences as they search for meaning and belonging in the land

under intense political contestation. The return journey offers a splinter of hope where the child looks forward to returning to school and enjoying their rights to education. The reader sympathises with the child who exhibits evidence of trauma arising from the displacement from familiar land to the invaded sugarcane plantation and a forced return this time without the father. In addition, the source of wealth, symbolised by the cattle, is no longer in the possession of the family. Their calf was stolen and two cattle were sold but the proceeds from the sale never benefited the family. Thus, the sense of loss characterises ordinary families at the periphery who were left counting losses, rather than gains from the *Third Chimurenga*. Ultimately, children in the short story are robbed of their childhood, despite Chido's continued wailing which could symbolise the silent protests and general pain arising from the adverse effects of the *Third Chimurenga*. The narrators in both stories undergo a journey from which they gain experience while exposing the fallacies of the land reform programme. Therefore, Hoba uses the child narrator to enter established socio-cultural spaces and critically engage with political, social, economic and land dynamics, which in turn help the reader to understand the nature of childhood identities in that historical context. This child focalisation also carves as a point of entry into diverse childhood identities in the other short stories examined in ensuing chapters.

In her delineation of childhood and its accompanying sense of belonging and un/becoming in Hawaii, Nolte-Odhiambo (2018: 377) argues that:

When the figure of the child is evoked in social and moral debates it often serves as the nexus of belonging, citizenship and the nation. Popular discourse surrounding children crystallised in the common saying 'the children are our future,' demarcates them as future or not yet citizens who need to be protected from social ills but at the same time socialised into their political community so as to be able to inherit the nation upon reaching adulthood and attaining full political citizenship.

Similarly, Hoba uses children as narrators to expose the nature of the ruling elite and their practices. This narrative strategy enables him to comment on critical issues – albeit under the guise of childhood innocence – that characterise the period of crisis in Zimbabwe. The protagonist tries to discover his sense of self despite all that is happening around him.

The relationship between family and childhood identities amidst unstable socio-economic conditions is deeply intertwined, as family dynamics often play a crucial role in shaping the

identities of children. Families are the most significant socialising agents in a child's life. In unstable socio-economic conditions, such as poverty, unemployment, or social unrest, families impart values, coping mechanisms, and survival strategies. In families where the children experience neglect, conflict, or emotional deserts, they generate feelings of insecurity and a fragmented sense of identity. Therefore, children might develop an identity marked by conflict, withdrawal, or a sense of powerlessness, especially if their basic emotional needs are unmet. "The Trek" offers a typical representation of the institution of the family and land reform processes within the context of the protagonist's troubled experiences. The reader begins to appreciate the dynamics that result from the turn of events through the inadvertent involvement in the processes and the narrative trope of childhood. By tracing representations of the lives of displaced children during the land redistribution, the narrator becomes the window through which we witness how they (re)negotiate their sense of identity and belonging. In another case, "Specialisation" presents another set of a family institution made up of Chimoto, Baba Nina and the narrator. Mai Nina only comes into the picture as a child bearer who has known nothing but breeding children whose future is marred by a deepening crisis.

The grand geopolitical consequences of the land reform programme in Zimbabwe have transformed both socio-cultural and economic institutions. The family institution and by extension, childhood identities which form the nexus of this study, have undergone dramatic change. The short stories analysed above demonstrate how literature recreates, explores and negotiates social spaces. Literature interacts with social spaces and social relations. Hence, by using the child protagonist, the author shows how children's lives, or those of the youths, are affected by the policies enacted by the elderly political leaders. It is interesting that the story is told by a child in the first-person narrative voice. The pervasive social reality is that children are often to be seen and not heard. In "The Trek" one identifies with the child's feelings as he is dragged through all the haunted and haunting processes and in the way his life is affected by events happening around him. This is a typical representation of a childhood caught up in the political and economic melee of the nation.

The project of redistributing land in Zimbabwe, commonly known as the *Third Chimurenga* phase, raised mixed reactions. On the one hand, it is presented as a potential site for hope and new beginnings. On the other hand, it is a "contested cultural and political terrain," to borrow from Muponde's (2005) delineation of childhood in Zimbabwe, where individual and collective (childhood) identities collide, reassemble, and reconfigure. I also contend that the

idea of how childhood in the post- land redistribution relates to earlier representations of childhood. This enables me to draw comparisons between reconfigured childhood identities in the context of socio-cultural, economic and political crisis in Zimbabwe during, and after the land reform programme. I argue further that the fast-track land redistribution exercise ushers in a new era under which I examine emerging childhood identities. I premise my analysis of the selected literature on New Historicism. I deal here with the issue of subversion and subversive literature and art and consider the ways in which the literary works map an interplay between traditional and subversive discourses circulating in the culture in which that work emerges and/or is interpreted.

My analysis focuses specifically on how the national economic decline affected childhoods and childhood identities. In short, the selected fiction used in this study is a tool to examine childhood debates on how the representations of conditions in the selected period, with emphasis on childhood identities, help to understand the Zimbabwean political, economic and social trajectories.

2.1.3 Land Redistribution: Original Intentions *versus* Realities on the Ground

There have been varying schools of thought regarding the violent takeover of white farms from the year 2000. Some scholars (Mlambo, 2007; Magosvongwe, 2015; Hove, 2016) argue, justifiably, that the white farmers are linked to the legacy of violent seizure of the land from the blacks during the colonial era in the 1890s. The willing buyer/willing seller Lancaster House agreement was subverted and reflected that the white settlers or Rhodesians were not willing to share the same land they had, or their ancestors had grabbed or passed on to them. The Lancaster House Agreement of 1979 was a landmark agreement that played a pivotal role in the political transformation of Zimbabwe (formerly Rhodesia) from a minority-ruled, white-majority-dominated colonial state to an independent nation with a black-majority government. The negotiations and subsequent agreement were crucial in ending the long-standing Zimbabwe liberation war and establishing the framework for a democratic Zimbabwe. In 1979, Britain organised negotiations at Lancaster House in London, aiming to resolve the conflict and establish a framework for a transition to majority rule in Rhodesia. The Lancaster House Agreement resulted in a ceasefire and laid the groundwork for free and fair elections to be held within a year of the ceasefire. The elections were held in March 1980. The Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) led by Robert Mugabe, won a resounding if contested victory,

marking the birth of the independent state of Zimbabwe. However, the Lancaster House Agreement placed restrictions on how land redistribution could occur, stipulating that land could only be redistributed if the owners agreed to sell to willing buyers.

The argument by Mlambo and Magosvongwe, however, also presupposes that all the whites in Zimbabwe were farmers. To subscribe to that position is also to miss the grander point. It should be acknowledged that a minority white farmers owned large tracts of land while the majority of the black Zimbabweans owned less or nothing at all. This minority white farmer community was also unwilling to sell their land to the post-independence government, which wanted this land to resettle landless people. To escalate the problem, the British-Blair government at the expiry of the Lancaster Agreement in 1990, was unwilling to hear the Zimbabwean case on land. As a result, Mugabe government took the white farmers as unrepentant, and a betrayal to the Zimbabwean extension of the reconciliation extended to them by Robert Mugabe in his inaugural speech delivered as Prime Minister in 1980.

Meanwhile, 20 years after independence, the landless black majority were becoming restless hence the violent land repossession. My argument regarding the black-on-black violence relies on the way in which fellow blacks also went on to forcibly and violently remove other black families who had originally occupied white men's farms. The whole system became corrupt as the more powerful, particularly government officials, ended-up violently removing fellow blacks, and occupying all the prime land. Ironically, this elite could not even utilise the land. In addition, in some cases, the elite left the repossessed farms idle after harvesting that which they had found ready for harvesting at the time of the invasions.

These anomic attitudes contributed to the deepening of the Zimbabwean crises that brought untold suffering to the already suffering poverty ridden blacks. A productive use of land could have helped alleviate the hunger and poverty that cut across the decade of crisis. This is what is suggested in Hoba's "The Trek" through the child narrator as an entry point into the childhood identities imagined in the crisis period. It is no surprise that the protagonist-child in "The Trek" indicates that had the father worked so hard as an individual, he probably would have been prepared to adjust to the change, ensure that the commercial farm was productive, and would have been able to defend the acquired land from black invaders as became the case. He too would have probably been able to defend and protect his family that disintegrates utterly.

Hoba is concerned with the dynamics of the land redistribution exercise. He chronicles the ripple effects of the land reform programme on the lived experiences of children and how these impacted on their sense of selfhood and identity. The fast-track land reform programme is depicted as a populist exercise supported by the ruling party ZANU PF that pushed its own existential agenda, despite indicating that its goal was to empower the majority Zimbabweans with land. The stance is contested as the exercise is seen as a move by the political elite to hold on to power. In their delineation of “politics of patronage” and violence in Zimbabwe, Alexander and McGregor (2014:751) point out that:

[a]s unemployment rose, salaries stagnated and rural livelihoods were undercut, analysts describe a State unable to meet expectations over services and welfare, and a party leadership that was losing its connection to its popular base.

Faced with a high rate of unemployment, a shrinking economy, political unrest and threats to political power due to labour-led stay always, land became the only political safety valve for ZANU PF as a party and government. In addition, ZANU PF tasted its first defeat in an election since 1980 in the victory of the NO vote in the constitutional referendum of 2000 (Kriger 2003). Therefore, ZANU PF embarked on a fast-track land reform programme outside the provisions of the Constitution as appeasement for a restless electorate. Notably, land had been the election trump card for ZANU PF for the two decades since independence, and, as tensions mounted and the economy shrank, the only political strategy out of a political dilemma was to allow the majority black people access to the land. Political mantras like “land is the economy and the economy is land,” and “*Ivhu kuvanhu*” (meaning land to the people) hogged the limelight in state-controlled print and electronic media. For instance, the mantra appeared in a story titled ‘Communal farmers support farm invasions,’ *The Herald*, 09 June 2000. Chari (2013:304) offers an analysis of such media coverage by the state media, who notes that

State-owned newspapers published opinion pieces historicising the land issue, primarily suggesting that it was an unfinished historical item on the decolonisation project. Examples include an opinion piece by Kenneth Kaunda headlined ‘Western Countries Wrong’ (*The Herald*, 14 June 2007) and Neil Thomas’s ‘Zim’s suffering externally driven’ (*The Herald*, 14 January 2007). The public media, therefore, harked back on history to show that the ZANU-PF leadership was being unfairly blamed for the situation unfolding in the country, when, in fact, the West, particularly Zimbabwe’s former colonial master, Britain was to blame for the crisis.

State-run media outlets, such as *The Herald* newspaper and Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC), played a major role in promoting the idea that land was fundamental to the country's economic recovery. The need for action seeking to address the land issues became prominent as the war veterans also threatened to lend its political muscle to the newly formed MDC.

As shown earlier, the narrator in Hoba's (2007) "Specialisation" is an adult, unlike the child narrator in "The Trek". Through this adult narrator the reader learns about the lives of his colleague's children who are not attending school and have been assigned the task of weeding the fields. The narrator in "Specialisation" alludes to Chimoto, the war veteran who had once pointed out the absurdity that "twenty years after independence, we still had not got that (land) for which we had shed our blood" (71). Hence, the land redistribution exercise becomes an attempt by the ruling ZANU PF party to reconnect with the ordinary citizens and its support base. The abuse of children bred mainly by Mai Nina is appalling and it shows the vulnerability of children as most were exposed to child labour where their rights are violated.

Understanding the undercurrents informing the crisis in the decade following the land redistribution phase is crucial to this study. The objectives of the ruling party ZANU PF in giving the landless black people access to the land was to empower them economically, as conveyed by their 2000 'Campaign, Land is power' (Manase, 2016). Ironically, the objective to empower was followed by a deterioration in the people's living conditions. Production on farms deteriorated, the agro-based industry suffered due to a lack of raw materials, and the Zimbabwe currency lost its value against major foreign currencies, with inflation reaching astronomical and hyper levels by 2008. Food and fuel shortages engulfed the nation, which turned from being a regional breadbasket to one relying on imports. This can be attributed to a scenario where a society expected its members to acquire wealth and yet did not offer adequate means for them to do so as typified by the lack of capital and knowhow in using the land profitably.

There are opposing views regarding the success or failure of the land redistribution exercise. Hoba joins the cohort of scholars and authors who focus on the flaws and failures of the agrarian reform programme. In "Specialisation," Chimoto questions the delays in getting land. Secondly, the author's description of how fences are pulled down when people rush "to grab the juiciest piece of ancestral soil" because "the hunger had been too great and finding gates

was just a waste of time” (70) shows that Hoba acknowledges that there was a need to carry out such an exercise to redress the unequal distribution of land. However, one reads his disapproval of the way the exercise was carried out, which contributed to its failure to change the lives of the poor black people for the better. Hoba shows his disapproval through satirising the manner in which the Land reform programme was carried out as shown above. He uses over-the-top scenarios such as hunger being too great that finding gates was a waste of time to make the subject of satire more obvious and striking. In this case, his satire carries a sharper, more critical tone, pushing readers to reflect on the flaws of the land reform programme.

Thus, whilst the land distribution exercise was meant to give a new lease of life to the previously landless Zimbabwean majority, the two stories by Hoba paint a picture of gloom regarding the manner in which the exercise was carried out and how it went on to beget a particular kind of childhood as shall be explored further.

Images of the poverty that afflicts the narrator’s family’s everyday life permeate “The Trek.” By extension, those are the iterations of the poverty experienced by all ordinary Zimbabweans. Several references are made that point to dire poverty, such as:

“A sack of maize meal, almost empty, sits next to the pots... An old mattress lies rolled up with blankets inside, tied together with tree bark fibre next to the mats. There is no base bed... My own bed, which we left behind had a mattress made from sacks filled with soft straw (116).

The narrator goes on to describe their torn and tattered clothing. He says:

Some old sacks lie next to the mattress; they contain all our clothing. A few old nappies for Chido, mother’s dresses, father’s trousers and shirts, and my torn shorts and T-shirts. (116)

The narrator’s description of his family’s meagre possessions above suggest dire poverty. This is ironic in that the people’s rush when the land redistribution programme began was to improve their lives through farming, despite lack of capital and knowhow as is the case with the narrator’s family. In addition, the glaring poverty, which is evident in the life of the families of the child-narrator speaks volumes regarding the lives of the rural folk in Zimbabwe during the land reform programme. This poverty is enhanced through the bleak images of an old scotch cart with rotting wood,

...a scotch cart which goes back more than three generations back ... His father is the one who knew who had labelled the scotch cart (115).

The above image reiterates the idea of a government that had failed to provide resources to its people. As a result, there is a continuity of poverty from generation to generation, and the narrator is caught up in this generational poverty symbolised by the old, rusty, squealing and cracked scotch cart which is passed down the family. Evidently, the narrator grows up amidst abject poverty.

This also shows how Hoba's fiction enters the debate on the success and failure of the fast-track land reform programme in Zimbabwe, through the portrayal of the narrator's family experiences on a white man's farm. By looking at the versions of childhoods imagined and created in his stories, the reader revisits Mungoshi's *Some Kinds of Wounds* (1980) to get a nuanced counter-narrative to the grand narrative of the ruling party ZANU PF.

In his interrogation of the successes and failures of the land reform programme in Zimbabwe, Musanga (2015) contends that drivers and architects of the programme view it as an empowering project that is revolutionary and progressive. Those that hold a contrary view consider the land reform programme as suicidal actions of a government that violates property rights in a desperate bid to cling to power. Musanga acknowledges that the success of land reform debate requires a multidisciplinary and holistic approach to produce a clear understanding. In my analysis of the selected literature, it remains manifest that the exercise did not yield the desired results. Rather, the redistribution fuelled the crisis, as typified by the life of the narrator and his family in "The Trek." In addition, the anxiety and uncertainty that comes with change is evident in the narrator's mother who "sits staring at the road behind, her face expressionless" (115). Looking back and holding onto the past symbolises nostalgia and a lack of hope for the future. Any hope would have projected the mother staring ahead. Ultimately, her premonitions are not misplaced as nothing fruitful comes out of the whole exercise and the family is acrimoniously removed from the farm by more powerful forces.

As mentioned earlier, the government portrays the agrarian reform programme as a success (Musanga, 2015). However, literary representations that capture the moment tell a different story. In "The Trek," the reader is told of how the narrator's father broke down the door to gain

entry to the farmhouse. A year later, a policeman comes to give the family a day's notice to vacate the land, and the next day, policemen with guns and helmets come to evict them. Meanwhile a man with a Mercedes Benz and a pot belly (the symbol of the Zimbabwean postcolonial politician) is already impatiently waiting, signifying that he is now the new owner of the land. It is ironic that Baba used to sit on the black leather sofa that the *murungu* (white man) used to sit on and how the man who comes to evict the family also sits on that same sofa. Deductively, the new owner with the pot belly and the Mercedes Benz will also come and sit on that sofa. It becomes a vicious cycle of possession and dispossession of land. At first it was the white man who violently took over the land from the black man, then Baba violently repossessed his ancestral land, followed by cases in which pot-bellied black men violently seize land from their own folks. This is an example of the black-on-black violence characteristic of the postcolonial state.

The elite, representing the centre, appear and vanish instantly, leaving a very strong symbolic mark of power and control. In "A land of starving millionaires," (Chinyani, 2007), Baba Alphabet is run over and killed by a legislator speeding in a Mercedes Benz car. In Hoba's "The Trek" (2005: 120), the narrator identifies a man "with a pot-belly" standing "by the big black mesidhisi-bhenzi parked besides the field," and one assumes that these are politicians with power and influence in society. The livelihoods of the children are patently determined by the omissions and commissions of these pot-bellied politicians. Instead of the land reform working to alleviate the plight of the people, it becomes an unfruitful venture punctuated by continued suffering of the people. In the case of the narrator's family, their circumstances do not change, and they are forced to go back to the village. Hoba offers an alternative history of the agrarian reform programme which otherwise is absent in what Ranger (2004) has termed patriotic history. While the extent to which the land redistribution exercise has been successful has always been debated, one may also draw parallels between the end results of the attempts by the father of the narrator to possess a farm, albeit with dismal failure, and the attempt by ZANU PF government to pacify the masses by allowing them access to the land as reflected in "Specialisation." The government appears to have allowed black Zimbabweans to occupy land as there were no models used to redistribute the people. "The Trek" may be interpreted to mean that the process that the evictions that narrator's family goes through and the futility of their endeavours, are representative of the general failures of the agrarian reform at large. It is ironic how mother blames *sekuru* for the failed crop, when there were so many things that are done wrongly. For instance, the narrator says:

Maybe if the engines were working, there would be enough water to irrigate the fields. There might even be fertiliser, that's what *sekuru* said the crops needed to grow. (115)

The narrator's utterances in this case point to the several factors contributing to his family's failed sugar-cane crop. Parallels can also be drawn between "The Trek" and "Specialisation" where Hoba highlights glaring shortfalls of the agrarian reform programme. The notable thread that permeates through the story is the unpreparedness of the black people who occupy the land formerly owned by the white man. For instance, the adult narrator refers to the burning of grass and that "we could never be charged with destroying the forests with fire – it was a cultural practice" (70). He also notes that "we had not had time to repair the fireguards, a colonial institution" (70). Thus, these new farmers lack both financial resources and knowledge of commercial farming.

It should be noted that the author uses satire in his description of the events on the redistributed land. As noted in the above quotation, he uses the terms cultural practice and colonial institution sarcastically. The new black farmers take pride in getting away with burning grass as it is their cultural practice. At the same time, the same newly resettled black farmers make a mockery of fireguards and label them a colonial institution. Yet, there would have been nothing wrong with maintaining fireguards as they would have been of help to them. The cultural practice of burning grass to the detriment of the environment only has negative connotations. In this case, it would have been better to abandon detrimental cultural practices and embrace positive practices such as fireguards, albeit from the said colonial institution, as long as it had positive results.

Hoba sums it all in the final paragraph of the story, "The Trek," where the narrator observes that the dam was full and the irrigation equipment lay idle, but they had forgotten to find someone who knew about irrigation. This shows one of the many ways in which the newly resettled black farmers failed to run the farming business to their benefit and the country economically. The blame game witnessed above also echoes the way in which the Zimbabwean government always finds a scapegoat and keeps on blaming all their failures on Britain and America on the grounds that both countries worked in support of the white settlers. In his portrayals indicated above, Hoba's work offers insight into how events of the land redistribution fuelled the crisis which had already begun.

2.1.4 (Re)configuring childhood identities

The abject poverty witnessed in the families during the Zimbabwean crisis inevitably leads to serious degradation of family and basic social structure. There is a clear intersection of political violence with social and economic violence, and this implies that the child must forge new identities under these intersecting conditions. This gives an understanding of what it means to be a child in local and culturally specific contexts and how childhood experiences in such contexts shape the nature of childhoods emerging from those experiences. This can be read from the childhoods witnessed in the selected stories in this study. That is, the children's identities are both transformed and shaped by the Zimbabwean crisis which deepened as the crisis extended after the land redistribution.

Most of the children represented in the selected literature live in a complex and precarious environment. The child has to continuously navigate between home, school, religion, poverty, land and politics (Knutsson, 1997). In addition, Knutsson (1997) observes that the African child is constantly interacting with other components in the total web of human reality. Consequently, they are in their own specific way, not only crucial for the production, reproduction and sustainability of human life, but also co-builders of the social and cultural structures that constitute their communities and societies. This raises the question of how the African child defines their identity in a postcolonial context.

It is imperative to consider a broader understanding of the effects of colonialism on childhood identities. My analysis of "The Trek" draws on postcolonial perspectives regarding the crisis in Zimbabwe, and its subsequent effect on childhood identities. Adomako (2019: 66) posits that "through a postcolonial lens, the African child is born into a system that sustains the hierarchies introduced by colonialism." Some of the circumstances described in the literature under study have their roots in the colonial legacy. The land question, which forms the basis of the stories "The Trek" and "Specialisation," emanate from the land disparities of the colonial era. Therefore, a study of childhood identities in Zimbabwe in the aftermath of land reform and its resultant crisis is inseparable from colonialism, and how it frames identities.

Among the various elements that the child negotiates in their quest for selfhood, is the family institution. Families, for children trying to negotiate self-hood in the Zimbabwean crisis

context, cannot be described simply as a set of well-defined units anymore. Rather, families and roles are negotiated daily, constructed by interactions between members of the household and influenced by the prevailing political and economic sphere. The crisis transformed both the nature of childhood identities and the Zimbabwean family as the crisis thrust parents into new modes of providing for the family and redefined gender roles as discussed further in this chapter.

A closer reading of the unnamed narrator's family in "The Trek" reveals that his family perpetuates the patriarchal system. Manzoor (2017) advances the view that within patriarchal institutions there are deeply entrenched gender inequalities, patriarchal hegemony and culturally constructed codes of gender status and roles. She adds, "women are trapped in the socially constructed gender roles in a patriarchal society" (Manzoor, 2017: 32). In "The Trek," Hoba (2005) portrays the subtle influences of culture, tradition, and the general organisation of the society that constrain and limit women's freedom. The narrator witnesses the violence perpetrated against women. He refers to an incident when his mother ended up with a swollen eye for questioning where Baba had obtained the yellow national railways of Zimbabwe overalls (115). He observes that "Mama didn't cry when Baba hit her with his hoe handle" (117) and later on indicates that he once asked *sekuru* why mama never cried (118). The child grows amidst this domestic violence and painfully notes how his mother takes it all in without flinching as if that were normal. This typifies further observations by Djossou (2018:35) that:

Women are not supposed to speak in typical traditional and patriarchal societies. While their husbands address them, they must remain silent to the end of the talk and execute what they are told with no complain and restraint ... Cultural and traditional norms of their different community allow their desires being ignored and put aside. Women face subordination, oppression and abuses of all kind all over the time and have to cope with them.

These observations reiterate the suffering in silence depicted in the narrator's mother as highlighted above. Therefore, this could be the way baby Chido will end up in her adulthood. This is a pertinent point to raise given that the Third Chimurenga and the deepening crisis have no end date.

Rajeswari and Mythily (2019) describe localised violence within the domestic and family space as arrogant, abusive or intimidation behaviour. The categories of domestic violence include

social, physical, sexual and emotional abuse. Women develop from childhood, the required characteristics of learned defencelessness, and learn to live under the violence because they have been made to internalise those feelings through institutionalised victimisation. In the same manner, the narrator's childhood is marked by violence meted against the mother by his father. Such traditional conceptions of women, which promote women's subjugation, have prompted Heilbrun (1993), to observe that men have monopolised human experience and left women unable to imagine themselves both as ambitious and female.

The experiences outlined in the story invoke notions observed earlier by De Beauvoir (1979) that the situation of a woman is that she is a free and autonomous being like all creatures but finds herself living in a world where men compel her to assume the status of the other. This partially explains the docility exhibited by the narrator's mother, though her overall character and behaviour qualifies her as one of the new crop of women emerging as economic providers for the families. Djossou (2018:35) states that:

Most human societies on earth are structured around relatively stable patterns that establish how social interactions will be carried out ... The stratification ranks these members either in a high prestige status or a low prestige one.

In male dominated societies, men are ranked on the top followed by women and children. This status, which is associated with roles, gives men the total right to subjugate the female other. This draws on patriarchy, provides some stereotypes which imply the oppression of the subjects considered as inferior. These sentiments are supported by Glaeser (2018) who notes that in patriarchal societies there are undeniably cruel realities and violence that the African woman finds herself in, which is a combination of intolerable social and political pressures together with patriarchal values that induce women's self-doubt. It is crucial to note that most women at the global level are also affected in more or less the same way. However, Glaeser's sentiments are given with specific reference to African women, and I find resonance with the same in the context of the narrator's family.

2.1.4.1 Patriarchy and the family institution

A look into the narrator's family reveals the above definitions of a patriarchal family. The irony is that the narrator is directly and indirectly sucked into the inevitable web of the patriarchal

society which characterises his family. The narrator's family typifies other black families within the same resettled communities. Notably, the narrator's father exemplifies the toxic or treacherous masculinity described by Morrell (2016). In his 2016 work, Morrell expands upon the concept of toxic masculinities, focusing on how masculinity, in certain contexts, can be harmful to both men and the people around them. He also explores how these forms of masculinity can manifest in ways that are treacherous, reflecting the dangerous and destructive side of gendered expectations and behaviours. Understanding toxic masculinity through Morrell's framework involves recognising how the ideals of masculinity can contribute to societal issues like violence, emotional repression, and inequality. In the context of Zimbabwean crisis literature, in this study, masculinity plays a crucial role in shaping the lives of young men and boys in the society affected by violence, political strife, and economic collapse. Many of these young male characters are forced to navigate complex gendered expectations amidst a crisis that disempowers them, creating a situation where masculine identity becomes entangled with both survival instincts and socially imposed behaviours. The father's influence on the climate within which his children's many experiences occur is established by the conditions of his basic value. In other words, male children tend to embrace the values and beliefs of their fathers. The father provides a basic model for masculinity for the son and this model becomes a basis for the son developing his own male identity. Therefore, a child, such as the narrator in "The Trek," constructs and reconstructs his gender identity in relation to the definitions given to him by his father.

The narrator continuously refers to issues that his father says or teaches him, which serve to perpetuate the patriarchal society. For instance, the protagonist-child says that "father always says women and children should never sit on stools" (116). The most notable socialisation into the patriarchal norms can be read where the narrator says:

I know I don't cry because I am a man. Baba said only women and girls should cry. One day he beat me up for crying when I fell off the scotch cart (118-119).

The above statements convey an image of a childhood that is still steeped in patriarchal practices. This portrayal by Hoba (2005) exemplifies observations made by Rajeswari and Mythily (2019) regarding patriarchal systems where the social and cultural constructions of gender roles encourage a boy to be aggressive and violent while girls are taught to be dependant

and submissive. This behaviour is observed through the behaviour of the father which is stated by the narrator as if they were the facts of life from which he is learning:

Mother once asked how he got them [the overalls] and she ended up with a swollen eye (115).

Mama didn't cry when Baba hit her with a hoe handle (117).

All these are manifestations of violence perpetrated against women and internalised by the narrator. In this way, the family as well as the society, plays an active role in reproducing the structure of inequality. The father's hostile attitude to his family, in conformation with society's values, is the reason the subjugation of women and children is perpetuated. However, this expression of domestic violence is given credence by Marechera's (1978) gruesome portrayal of a man who beats his wife and rapes her in public. It is as though Baba is recreating this Marechera moment.

Hoba explores dramatic social changes in intergenerational and gender relations in "The Trek" against the backdrop of patriarchal tendencies. The dynamics resulting from changing gender roles within the family setup require careful consideration to establish how they influence the family environment, which shapes the emergent childhood identities. The crisis compels gender relations to become more fluid and change dramatically as a result of blurring boundaries within the family where the father has previously been regarded as the provider. Ola et al., (2014) observe that the new family trends are characterised by changes in gender roles, especially an expansion of the female role to include economic provision for the family.

2.1.4.2 Traditional roles challenged

The traditional gender roles are challenged by powerful women in the selected stories. For instance, the narrator's mother in Hoba's "The Trek" emerges as the sole provider for the family, showing that women now work to provide for the family, and in some cases the men have completely stopped doing so. The mother is presented thus:

A plough sits on the far end of the scotch cart, looking new. Mama bought it last year with money from her groundnuts. Mama always works very hard...Mama's hoe is worn from use; Baba is still new and clean: the inscription 'Master farmer' is still visible. The only use Baba's hoe gets is when it rubs against shoulders as he goes down to the fields to inspect the crop (116).

In contrast, the narrator's father, Baba, is presented as a lazy drunkard who contributes nothing towards the upkeep of the family. The narrator concludes that his father should have written 'Mrs Magudu' instead of 'Mr Magudu' on the metal board they were going to erect on their new farm because "he never works in the fields, the farm will be Mama's to run" (117). This reveals a generation of children who witness a shift in gender roles regarding the women as economic providers despite their patriarchy-induced submissive roles within the home.

The image of an economically inactive father is also reflected in Hoba's (2007) "Specialisation." Baba Nina is described thus:

Besides cleaning cars, the only other thing he knew how to do well was drinking himself stupid and making Mama Nina pregnant ... By now she was carrying their tenth child...Mama Nina sowed the roundnuts and groundnuts because they were a woman's crops ... The children, Baba Nina's children, weeded the fields. (74)

The shift in gender roles, where mothers increasingly become breadwinners, represents a significant transformation in societal structures and expectations. This change reflects evolving attitudes toward gender equality, challenging traditional notions of masculinity and femininity that once dictated rigid roles within the family unit. In this case, the responsibility of working the fields lies with the mother and her children. This shows imagined mother figures' ability to face harsh realities and their enduring inclinations to provide for their children.

2.1.4.3 Shift in gender roles

A shift in gender roles can occur due to several factors. These include economic factors in the context of the Zimbabwean situation under study. The land crisis led to a rise in unemployment in the nation that also affected the fathers who are the traditional breadwinners. Potts and Mutambirwa (1998) demonstrate that economic events and programmes such as ESAP resulted in severe negative effects on the working class. Kawewe and Debie (2000) also confirm that the post-2000 period was marred by a high unemployment rate following the closure of most manufacturing companies and the disruption of production on farms. The *Third Chimurenga* worsened an already bleak reality as it rendered most men impotent as it became increasingly difficult for them to provide for their families.

As the men are torn and weighed down by the crisis, women stepped up to fill in the role of the provider for the families. The notion of matriarchy taking over is evident in most of the stories. As noted earlier, the narrator's mother emerges as the sole breadwinner for the family. In addition, in "Pay Day Hell," Sipiwe earns money for the family through her sewing trade while Freedom's wife in "These are the days of our lives" is engaged in the selling of pottery and doilies before being beaten up by the Botswana police for boarder jumping. This can be viewed as womanhood reinventing itself, with the women taking on the role of family providers, while weakened masculinities fail to fulfil the role of family provider and protector. All around, the gender wall is torn down.

The writer breaks new paths by portraying a new breed of women who defy the traditional set up and dispel traditional beliefs about what they can or cannot do. The mother who doubles as both the caregiver and the economic provider, differs from a traditional conception of woman. Equally, the children growing up in all the above households have to contend with this shift and discover the self within these new circumstances. At the same time, this results in uncertain prospects for men who now fail to fulfil the role of the breadwinner, rendering them emasculated fathers.

Therefore, children, such as the narrator in "The Trek" represent childhoods growing up under matriarchal care and thus, marking a shift in gender roles and characteristics of fatherhood claims made by various scholars. For instance, Christiansen and Palkovitz (2000) propound that providing for the family remains central to a father's identity as a (male) parent. Marsiglio and Plek (2005) also argue that sociological theories on gender and masculinities interrogate how fathers' masculine identities intersect with age, sexual orientation and socio-economic status, and relate to their childcare involvement, parenting practises and relative influence on child development and family.

However, mothers still spend more time on childcare responsibilities than fathers do despite mothers' involvement in economic provisions (Gornick, 2011). This shows that women have continued to bear a disproportionately large share of family responsibilities on household work and care, despite their increased involvement in paid work. This observation brings to the fore the image of the cow and the ox, portrayed by Hoba in "The Trek." Hoba draws parallels between the ox and the cow, where the very description of the oxen and the cow that are pulling

the old scotch cart gives an image of a mother who shoulders all the responsibility. The reader is told:

It is the cow that is the problem. It stops frequently to feed her calf that is walking besides it. The ox ... walks energetically; it has no suckling worries. It stares straight ahead, wearing the same expression as baba, tired and bored. (116)

The new female gender role post the land reform now incorporates dimensions of economic independence and support responsibilities that until quite recently belonged to the male domain (Ola et al., 2014). However, the transformation has not been accompanied by new patterns in the gender distribution of household duties, including the care for children. This has prompted scholars such as Goldscheider et al. (2010) to affirm that until men's contribution to care work can match that of a woman in paid work, the gender revolution remains incomplete. Such is the case, because women execute caretaking roles, over and above their new role as economic providers for the family. The narrator refers to this anomaly:

I think Baba should have written 'Mrs Magudu' instead of Mr Magudu; he never works in the fields; the farm will be Mama's to run. (117)

This shows that there is now a shift in the way the narrator views the current gender roles which in turn influences the way he conceptualises his male role. He now acknowledges the role of his mother as a provider and forges his own manhood around that realisation.

The man's income largely determines the social, economic status of the family. However, the crisis context and the dramatic economic restructuring rendered the father incapable of fending for the family. The fathers in the selected stories, such as Doubt, Chimbado, Freedom and the narrator's father in "The Trek," have no meaningful income because of the crisis. This results in the fall of the family set up with regards provision of basic needs, where responsibilities no longer lies with the father alone. The imagined mother figures, such as the narrator's mother in "The Trek" and Sipiwe in "Pay Day Hell," end up assuming the role of both mother and father, by becoming providers over and above their mothering roles.

The women's ability to provide for the family threatens the ego of men who have been rendered incapable by the crisis. This is more evident in family set ups that are characterised by

traditional gender roles such as the narrator's in "The Trek." This is supported by Bosson et al. (2013) who notes that masculinity, in contrast to femininity, has been described as transient, precarious and something men continuously need to perform. Wood and Eagly (2011) who draw on the social role theory also note that gender stereotypes are dynamic constructions influenced by actual, and conceived changes, in what roles women and men occupy. The shift in gender roles witnessed in the selected stories is best described by Judith Butler's concept of gender performativity. In her seminal work *Gender Trouble* (1990), Judith Butler introduces the idea of gender performativity to challenge traditional views of gender as something inherent or biologically determined. Performativity, according to Butler, is the idea that gender is not something one *is*, but something one does. Gender is produced and maintained through repeated actions, behaviours, and language that align with societal expectations. These actions are performative in the sense that they constitute the very identity they seem to express.

In other words, when individuals perform gender, they are enacting a set of behaviours, gestures, and norms that align with the dominant cultural understanding of what it means to be male, female, or any other gender. However, these performances are not the expression of an internal or stable identity. Rather, they actively construct and reproduce that identity. It is, therefore, critical to interrogate the new roles of men and women and implications for family and society. This is done by examining the interplay between shifts in gender roles amidst the crisis, and configuration of childhood identities, under conditions of uncertainty posed by the Zimbabwean crisis in question, and the precarious childhoods emanating from such scenarios.

2.1.4.4 Women's increased economic activities

As has already been established, women's increasing economic activities resulted in a shift from social norms marked by the male breadwinner-female homemaker scenario. At the same time, role change among men influences perceptions of male stereotypes. The incapacitated father figures in the selected stories display traits characteristic of men with fragile egos. In addition, some of the fathers' behaviour, such as drunkenness and violence towards women and children, may be read as escapism, since the crisis has diluted their masculinity and capabilities to provide for their families. This is echoed by Ndlovu (2023) who explores how Mungoshi's works engage with the complexities of masculinity, particularly in the context of postcolonial Zimbabwe. Ndlovu analyses how Mungoshi's male characters often grapple with

the tension between traditional masculine ideals and the destabilising forces of modernity, social change, and personal crises. The term "broken backs" is metaphorical, referring to the emotional and psychological burdens these men carry due to societal expectations and their internal struggles. Therefore, while the fathers used to work alone and provide for the family, the current crisis does not permit the same such that they resort to drowning their failures in beer like the narrator's father.

Furthermore, some male characters' egos were deflated by the crisis. Mr Chimbadzo, or 'Baba vaAlphabet's pride and ego in Chinyani's "A land of starving millionaires" (2007) has shrunk so much that he is identified as "the millionaire with his stash of useless dollars" (39). He fails to provide for his family's basic food and is burdened by a cumulative school fees debt running into billions. At one point we are told that:

Then, he used to boast that he was the father of not one but two 'football teams' and their match officials. He used to grin when they nicknamed him Baba vaAlphabet. (39)

His ultimate death after being run over by a politician's new Mercedes Benz signifies that men in crisis-laden Zimbabwe have had their traditional roles reconfigured not only by the environmental circumstances, but by the inconsiderate attitude of leaders and politicians. Consequently, women either remain with the burden of having to take care of the children or they note the impotence of their husbands and rise up to become breadwinners themselves.

The above highlights that the woman's roles as caretakers are now combined with her newfound role as a provider amidst harsh economic conditions. The narrator in "The Trek" also mentions that "A plough sits at the far end of the scotch cart, looking new. Mama bought [it] last year with money from her groundnuts. Mama always works hard" (116). This points to the idea of a hardworking mother almost singlehandedly providing for the family. This is reiterated by the narrator's reference to the fact that "Mama's hoe is worn from use, Baba's is still new and clean" (116-117). As noted earlier, this further speaks of the mother as the singular provider and advancing the shift in gender roles, under which circumstances children forge their own identities.

The narrator in "The Trek" goes on to predict that the day after their arrival at their newly acquired farm, "Mama would be exploring her fields. Papa will be gallivanting searching for

the farmer who might have brewed a few drums of thick, rich *masese*” (117). This is later evident when the family is evicted from the farm at the end with the father depicted as absent from home and drinking away the money he got from the sale of the family’s cattle instead of using the money to repair the engines and irrigate the sugarcane. Ultimately, father in “The Trek” abandons his family and his whereabouts remain unknown at the time that his family is evicted by the powerful politician from the farm they had occupied. Therefore, one witnesses a childhood that is marked by emasculated fathers, and children who depend on their mothers for survival. I argue that this emerging childhood identity is a result of the collapsed economy, which has rendered men incapable and engaging in escapist behaviour.

2.1.4.5 Childhood and failed fatherhood

I now focus on childhoods marked by fathers who fail to provide for their families and here, I draw on the concept of emasculated fathers in my discussion. This builds on Muchemwa and Muponde’s (2007) discussion in the introduction to their book *Manning the Nation: Father Figures in Zimbabwean Literature and Society*. Both Muchemwa and Muponde refer to marginalised and emerging masculinities versus hegemonic masculinity. They argue that masculinities are not homogenous as there exists, within the broader circle of all men, those that are suppressed, rendered weak and ineffectual by the hegemonic masculinities. The father figures prevalent in the stories analysed in this chapter are incapacitated to provide for their families. The fathers are also victims of oppressive masculinities as I show in this discussion. The fate of the weak masculinities is best captured by Muchemwa and Muponde (2007: xvii) in their remark that:

Current political cultures are sustained by the manning of many sites of identity so as to efficiently man women and children and to thoroughly unman other men.

On one hand the State, in this case, may be equated to oppressive and hegemonic masculinities, while the father figures struggling to provide for their families represent marginalised masculinities. On the other hand, I draw parallels between the failure of the father to care for his family and the failure by the State (masculinised) to take care of its citizens. This can be read in the case of most of the fathers represented in the selected stories. One of the features common in the selected stories in this study and other literature emerging from the same period is the extent to which men have been disempowered. They have lost their status as protectors

and providers. Their masculinity has been undermined due to a national economy which leaves them unable to provide for their families. As a result, their masculinity is now only in name, a phenomenon scorned by the women in their lives. For instance, “In Pay Day Hell,” Sipiwe laughs at Doubt’s failure to look after their family. This results in the emergence of childhood identities under newer circumstances whereby man’s traditional gender role as the provider of the family has been rendered unsustainable by the economic crisis. As such, the likes of Ndlala in “Pay Day Hell” grows up with no respect for his father.

Margins or victims (including victims of violent childhoods) are created through active processes of marginalisation. The state is often complicit in perpetuating the exclusion and violence through systems of power and control to render individuals at the margins with multiple interconnected ways. In other words, government unmans men and men take it out on women and children. Therefore, while men are incapacitated, they try to defend their masculinities and this also includes efforts to re-establish and reinforce power over women and children, which is sadly done using violent ways. This violence cascades down the family set-up, which has since been established as the necessary fortress for a child’s development but has failed to offer a conducive environment for the child to forge a positive sense of selfhood for themselves.

Violence for the protagonists in the selected stories, such as Ndlala in “Pay Day Hell,” is not an abstraction. It is real and embedded in complex practices and places in young people’s lives/experiences. In “The Trek,” the narrator reveals the violence that he receives at the hands of his father. He says, “One day he beat me up for crying when I fell off the scotch cart” (116). This breeds violent childhoods as I shall analyse further in this chapter. It is also crucial to take cognisance of the fact that negotiation of identities by children of both sexes is influenced by both the father’s conduct and the mother’s evaluation of the father. The imagined families in this study are characterised by dejected wives who seem to continuously remind their husbands of their failed lives. Thus, Doubt’s mother in “Pay Day Hell” mocks her husband about his lack of education and money. Similarly, Doubt’s own wife Sipiwe endlessly complains about their poverty and compares him with other men. She states, “And why did God not give this house a leather sofa and a TV like other houses in the township?” (196). In addition, Sipiwe constantly nags her husband because she still harbours the idea that it is the duty of man to provide for his family. Freedom’s wife does not respond when he tries to talk to her, and Mr Chimbadzo’s three wives redirect the children’s cries for food to the father. One of the selected

short stories, "Rukudzo" by Andrew Aresho is a poignant story that explores themes of identity, tradition, and personal conflict and violence. The narrative centres on Rukudzo, a young boy grappling with carving out his own path in life in the face of the crisis conditions in Zimbabwe. In "Rukudzo," Taka's mother joins the other mother figures who constantly remind their husbands about how they have failed in their role to provide for the family. The protagonist Taka observes how her mother makes constant references to his father as useless and refers to his earning as meagre. This relentless criticism not only deepens Taka's sense of disillusionment with his father's ability to fulfil his responsibilities but also highlights the shifting dynamics within the family, where traditional gender roles and expectations are increasingly questioned and challenged. Therefore, the economic upheaval impacts the fathers and men in a negative way. It brings to the fore the vulnerabilities of men and forces them to accept the demise of their place as the dominant sex that control women and children.

2.2 Loss of rights and innocence

There are similar trends that run across the stories under study as depicted in "These are the days of our lives," "A land of starving millionaires" and "Pay day hell." These show communities plagued by debilitating poverty in a bid to locate the nature of childhood identities emanating from the Zimbabwean crisis. These stories provide a compelling site to examine the suffering and expectations of children in relation to the deprivation of their rights.

The father figures portrayed in the stories, as discussed earlier, fulfil the idea that the concept of childhood appears to evolve as lifestyles change and adult capabilities alter. Christiansen and Palkovitz (2018) indicate that providing for the family remains central to the father's identity as a male parent, especially when read from a traditional, cultural and patriarchal standpoint. In most cases, children expect the fathers to be the providers of their basic needs. This includes the availability of resources to cater for their mental, physical and social well-being. On the contrary, images of hunger pervade the childhoods in the stories in this chapter. Freedom, the father figure in "These are the days of our lives," leaves his family with nothing to eat when he goes to town one month-end hoping to find a friend who could lend him some money. He spends the whole day walking and hungry, but nothing materialises. When he can no longer bear the hunger, he decides to pass by his sister's house in the hope of getting food, to no avail. The family he has left home is equally hungry and he comes back home empty-handed.

In “A land of starving millionaires” Mr Chimbadzo’s family, Baba vaAlphabet is also perpetually hungry, and this is aggravated by the fact that he is a polygamous man with several wives and children. The children are constantly crying and asking for food. Mr Chimbadzo struggles to feed his family during the hyperinflationary situation which characterised the early 2000s. When Mr Chimbadzo goes to a shop with “one million, three hundred thousand Zimbabwean dollars” in the hope of purchasing a loaf of bread and a packet of sugar, he is informed by the shopkeeper:

Old man, don’t you read the papers? Or haven’t you got a radio? The price of foodstuffs quadrupled this morning. Half a loaf of bread now costs one million five hundred thousand. Forget about the sugar. It will give you a heart attack. Sugar is now strictly for the super-class. (38)

Mr Chimbadzo then resorts to collecting money from two men who had borrowed from him but had not paid back in a long time. Mr Chimbadzo finds mourners at the funeral of the first debtor, whom he learns had committed suicide. He then proceeds to the second debtor’s house, whom he finds on his death bed, suffering from HIV/AIDS related illness. Mr Chimbadzo goes on to obtain money from the second debtor’s family on the pretext that he was going to get medicines for the dying man to cure his HIV/AIDS illnesses, “...he was only conscious of the need to buy food for his howling family” (42). Unfortunately, he does not succeed, again as food prices had gone up several times since the last time he had heard of price hikes that morning. In this instance, the writer gives a lucid description of the feelings of helplessness that characterises this failed father. It is as though Mr Chimbadzo is rolling a stone up a hill in the Sisyphean fashion, whose result is similar to those of Solomon, Dinah, and Cyrus in Patterson’s (1964) *The Children of Sisyphus*. The search undertaken by Mr Chimbadzo is no longer a mere search for food but symbolises a struggle to find meaning as men in their personal lives. This explains the psychological turmoil he suffers, as noted in the narrator’s statement: “His head was whirling and spinning... He wondered what he was going to say to his three expectant wives and battalion of children” (42). Therefore, men represented in these stories feel humiliated as they are confronted by the reality that they are no longer the invincible and resolute men that society expects them to be.

The government’s actions and policies have created a scenario where some men occupy the realm of marginalised masculinities. The conditions obtaining owing to the economic

meltdown and uncertainties explain this marginalisation. Their own children are witnesses of their fathers' demise. Therefore, the childhoods in these stories typify childhoods growing up under emasculated fathers. This reflects a shift in the conceptions of manhood, where there is a collapse of the traditional conceptions of masculinities. These children also grow up amidst serious lack, deprivation and perpetual hunger, which leads to resistant childhood identities as analysed in chapter five of this thesis.

The feeling of helplessness and hopelessness that haunts the powerless fathers lead them to resent their families and view them as the source of their troubles. As noted earlier, in "Pay day hell," Mabhena senior and his son Doubt equally resent their children and families. Freedom is bothered by his hungry children and Mr Chimbado shifts from being a proud father of a huge family to wishing the children did not exist, since he lacked the means to look after the family. The narrator says:

...he used to boast that he was the father of not one, but two 'football teams' and their match officials... they now formed one ear-blasting choir that Baba vaAlphabet could well do without... The combined sounds of their non-stop shrieks set his teeth on edge, and spun his head... (39)

This resentment is not lost to the children who notice, as they grow up, that their fathers wish that they were not there. This amounts to rejected childhoods which is not ideal for healthy childhood and family life. The shifting economic realities have significantly changed the notion of a child's right to be cared for. According to John (2003), problems besetting children globally include the non-recognition of their needs, and challenges with establishing identity, agency, exercising power and finding a voice. In this case, they are rendered powerless as their fathers are incapacitated to fulfil their fatherly duties. The failure by these father figures to send their children to school resulted in limited prospects for these children as education could have helped them to improve their lives. In "Pay Day Hell," Doubt had already decided that Ndlala would not go to school. He could not afford the school uniform and schoolbooks. Failure to send children to school is prevalent in the selected stories in this chapter. Therefore, crisis childhood identities are characterised by lack of various needs relevant for growth and education, which is detrimental to a child's future.

The story "These are the days of our lives" also depicts a typical month-end scenario by a financially struggling family. There are striking resemblances with "Pay Day Hell" which

shows the importance of the author in recording history. The name of the father figure in the story “These are the Days of our Lives” is, ironically, Freedom. Arguably, political freedom came in 1980 along with promises of a better life for Zimbabwean people. More than 20 years later, life has not improved and the people’s lives deteriorate further and the government still makes similar promises that the land redistribution programme will empower the blacks economically. Yet, a few years later, as depicted in the selected stories, the readers are confronted with representations of African families who are caught up in the web of inescapable poverty, which leads to the questioning of the essence of freedom.

Unlike Doubt who is still employed, but whose salary can hardly sustain him and his family, Freedom is out of employment, yet he goes to town in the hope of bumping into one of his old friends “fortunate enough to be still employed” (63). Freedom is bothered by his three children’s demands. Freedom retorts:

Daddy, my shoes are torn. Daddy, I’m hungry. Daddy, school fees. Daddy my pen, my socks. Daddy this. Daddy that.... He felt so helpless. (63)

The demands by Freedom’s children are basic needs which they must ideally be provided with. Yet, because the fathers are incapacitated, they end up considering their children burdensome. In a similar case, Mabhena Senior in “Pay Day Hell” scolds his wife for bearing too many children who are now the source of his woes as they need to be fed. In the story “Pay Day Hell,” Doubt’s wife Siphwiwe tells their son, Ndlala, that Doubt is angry because he regrets that they are in his life. In relation to the concept of onomastics (Pfukwa, 2016) the name Ndlala, which means hunger in isiNdebele language, is symbolic, given the history of the family in “Pay day hell.” In his 2016 work on onomastics, Charles Pfukwa explores the significance of names within the context of African literature and culture. Onomastics, the study of names, particularly personal names, is used to understand cultural, social, and historical contexts. Pfukwa highlights how names are not just identifiers but are deeply tied to identity, heritage, and the socio-political dynamics of a given society. In the African context, names often carry symbolic meanings and are linked to the family, history, and even political events. Pfukwa's analysis emphasises how naming conventions serve as a medium through which individuals express their belonging, values, and personal experiences. In literature, names can also reflect the characters' internal struggles or their relationships with societal forces. The name Ndlala (hunger) therefore, represents the hunger that has pervaded the Mabena family for generations.

The children within the families mentioned above tend to have resigned to fate as they see no other way out of their poverty.

In addition, the story “A land of starving millionaires” captures the days of hyper-inflation in Zimbabwe and the childhoods experienced during that period. Money is losing value quickly and the father figure in this story, Mr Chimbadzo, is told that his one million and three hundred thousand Zimbabwean dollars with which he had hoped to use to purchase one loaf of bread and a packet of sugar, is no longer enough for just half a loaf. Prices of foodstuffs have exorbitantly gone up almost four times that very morning. Such has been the trend, and more hardships are to come. It leaves the father with the helpless feeling of a man who has failed to provide for his family. The family situation in this story is more glaring as the man has a total of 29 children who all look up to him for food and other provisions. Mr Chimbadzo, and his three wives have more children than they can care for. As a result, the crisis period in Zimbabwe is characterised by children who lack the basic provisions from their parents as confirmed by the images of Mr Chimbadzo’s 29 children “wailing at once like a siren and producing a deafening din” (38). There is no doubt that childhood identities are deprived of the basic right to food.

The images of hunger permeate the story, “A land of starving millionaires.” Baba vaAlphabet (the nickname that Mr Chimbadzo had proudly earned when his children reached 26 in number) had pawned his radio cassette player and TV:

...to alleviate the tooth-gnashing hunger haunting his house...At first their hungry cries were directed at the mothers: *Mommy Tadha-a! Mai chaja-a, AMAI TIRIKUDA SADZA-A-A!!!*. (Mother we are hungry and we want food) (39)

This is a representation of childhoods marred by extreme poverty in the wake of the economic meltdown and the situation exudes gross suffering. While the men depicted in the stories and examined in this chapter have largely been homogenised on the basis of the mutual circumstances that symbolise their lives, they are victims of the hegemonic masculinities around them. A closer reading of “A land of starving millionaires” sets Mr Chimbadzo apart from the other emasculated fathers on account of choices that he has made regarding his family. Before the crisis, Mr Chimbadzo is said to have been proud of his offspring to an extent of

boasting that he was the father of many children. Muchemwa and Muponde, (2007: xvii) note that:

father figures show how fatherhood is related to the performance of hyper masculinity associated with violence, domination and biological siring that does not have moral and social legitimacy.

The same concept of irresponsible siring is discussed by Muponde who locates such masculinity “in the misfit between siring and fathering, revealing a gap between biology and morality...” (Muchemwa and Muponde, 2007: xix). In other words, men must take responsibility for the children that they consciously bring into the world and sire an acceptable number of children which they can afford to look after. The 26 children that Mr Chimbadzo used to boast about is an example of irresponsible siring of children since it is difficult even under the best of circumstances for one man to provide adequate needs for so many children. This is a crisis period and Chimbadzo is still siring more children. Apart from the hungry triplets who arrive to take the number of children to twenty-nine, the other two wives are also expecting. Meanwhile, all of Mr Chimbadzo’s school going children have been sent home for non-payment of fees. That is irresponsible on the part of the father who brings children into the world with no hope of being able to care for them. Therefore, men must take responsibility for their actions to ensure that children are provided with the necessary care that they deserve as they are the most vulnerable group in the society.

Most of the suffering witnessed in the representations of childhood in this study is the result of betrayal by the adult world. The narrator’s father in Hoba’s “The Trek” (120) suddenly disappears. The adults fail to provide for and fulfil their children’s rights and yet, they also feel betrayed by their own government which has failed to improve the living conditions of the ordinary Zimbabwean, as represented in the selected fiction. The writer, in “These are the days of our lives” invokes satire to mock the way in which the government, which is supposed to put in place measures and policies that would improve the lives of its people, is always finding a scapegoat for its failures. Freedom’s possession of a tiny plot by the Sakubva River is supposed to bring relief to his suffering conditions by providing him with the much-needed food on the table. This has not been the case because of drought and other challenges. The explanation regarding the drought points toward the way that the government always tries to justify its shortcomings. The reader is sarcastically told:

There was a more plausible explanation, one that was never discussed in the papers, of course, but everyone who was patriotic and politically mature believed it. The drought had been arranged by the British and Americans, who had apparently set up base in neighbouring countries, just for this purpose... common sense told you that. (64)

Mr Chimbadzo's attempt to collect money from the first of the two debtors who owed him is unsuccessful when he finds people at the debtor's funeral wake. His unnatural ranting, raving and cursing following the discovery of the debtor's death alluded to a man at his wits' end. This typifies a man who has been stretched to the very limit and has no idea what else to do in the face of a crippling family crisis of extreme hunger. The patriarchy represented herein is tested to the limits by the crisis. This resonates with Ngumbi's (2018) observation that it is through the eyes of the child that a different perspective becomes accessible regarding the struggles of the adult world. Therefore, by portraying childhood identities marked by extreme poverty at the hands of the would-be provider, the father, one can understand the various elements that work together to produce the imagined childhoods emerging from the Zimbabwean crisis.

Representations of children's loss of rights are also evident in "The Trek." Throughout the narrative, the readers witness a disillusioned childhood. The narrator says:

There is no school here. There are no other children. They all went away with their parents when Baba couldn't pay them. (118)

The child narrator paints a picture of one who has no choice but is dragged through all that happens to his family. This gives the whole scenario a sense of helplessness and buttresses the vulnerability of the child narrator. The narrator is uprooted from his home which represents a state of extreme poverty and is by extension a reflection of the failures of the state. While the land redistribution exercise is supposed to offer a new lease of life to the beneficiaries of the programme, it worked against the child narrator, and the rest of the black Zimbabweans. The move to their family's newly acquired sugarcane farm seems to close an important phase in their lives, which also meant opportunities to go to school. The narrator laments at the lack of an opportunity to go to school after discovering that there was no school in the new area and that there were no other children to play with since they all went away with their parents when Baba could not pay them. Stathis et al., (2016: 45), define child neglect as:

"the failure of a parent or caregiver to provide for the child's basic needs, including food, shelter, clothing, medical care, education, and emotional support, which can result in harm to the child's health or development."

This definition emphasises the broad range of neglect, from physical neglect to emotional and educational deprivation, all of which can have lasting consequences for a child's development and safety. The loss of a schooling opportunity for the narrator in "The Trek" is a serious infringement on the basic rights of a child. The narrator is happy when his family is evicted from the sugarcane farm because he will at least be able to return to school. The problems on the socio-political landscape in Zimbabwe during the period under study impact on the intended socio-economic growth. This results in a typical scenario of a failed state, failed fathers, and a creation of new childhoods.

2.3 Family and parental influence amidst the crisis

In any society, children embody the hope of the future of that particular social order. This means that parenting plays a crucial role in childhood in any society at a given time. The childhood identities portrayed in the stories under study emanate from the family set up where the child is nurtured. To this end, Smart (2000) advances the idea that the influence of the family on the development of childhood identities and social habits are reproduced through everyday interactions. He further argues that family life is not given, but is a social construction as families embed their everyday lives in internal daily routines, practices and external social activities, interlinked with changes in gender roles and family relationships. The centrality of the family in childhood identity studies is also highlighted by Olanipekun and James (2018: 304) who postulate that:

childhood as a process of becoming an adult has come to dominate and occupy an increasingly high profile in contemporary African fiction. One possible reason is that children are central to the fabric of African culture within the context of the family.

While both scholars approach the subject of childhood identity studies from a non-literary point of view, they acknowledge that the concept is increasingly finding representation in fictional works. This resonates with the centrality of my thesis, where I interrogate representations of childhood identities within the context of crisis as imagined in literature.

Thus, the child-parent relationship has a major influence on child development. Parents' beliefs, thoughts and feelings can either positively or negatively impact the development of the child. According to Mahalihali (2016) the development of a child's behaviour is strongly influenced by how well their family functions. Children receive care for their dependency and attention for their sociability (Mahalihali, 2016). The kind of care and attention children receive during their early years of life affects their handling of important issues.

2.3.1 Child development amidst the crisis

Child development is discussed at length by most scholars in the education, psychology, sociology and even health fields. Such discussions also observe development systems such as the microsystem directly linked to a child. According to Lefrancois (2019) the microsystem of child development focalises a peer group, the home and school from which the child experiences life. The home and peer group are the most influential since the child is always in contact with such (Evans, 2000). Beside the microsystem, there is also the mesosystem. This refers to the experiences a child gains from participating in the microsystem, such as interactions that occur when a child connects with school. According to Clark (2007) and Martinello (2020), these interactions contribute to the child's development and understanding of childhood.

Scholars such as Santrock (2010) discuss on an exosystem where a child may not necessarily be present, physically at least, but affirm that whatever happens in that space affects them greatly. Baba vaAlphabet for instance, has three wives who are heavily pregnant, meaning the children they are carrying are not physically within the crisis-laden context under study. It means there is an exosystem to child development at play because the potency of the father, economic, social and political challenges identified and characterising the Zimbabwean context affect first their growth as foetus and their growth as born children from which their childhood may turn-out to be worse than the livelihoods of those currently battling to comprehend. This means the occupation of their parents have a direct connection to child development under the exosystem alluded to.

There is the macrosystem which, according to Schunck (2020), relates to the larger society. It follows that the nature of the society in which the children grow up in generally affects their development. Society is a space where values, laws and various patterns are shared. Finally, I

observe the chronos as involved in the shifting of one's life. It is within the chronosystem where strategies are required since these include issues such as divorce or political instability. This implies that how one imagines childhood experienced within the context of the Zimbabwean crisis, is based upon family experiences.

The notion advanced by Mahalihali above is also observed by Elkin and Handel (1978:118) who contend that "the family is the first unit with which children have continuous contact and the first context in which socialisation patterns develop." This observation further points to the fact that the values and standards of a child are shaped during the period that they are reliant on their parents. Mahalihali (2016) also reports on the society's effects on the formation of childhood identities, and that the effects of the family on a child's development may be modified by some other agencies such as the environment, school and television. However, Elkin and Handel (1978) state that despite a greater exposure of the child to outside influences, the family remains remarkably important for socialisation. This idea is supported by Goldsmith (2000) who points out that children learn their attitudes primarily from their parents, but in time, those attitudes are shaped by other environmental influences. A consideration of all the above arguments leads one to conclude that the family is central in shaping of childhood identities.

Schor (2003) produced a family paediatrics report and explains that the development of children is significantly influenced by interpersonal relationships within the family. At the same time, children are also dependent upon parents to meet their needs. Affection and protection are crucial for the development of a child. Thus, children need to receive love and protection for their healthy emotional development. However, a closer reading of the selected stories illustrates that this is not what obtains because of the prevailing crisis. The harsh economic conditions in Zimbabwe's period of crisis produces fathers who are unable to care for their children. Their living conditions, household income and access to basic services (all of which are pathetic) adversely affects their lifestyles and leads these fathers to resent their children. At times, the fathers become violent towards their children when all they want is provision of basic needs as vulnerable members of the society who require care and nurture. It is therefore vital to appreciate how theoretical understandings of, for instance, violence, can be used to locate and interrogate the lived experiences of children in their environments.

2.3.2 Love and care when nurturing children

The fathers depicted are expected to provide love, care and nurture to children, and yet lack of resources undermines their status such that they also marginalise and render members of the household vulnerable. The children often become victims of the violence between their parents. Generally, violence has been defined as actions and words that are intended to hurt people. In relation to the protagonists in this study, what is witnessed is domestic violence, thereby confirming McCue's (2008) submission that the most common forms of domestic violence include physical, emotional, psychological, sexual and economic abuse.

In "Pay Day Hell" Ndlala, the 4-year-old protagonist, is the embodiment of the culmination of the violence experienced by the entire society in the context of the political and social constraints affecting the nation at large. In Ndlala's family, arguments which can rightly be attributed to a lack of resources often degenerate into violence. In addition, this violence is directed to the most vulnerable member of the family, Ndlala, much to the psychological detriment of the child that culminates in trauma. This confirms findings in the Family Paediatric Report (2003) that when the family environment enables their needs to be met, children generally turn out well, socially and psychologically. On the contrary to the 2023 report, Ndlala's family environment is not conducive for the well-being of a child.

Conversations between Ndlala and his father are marked by violent utterances and endless threats which evoke negative emotions and reactions from the child. For instance, a simple enquiry from the child on when the father would buy a new television set is met by a brusque "Shut up!" and the light in Ndlala's eyes disappeared. (189). There are also incidents where Doubt continues to shout at his child Ndlala. For instance, when Ndlala tells his mother that it was his father who sat on the old bench and it broke, his father snapped at him. In addition, fright jumped into Ndlala's eyes, and he yells:

Get out! He pointed at the door...burst in[to] tears, or tears sprang to Ndlala's eyes. (190).

The father figure uses violence as a resource for escaping his circumstances in a context of massive deprivation and economic instability. Further confrontation between Doubt and his wife, Siphwiwe, eventually prompts Siphwiwe to warn her son. She says:

Beware Ndlala, my child! ... Father is angry today, just like yesterday and the day before that! ...

Siphiwe's statement implies a perpetual anger that is exuded by Doubt towards his wife and child. The childhoods witnessed during the crisis period of severe lack of resources in the family, are therefore marked by violence. Ndlala learns to avoid staying close to his father and leaves the room whenever his father is in a fit of rage because of economic frustrations.

Finally, the level of Doubt's anger is described as too deep and too hot, and even frightening to Doubt himself. Allusions are that he does not remember being like that as a youth. This calls for the need to interrogate the recurring patterns of violence and the economic, social and cultural forces that account for this. For instance, Doubt's own circumstances of poverty and lack while growing up in a violent home has led him to be a violent father to his child in turn. He raises his own son in similar circumstances, and breeds violent childhoods, which lead to violent adult identities. The portrayal of the father figure's own childhood reinforces the idea that violent or traumatized children experienced a lack of warm, supportive, and loving relationships during their upbringing.

2.3.3 Recurring spats of violence in society

Violence perpetuates itself in people and in the society and inhibits children from realising their potential. There are traits of childhood identities that continue from one generation to the other (a continuity of childhood identities) affecting children in more or less the same manner that it affected their fathers before them. The general sense of futility that characterises the life of Doubt, the father figure in "Pay Day Hell" emanates from his entrapment in a vicious cycle of poverty. The same pattern of lack that he and his siblings grew up under replicates itself in his own family and child's life.

In the same way that Doubt's father did not send him to school, Doubt has already envisaged a scenario where his own child, Ndlala, will not be going to school because he simply cannot afford to pay for his child's education. Doubt wonders if his child had already fathomed that he was just another city desperado, weak and scared. In other words, Doubt can clearly see generational poverty passed down the family. His father, and he and his son, are caught up in an inescapable web of poverty. Many other references are made to the debilitating poverty surrounding Doubt's family. Ndlala is described as:

Thinly built, with the telltale slightly bulging stomach, he was dressed in a dirty pair of patchwork shorts which were torn at the back, exposing a small, dusty buttock. (189)

Ndlala's bulging stomach is suggestive of a child suffering from kwashiorkor. He is also donning a dirty pair of patchwork shorts torn at the back (189). They stay in a rented room and their furniture is described as paltry and pathetic. Doubt is unable to provide the basic needs of his child. In fact, reference is made to inter-generational poverty which tends to keep on sustaining itself. Doubt's father, with his wife, and seven children had also only ever stayed in single rooms in other people's houses. His father's only possession was a sagging, creaky, iron bed which Doubt had inherited (190). Ironically, Doubt's insignificant inheritances from his father signify inheritance of the poverty that marked his father's life.

Doubt inherits his father's job following his death. Doubt's father's death could be likened to the way in which Baba in "The Trek" or Baba vaAlphabet's deaths affect the surviving children. In that way they extend the cycle of childhood hopelessness and helplessness in crisis-laden Zimbabwe where fathers eventually become socio-politically and culturally impotent due to prevailing economic challenges. For Doubt, however, it was unfortunate that the wages were hardly enough to sustain a family. He also inherited the old sagging and creaky bed, which amounts to nothing. Ndlala's childhood is thus already doomed, and marked by poverty which is handed down from one generation to the other.

Towards the end of this story, Doubt's despair over his family circumstances portrays the continued nature of poverty passed down from one generation to the next. Doubt remembers how his own father, Mabhena, would come home on pay day with nothing to show for the family. Doubt asks whether that was bound to be his fate too and to this, the narrator says:

The thought terrified Doubt. But still, it seemed as if he was stuck in the same rut, and his father's fate was lying in ambush for him at the corner. (197)

By extension, the same fate lies in ambush for his child Ndlala as well. As shown earlier, Doubt has already concluded that his son would not go to school, as he could not afford it. Ndlala's childhood, deprived of the basic right to education translates to Ndlala being ensnared in the same poverty cycle that characterises his father and his grandfather's lives. Thus, while other

childhood identity traits emerge, the crisis inevitably replicates the same childhood identities, as shown in this story.

As alluded to earlier, the general feeling of futility characterising the families and childhoods in the aforesaid stories often breeds violent fathers and homes, where the cost of violence is traumatically borne by children and domestic animals. The stolen calf in “The Trek” symbolises how domestic animals are not even safe. In Marechera’s *The House of Hunger*, children beat up and kill cats and dogs. In Honwana’s *We Killed mangy-dog*, a stray dog, Mangy, is mercilessly killed while in “The Trek,” a calf is stolen instead. These recurring acts of violence highlight the deeply ingrained cycles of brutality that extend beyond human interactions, affecting both families and animals alike, perpetuating a society where violence becomes normalised and the victims, often the most vulnerable, suffer ad infinitum.

2.3.4 Hostile parenting

Intimidating parenting is often associated with anxiety, depression and low self-esteem. In “Pay Day Hell,” the father is actively involved in making the home environment unsafe for the child. He inflicts physical and emotional violence on the child. As a result, Ndlala lacks normal parenting for a healthy childhood development since it has been established that good parenting behaviours and skills have a positive impact on children’s cognitive development, achievement, self-esteem, behaviour and even school. Therefore, the childhood identities are marked by fear, anger, anxiety, distress and helplessness.

There is also a general lack of child rights principles. For instance, earlier on I noted regarding Ndlala in “Pay Day Hell” that, “fright jumped in Ndlala’s eyes” (190). In addition, Taka, the protagonist in “Rukudzo,” is another victim of violence in the home environment. The narrator says, “For Taka, violent Fridays had become part of his life at home” (5). There are numerous alarming instances of violence between Taka’s parents. Growing-up in this distressing setting leads to Taka suffering from anxiety and often never knowing when to expect another eruption of violence between his parents or from his father to the children. The reader is told that:

At Ruzvidzo primary school, he enjoyed the tightly contested football matches, but the moment he returned home, the excitement of the day soon dissipated like dew (5).

Therefore, Taka's childhood is marred by violence, and fear, where the home has become a battleground and this creates a negative impact on his development as a child. As a way of negotiating the violence around him, Taka develops coping mechanisms to deal with the toxic hostile home environment. He makes use of the institution such as the school, as the one place where he feels safe and secure. The school here is noted as an exosystem that helps Taka develop.

Therefore, the selected stories raise significant questions about the home environment in which the violence takes place. They also highlight the social and economic factors of the period, which permits such violence on children. In the case of Ndlala, his life mirrors family framings of childhood experiences of violence. More importantly, there are ways in which specific instances of violence (such as those witnessed in "Pay day Hell") are embedded in a framework of insecurity that shapes everyday life and pre-occupies the young children in these societies.

2.4 Childhoods bereft of cultural and moral values

Morality encompasses the ability of an individual to make the right decisions in terms of right and wrong and what should and should not be done. It relates to an individual's ability to behave appropriately in the face of different life circumstances. Consequently, it is vital to instil moral values in children as they develop to enable them to make conventional choices in life and become acceptable social beings. DeMoss (2001) explains that parents have an enormous influence and responsibility in moulding the choices and lives of their children. Oswalt (2014) places the role of cultivating good moral values in children squarely on the parents since it is the parents' values that influence children in developing positive moral thoughts.

As such, I place children in the context of the African family, community and wider society in analysing morality. This is done with the awareness that values, customs, and beliefs are central in the lives of both adults and children and that they play a central role in determining the person they become. At the same time, family is an institution that has been regarded as the repository for cultural, moral and religious principles. In the Zimbabwean crisis period, from which emanate the childhood identities assessed in this thesis, morality is one the decline for adults, who in turn, influence children negatively. This leads to a potential disaster as children are the future of societies. Within society, parents identify certain values that are important for the development of their children (Goldsmith, 2000). While Goldsmith was writing from a

universal child development point of view, this concept applies to different cultural groups that subscribe to set values that govern their daily lives. The crippling crisis in Zimbabwe in the decade of the *Third Chimurenga* led parents to disregard this notion as they tried to navigate the crisis and this resulted in a lack of proper moral guidance to the children. For instance, Ndlala's childhood is also one filled with immorality, whereby he witnesses his mother's infidelity. Sphiwe sleeps with their neighbour, Ndlovu, in exchange for food and other material benefits. Sphiwe is driven by desperation to sell her body in exchange for food for herself and her child. Nonetheless, this is done before her child and growing up witnessing such acts is likely to create children who will not hesitate to behave in the same manner, even though it is not the ideal thing to do morally and culturally.

Ndlala's situation leads to his impaired judgement in terms of what is wrong or right. This is because Sphiwe's behaviour exerts a negative moral influence on the child. A good mother is expected to be guided by the ethics of what is best for the child (McCarthy et al., 2000). Sphiwe's survival mechanisms, whereby she commits adultery in exchange for food from their neighbour, Ndlovu, are not exemplary nor good guidance to her child. Growing-up with parents who engage in adultery and other immoral acts in full view of their children can also lead children to engage in uncontrolled sexual behaviour leading to rape, early and unwanted pregnancies as well as contracting HIV/AIDS, as is the case with other crisis childhood identities which are explored in the ensuing chapters.

While the traditional African family is known for its emphasis on strong family ties and the importance of the extended family, Doubt and his siblings, who are scattered across town do not visit one another and spend long periods of time without contact. The story establishes that:

Doubt's siblings were now scattered all across the townships of Bulawayo, their strained circumstances seemed to have strained family relations, because they never bothered to visit each other. (191)

Consequently, Ndlala does not know his aunts, uncles and their children. This symbolises childhoods marked by isolation and a lack of family support. This is fuelled by the harsh economic conditions which render it impossible for family members to afford the luxury of visiting and spending time with family. Each one of them is too busy try to scrape a living out of the crippling economic conditions. As a result, positive human values that are supposed to

stem from family interactions in the traditional African family have also been eroded culminating in morally barren childhood identities isolated from cultural institutions.

Other morally upright traits such as honesty are also lacking in the children growing up in the period under study. In “A land of starving millionaires,” Mr Chimbadzo - Baba vaAlphabet - finds his second debtor on his death bed having succumbed to HIV/AIDS and manages to con the dying man’s family of the exact amount that he was owed (though he had wanted more). The lies and deceit used by Mr Chimbadzo to scam the victim’s family are symptomatic of a society whose regard for honesty has been eroded and individuals will do whatever it takes to survive the biting economic hardships. Consequently, childhood identities marked by fraud and dishonesty are likely to result in future adults who are equally dishonest.

Societies are expected to be founded on strong moral grounds. Therefore, individuals’ lack of morals have ripple effects on the entire society. The childhoods discussed here, which are existing in, and/or emerging from families and communities fraught with moral decadence, often lead to immoral childhood identities and future immoral adults and societies. This is observed in the behaviour of the four boys who rape 13-year-old Rita in the story “Forever haunted by Rita’s eyes.” The behaviour of adults in the literature (which behaviour is supposed to positively influence children) does not render it possible for children to get good guidance on how to acquire acceptable social values and behaviour. For instance, when Sipiwe commits adultery in full view of her child, it portrays a gap in positive parental influence. This often leads to destruction of communities and a lack of decent childhoods.

2.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I analysed representations of childhood identities during the Zimbabwean crisis period against the backdrop of tensions caused by debilitating economic conditions, violence and fear. The recurrent theme of the short stories is a gross neglect of the needs of the child because of the crisis which has incapacitated the fathers. There is a clear rupture of children’s domestic security. The excessive lack of financial and material resources in the families described above all points towards a lack in childhood, since the children raised under these circumstances of extreme poverty do not get the basic rights to which children are entitled. The children depicted in the narratives are deprived of their right to education, nutrition, and proper care. The ideal of an innocent and protected childhood becomes a preserve of the few. Violence

also continues to take centre stage in families during the Zimbabwean crisis period which forms the backdrop of the stories.

The economic, physical, spiritual and moral misery which characterise the childhoods under study result in vulnerable, weak and traumatised childhood identities. The crisis period fails to produce children who are strong and in control because of the debilitating circumstances surrounding them. Instead, there is disregard for the child's individual progress and fulfilment. Overall, by drawing on the link between crisis and problem-fraught childhoods, a reading of these stories affirms the need to historicise these Zimbabwean childhoods as emanating from the Zimbabwean crisis, and to better understand the protagonists' identities.

My discussion regarding the way in which childhoods are (re)configured in the context of the Zimbabwean crisis also focused on the patriarchal family, and the shift in gender roles of the family, arguably, because of the crisis. It emerges from my discussions in this chapter that mother figures in the imagined families, such as the narrator's mother in "The Trek," Mama Nina in "Specialisation," as well as Sipiwe in "Pay Day Hell," represent a generation of women who bring up their children within an environment of trauma and repression as a result of socio-cultural and economic challenges. Indeed, for centuries, women's discrimination, vindicated either in the name of religion or culture, has pushed them into oblivion. This has turned women into subordinate members of society barred from participation in the formation of religious laws, societal rules and cultural practices. These women are bound by the patriarchal supremacy propagated by culture and tradition, and they have adopted this form of living as a norm. However, even within the confines of the patriarchal family imagined by Hoba (2005, 2007), it would be erroneous to assume that African society, and culture are static. Matriarchy has risen above the stagnant, postcolonial social environments, dominated and rendered dysfunctional by the presence of masculine authority. The mothers and women in the stories analysed rose to be the sole providers of their families' needs in the crisis period. Consequently, this projects the traditional father as a character not fit in the established framework of global masculinities, which stipulate the role of the father as the provider. The crisis led to increasingly complex family compositions and to a growing diversity of family forms and relationships. It led to a redefinition of parent child relationships and forced the child to seek a balance between patriarchy and matriarchy as their childhood identities are now marked by matriarchal providers.

The period under which I examine childhood identities is marked by crisis, resulting in children without family stability. The economic meltdown represented in the selected stories results in the disintegration of families, communities and individuals. The children in these stories are denied the search for family stability by the crisis. The authors construct the protagonists' families through images of poverty and violence. The families do not have access to basic services, have no household income and simply survive under deplorable conditions.

The protagonists emerge as free-floating subjects entering new worlds where they try to forge new identities. In the case of Hoba's "The Trek," the narrator's journey to invade the white man's farm, and back to the village without the promise of a better life is indicative of the complex national heritage stemming from colonialist influence which the black child fails to break away from. Thus, the narrator creates his own world, independent of his family where he constantly grapples with unanswered questions regarding his existence within the broader context of the family and the nation. Hoba (2005, 2007) uses the figure of the child narrator to comment on the worsening Zimbabwean crisis in the context of the agrarian reform programme amidst debates of its successes and failures. In the process, the author shows representations of childhood identities marred with violence, poverty, disillusionment, vulnerability and pain.

The chapter explored the extent and depth of children's suffering and paid homage to the children's will to survive. It analysed the ways in which the children navigate the context of violence in the home and in the society. While children are not generally able to challenge the structures that are actively violent to them, they are actively and constantly seeking ways of lessening the risks and violence to their lives. In other words, children find spaces and ways of being amidst the insecure environments of their everyday lives that actively resist the suffering surrounding them. Thus, Ndlala, in "Pay Day Hell," is familiar with violence and must make sense of it routinely in his life. This is sometimes achieved through avoiding, incorporating, resisting, rejecting, negotiating and indulging in violence. For instance, as a way of avoidance, Ndlala goes out of the house when he sees the familiar signs of his father's anger. He is young but already knows not to stay in the way of his angry father, thereby actively responding to a repressive situation in his quest for selfhood. All this occurs within the broader social context of the daily struggle for survival during a period of economic collapse which sets limits to their identities as children. The childhood identities are, therefore, marked by an overwhelming sense of loss or betrayal because of emotional violence from parents or caregivers, the very

structures that should intervene but are perpetuating the violence. In children's lives, these acts of violence manifested as profoundly destabilising to the forging of positive identities.

Emergent from my analysis of crippling economic conditions, violence and the resultant everyday fear and challenges, is a more complex terrain of the environment that determines the way in which childhood identities are (re)configured. The crisis brought with it certain kinds of struggles which continue to foreground how children negotiate and construct identity within the tensions caused by debilitating economic conditions, violence and fear. Therefore, I tried to historically contextualise contemporary representations of childhood identities within the specific political, social and economic environments represented in the texts, especially the socio-economic conditions that altered the landscape in which children negotiate their identities. I carry the debate further in the ensuing chapter, where I interrogate crisis childhood identities in relation to the female child, bearing in mind the challenges that are faced by the girl child.

Chapter 3: Gendered Childhood Spaces

3.0 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the place of gender in the negotiation and production of childhood identities and personhood as imagined in the selected literature from the Zimbabwean crisis period. The main focus is on the delicate traditional and cultural influence, as well as the general organisation of the society that limit and constrain women's freedoms. As the female protagonists create new models that fit their multiple and slippery identities, they must grapple with the issue of victimhood and survival amidst the crisis. As such, the chapter proffers an insight into the emerging female childhood identities while being subject to a double crisis of an African girl child in a society where the patriarchal dictates determine how the female child negotiates her identity.

3.1 Intersections of Gender, Sexuality and Self-image

The selected short stories in this chapter are, Tagwira's "Mainini Grace's Promise" (2008), (*Women Writing Zimbabwe*), Mupfudza's "Forever Haunted by Rita's Eyes" (2005) (*Writing Now*) and Chingono's "Tomorrow Is Not Another Day" (2006) (*Not Another Day*). As noted earlier, New Historicism, places emphasis on the fact that every literary work is a product of the historic moment that produces it. As such, my analysis of the above stories considers how the authors contend with the unpleasant realities and violence in which the girl child finds herself in. That is, I examine how the writers capture the moment of crisis, and how that sheds light on how childhoods are represented in the selected literary works.

I begin by contextualising marginality and subjectivity of the girl child living in the Zimbabwean crisis period. This is followed by an analysis of the selected literature, with focus on the following thematic concerns: the struggle for selfhood against a system riddled with debilitating challenges, institutionalised violence inflicted on the girl child, stolen childhoods, trauma, unfulfilled promises, anger and anxiety, as well as entrapment, betrayal, loneliness and depressed childhoods, sexual violence leading to violent offences as well as shifts in care-giver roles. I conclude the chapter by critiquing how the period of economic, political and social crisis impacted the girl child as imagined in the selected literature.

3.1.1 Marginality and Subjectivity of the Girl Child

In examining the imagined childhood identities emanating from the Zimbabwean crisis, it is necessary to pay attention to the complex web of multiple forms of categories such as race, class, language and gender, with a bias towards ways in which gender disrupts and complicates crude identity categories. For instance, the represented childhoods in the selected stories portray the entanglement between girlhood and heightened vulnerability and marginality. During the crisis period, the girl child inevitably occupies the unstable position of being the most marginalised group. Therefore, this chapter uses narratives that feature the girl child to critique the crisis economic, political and socio-cultural environments and their influence on childhood identities.

Feminist theories contend that women have largely been subdued and relegated to the periphery and thus, curtailing their well-being. The discussion in this chapter is shaped by feminist and womanist discourses, including feminist claims that women in many communities are positioned at the margins and periphery of existence. Furthermore, African feminist perspectives, which consider the history and diversity of Africa, including colonialism, (Maathi 2006) are employed to understand the lived experiences of girls and women in the selected stories. This bent strives to understand systems that promote exclusionary policies and undermine women's progression in patriarchal environments.

Judith Butler's work (1990; 2004) on gender identity, emphasises that identities are constituted through social norms and discourses. These norms and discourses are not neutral but are shaped by power structures, which intersect to influence individual experiences. For example, a Black woman's experience of gender-based discrimination will be different from that of a white woman because of the additional layer of racial discrimination. In Butler's view, these layers of identity are not separate but are entangled and shaped through power relations that reinforce or resist particular social norms. The complexity of identity thus cannot be reduced to just one category (such as gender or race) but must consider the ways in which multiple categories intersect and create specific subjectivities.

A number of scholars have undertaken studies on marginalisation in general (Sutradhar, 2015; Ingutia 2019; Varghese and Kumar, 2022), and I apply the concept of marginality in my analysis of gendered crises childhood identities. This analysis is undertaken, bearing in mind

that the periphery standing of women in their different communities seems to have been universalised. Therefore, one of the ways to address women's challenges is to understand the conditions and practices that enhance their subjugation. The stories analysed in this chapter clearly demonstrate the double yoke that the girl child carries over and above the economic crisis affecting everyone else on the margins. To this effect, Chitando (2016:114) contends that "the struggle to ensure that the girl child enjoys a quality life is on-going. This struggle recognises that the girl child has to negotiate multiple negative forces if she is to thrive." Sutradhar (2015) defines marginalisation as a process whereby a group of individuals are pushed to the margins of the society. Ingutia (2019: 1) holds the view that marginalisation describes "situations of acute and persistent disadvantage" be it in education, economic, political or cultural practices. Varghese and Kumar (2022) find it as a common concept in literature concerned with inequalities and development. In this regard, and following Varghese and Kumar (2022: 23), marginality refers to "people or communities on the lower spectrum of the hierarchy in terms of the economic, social or cultural resources or power." Marginalisation directly impacts on the chances to dignified life based on resources management and distribution and is used to measure degrees of inequality (Varghese and Kumar, 2022).

The socio-cultural stratification of society is visualised on the bases of the presence, or lack thereof of marginality. However, the stratification of the society on racial grounds and its attempt to create philosophies and ideological standings to justify marginalisation has always been contested. Said's (1978) *Orientalism* and Ngugi's (1993) *Moving the centre: The struggle for cultural freedoms* discuss some of these contestations of the social stratification on racial grounds. Therefore, it follows that in all this and based on gendered grounds, women have occupied a lower position in the stratified social strata. Some of these divisions were colonially induced. In addition, crisis-laden contexts often spell doom and exposes those occupying the lower strata of the society, especially women, to the highest degrees of the negativities, disadvantages, domination and low statuses while the opposite appears true for those who occupy the highest positions in the strata.

The dichotomies, have-and-have-nots, poor-and-rich, centre-periphery, civilised-uncivilised, and black-and-white, become more pronounced within the broad marginalisation and the resultant interpersonal relations. Marechera's *House of Hunger* (1978) portrays the working of hierarchical violence during the colonial era where the male white settler initiates violence against the Black African man. The African man takes the violence to his wife, who in turn

passes it to his children, and the children takes it to domestic animals. The killing of dogs and cats in Vengere Township as depicted in *The House of Hunger* is an instance of violence that is connected to the merciless beating of a woman by her husband who shamelessly goes on to rape her in public.

Hence, women are portrayed as heavily discriminated against and abused (Techane, 2017) on the basis of their gender in crisis-ridden Zimbabwe. One observation regarding discrimination against women is that patriarchy socialises the boy child to dominate, while relegating the girl child to subjugation (Chitando 2012). Women are sidelined and remain marginalised in spite of their active roles in the economic sectors. The narrator in Hoba's "The Trek" (2005: 117) says: "I think Baba should have written 'Mrs Magudu' instead of 'Mr Magudu'; he never works in the fields, the farm will be Mama's to run." This attests to how the crisis in Zimbabwe post-2000 rode on existing cultural, and legislative as well as political norms that perpetuate their inequality in the economic sphere. It is no accident that feminist theories, in all their shades, have played an ideological role towards changing the *status quo*. Concepts such as inequality and oppression are often alluded to in relation to marginalisation, although, as Ingutia (2019) insists, the two concepts are related but different from each other. As such, the exclusionary practices related and linked to girlhood or womanhood are but social constructions resulting from a deep desire to gain, wield and maintain power within a crisis-laden society in the hope of using dominance as a relief from the economic, social and political challenges.

3.1.2 Family Disintegration

Family breakdown is another critical axis of intersectionality in shaping childhood identities during the Zimbabwean crisis. The loss of parental figures, due to death from illness or political violence, often forced children into roles they were too young to take on. Sarai, in "Mainini Grace's Promise," becomes the caregiver for her dying parents, while Fungai and Masimba in "Tomorrow is Not Another Day" are left to survive alone after the death of their parents. These children's identities are shaped not only by the loss of family but also by the necessity to step into adult roles, navigating issues of survival, caregiving, and responsibility at a young age. The absence of functional family structures due to political and economic instability forced many children to rely on themselves and each other for survival. In doing so, these children's childhood identities were forever altered. They developed identities based on resilience, survival, and resistance to external forces that sought to destabilize their lives.

The analysis of the selected stories in this chapter seeks to underscore the idea that gender significantly influences female protagonists' marginalised statuses. Hussein and Anzar (2017: 12) observe that "in the contemporary changing society, the institution of the family has lost many important functions like socialisation, caring of child, affection, love, recreation and so on." To this I add the view that the crisis widened the gap between parents and their children and this led to the marginalisation of the children within the family. This marginalisation is also tied to child maltreatment discussed earlier. In other words, the neglect there is an instance and ingredient of child abuse (Font and Macgure-Jack, 2020). Hussein and Anzar go on to highlight that the modern nuclear family is characterised by disintegration due to socio-economic and political factors at play in the modern world. In Mungoshi's *Some Kinds of Wounds and Other Stories* (1980) one of the recurring themes in most of the stories in the anthology is family disintegration because of urbanisation and subsequent westernisation. From the anthology, stories like "The Brother" highlight the underlying circumstances that lead the protagonist to mourn the disintegration of the family, fostering a deep sense of betrayal.

In the imagined crisis-laden Zimbabwean context, and in real life, parents are over-engaged in economic issues in the spirit of fending for their families. However, the manner in which this is done is detrimental to the very families they are fending, leading to serious fractures on that which is expected to bind what remains of the already fragile family given that most are headed by single mothers. The parents' attention has been drawn so much away from managing, checking upon and caring for their children due to the economic hardships posed by the crisis.

The period 2000-2008 is identified as a period that witnessed what is now being referred to in economics literature as the rise or development of *kukiya-kiya* economy (Sibanda, 2016; Jones, 2010) meaning multiple forms of making do or simply a hustling ethic (*The Herald*, 2017). Such an ethic of hustling became "the source of livelihood for much of the urban population" (Jones, 2010: 286). As a result, the attention parents gave to their children diminished, as survival became the primary concern. In essence, there was no longer room for family-time, and no meaningful checks on the security and other needs that the children required. In child development literature this is referred to as negligence which is also tantamount to child abuse. Avdibegoviü and Brkiü (2020: S337) indicate that child neglect is actually the most common form of abuse which refers to "omissions or negligence in meeting the basic needs of a child." The Zimbabwean crisis could not afford parents to the chance pay attention to their children,

thereby, showing what the World Health Organisation (1999) termed parental failure, especially in the area of emotional development. For example, in Mupfudza's "Forever haunted by Rita's eyes" (2005) (*Writing Now*), Rita's mother, Gogo Shupi, neglects her daughter Rita. She is depicted concentrating on her shebeen/brothel business and hardly sparing time for her girl child. The singled-out cases where attention was given are moments of emotional, verbal and physical harassment of Rita having been followed to school and dragged back home "to take out [her] foul-smelling, urine-infested blankets...[while] The whole school would snigger" (Mupfudza, 2005: 221-222). Resultantly, Rita is left to herself to deal with, and emotionally develop to a point of wishing "[if]...I could run away from this" (Mupfudza, 2005: 223). Hence, Mupfudza (2005: 221) describes her as "the girl who carried shards of her broken heart and tormented soul in the landscape of her hunger-stricken features."

Several elements threaten the safety of the girl child. Rita has to constantly negotiate the hazardous terrain of drunken men who come to solicit for prostitutes at her mother's shebeen. Eventually she falls victim to teenage pregnancy after being gang raped by four teenage boys, with the protagonist narrator, the poet, participating in the act of betraying her trust and sexually abusing her. Echoes from Honwana's "We Killed Mangy-Dog" (*We Killed Mangy-Dog and other Mozambican Stories*) (1964) are somehow re-enacted. Parallels can be drawn between the narrator (the poet) in Mupfudza's "Forever haunted by Rita's eyes" (2005) and Honwana's "We Killed Mangy-Dog." In Honwana's short story, the young boy and narrator initially show compassion and form an attachment to the stray dog, Mangy-dog, the most vulnerable member of the community. However, he later joins a group of peers in killing it. The killing exercise also marks as a rite of passage for the narrator and his peers similar to the sexual rite of passage that the poet and his peers, Thomas, Luke and Timothy undertook. In the end, Rita's daughter is a product of the gang rape and another single mother headed family is reborn in the cycle of life within the Zimbabwean crisis.

Similarly, the economic and health crisis in "Mainini Grace's Promise," shows how Sarai's family contributed to her being isolated or separated from the rest of the extended family members. Family members distance themselves from her and she is left to care for her sick and dying mother. Thus, Sarai is separated from society and the rest of the family. I discuss Rita and Sarai's circumstances as I proceed in this chapter. Nonetheless, parallels can be drawn between the short stories selected for this chapter with the way No-Violet Bulawayo's novel *We Need New Names* engages the experiences of a girl child to describe challenging situations.

Darling, the 10 year old protagonist of Bulawayo's novel, plays with her friends Chipso, Sbhoo, Bastard, Stina and Godknows in a dilapidated town called Paradise, and their interactions and activities bring out the crisis that grips Zimbabwe. The name of the town, Paradise, is ironic in that it is rather a hell on earth, where the promises of free health and education by nationalists is not the reality on the ground. Parallels can be drawn between the protagonists in the selected stories in this study (Sarai, Ndlala, Fungai, Masimba and others) and those in Bulawayo's novel. Darling and her friends are not able to attend school due to extreme poverty. Their families are also devastated by the HIV/Aids scourge amidst poor health delivery systems. Yvonne Vera is also another writer who grapples with matters affecting women because of the deeply patriarchal society they live in. Feminist discourses permeate through her writing in the following novels: *Without a name* (1994), *Butterfly Burning* (2000) and *The Stone Virgins* (2002). Vera presents unspeakable taboos with reference to generations of black African women. She invents tragic female characters plagued with abortion, suicide, rape and murder. These are some of the issues that also trouble female children in crisis-filled Zimbabwe as discussed in this chapter.

3.1.3 The Role of Culture in Child Development

Regarding the importance of the cultural fabric in the growth of children, Boakye-Boaten (2010: 110) observes that "in spite of the internal contradictions inherent in the African traditional system and its capacity to provide and protect its children, the social structure of Africa has undergone tremendous changes." Boakye-Boaten notes further that these changes have undermined the ability of social institutions within Africa societies to sustain practices, and values designed to protect and defend children. In other words, "changes in the political, economic and social institutions have been the main culprits in the re-alignment of children within the cultural context of Africa" (Boakye-Boaten, 2010:107). These observations confirm the idea that while the government now acknowledges education and nutrition as essential entitlements of children, there has been little legislation or initiative to safeguard the most fundamental rights.. For instance, although the government acknowledges children's rights to education and nutrition, many children in rural areas, like the narrator in "The Trek," still face barriers to access, such as inadequate school infrastructure and the lack of affordable food. This neglect underscores the gap between policy recognition and actual implementation, leaving children vulnerable and underserved in critical areas of their development, as depicted in the selected literature.

The *Third Chimurenga* has been described as chaotic by scholars such as Raftopoulos (2009), who examines the political and social upheaval during the Third Chimurenga, linking it to the broader collapse of governance structures in Zimbabwe. Alexander (2006) also discusses the chaotic nature of the land reform process and its political ramifications in postcolonial Zimbabwe. As a result, there was little consideration by the government to safeguard children during that time. This is witnessed in the story “Tomorrow Is Not Another Day” by Julius Chingono, where social workers fail to attend to a child-headed home and only come back after one of the children, Fungai, has already died. Much of the support appears to have become afterthought interventions. Commenting on the attitudes of most African governments, child protection researchers such as Kacker (2015) indicate that child protection for countries such as Zimbabwe which were driving a land reform political agenda had no appetite to enact, for instance, legislation designed to protect children. Dominating the period was the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPA) of 2002 described by Ngwenya (2019) as the first of its kind legislation to be enacted in Africa at the time. The Zimbabwean government was uninterested in protecting children amidst the crisis because it was preoccupied with coming up with:

...patently repressive laws to give a legal veneer to its power retention schemes anchored on three pillars. These were control; sowing siege mentality; and self-preservation. (Ngwenya, 2019:144).

This was a time when the MDC opposition was still in its early stages but wielding significant power, as its growing popularity posed a real threat to the ZANU PF government's hold on power. Therefore, despite constitutional and legislative provisions on the universal protection of children, and regulations of their activities, the conceptions of childhood, responsibilities and roles of the government remained highly contentious.

In Africa, and Zimbabwe in particular, traditional norms and a variety of patriarchal cultural provisions, conceptions of masculinity and those defining relations between men and women, boys and girls, continue to wield power and influence over communities. It is these norms that impose certain roles and duties on children and these are often at odds with the provisions of international child rights instruments. As such, the female protagonists construct their identities from the limited choices they are offered in a turbulent post-2000 Zimbabwean space where parental agency and guidance are unavailable for the girl child to emulate and construct their

own identities. This is shown in the way young Rita in Mupfudza's "Forever haunted by Rita's eyes" (2005), has limited choices, if any at all. In addition, Chido, in Hoba's "Trek (2005) continues to protest the *status quo* by crying and wailing and nothing much comes out of it as there are no signs that this allows her to construct her own identity. Perhaps, Jessie, Rita's daughter from the gang-rape, in Mupfudza's "Forever haunted by Rita's eyes" promises to change the *status quo* as she enjoys the mother's protection and is self-empowered towards redefining her identity. Even though she is growing up at a shebeen where immoral acts are rampant, she refuses to prostitute herself. She tells the narrator "I am not one of those girls" (228), an assertive identity proclamation not even money can redefine.

3.1.4 Stolen childhoods, unfulfilled promises, anger and anxiety in "Mainini Grace's Promise"

This story exposes the ways in which writers deploy the trope of contested childhoods to expose socially oppressive circumstances that entrap children, rob them of their childhood and leave them struggling with a sense of betrayal stemming from unfulfilled promises. In "Mainini Grace's Promise," Sarai demonstrates the kind of future she envisages for herself despite the limitations that surround her. This is shown when she ponders on the bleakness that characterise her life and the failures of the leadership in postcolonial Zimbabwe. The parent-child relationship is analysed in relation to the shift in the role of caregiver from the mother to the daughter as portrayed in "Mainini Grace's Promise." In "Mainini Grace's Promise" by Valerie Tagwira, the parent-child relationship is explored through the shifting dynamics of caregiving within the family. As the story unfolds, the mother, Mainini Grace, who once served as the primary caregiver, begins to experience physical and emotional strain due to HIV/AIDS related illness. This forces a role reversal, with her daughter stepping into the caregiving role. The daughter's transition into this position highlights themes of responsibility, sacrifice, and the complexities of generational roles. The shift also reflects the broader socio-economic challenges facing families, particularly women, in Zimbabwe. As the daughter assumes greater responsibility for her mother's well-being, the narrative explores the emotional and psychological toll of this role reversal, as well as the strength and resilience that arise from it. The evolving relationship underscores the inevitable transformations that occur in family roles due to external circumstances such as the crisis conditions in Zimbabwe. This is an expansion to the mother-daughter relationship represented in Mupfudza's "Forever haunted by Rita's eyes" where the relationship between Rita and her mother, Gogo Shupi, is very much different from that of Rita and her daughter, Jessie, despite both mothers being shebeen/brothel queens.

“Mainini Grace’s Promise” centres a child protagonist to comment on the expectations of children and show the precarious state of the girl child’s livelihood. Even when a girl child such as Sarai refuses to take her marginalisation lying down as shown when she asserts her right to education despite societal pressures, the disadvantages against her advancement are numerous. These disadvantages are presented in the story as cultural biases, gender discrimination, and lack of access to resources. This is evident in the story when it is indicated that,

For Sarai, dropping out of school to become her mother’s carer was inevitable. She felt as if the family had washed themselves clean of all responsibility, before dumping it carelessly into her fifteen-year-old lap (123).

The story, “Mainini Grace’s promise” draws on the discourses of the vulnerability of the girl child to articulate a politically sensitive issue of crisis and how this affects the most marginalised members of the society. The sensitive issues are gender inequality, child marriage, and educational barriers, and these affect marginalised character such as Sarai as noted in her experiences of denied opportunities for growth and constant societal opposition.

Thus, apart from the chosen theory’s ability to contextualise literary works within particular historical epochs, the author also goes on to question the political leaders of the day through showing their failure to protect vulnerable members of the society. In this case, Sarai’s hopes and dreams of going back to school and having a brighter future versus looking after her sick mother places her at a very precarious position. The sickness is a symbol of a diseased or ailing post-2000 society; a result of the absence of a functional healthcare system, and a metaphor signalling reversal of caregiving roles. There is no help rendered to Sarai to guarantee her aspirations as a child as members of the extended family have, in violation of their African cultural dictates, reacted by keeping distance, a clear sign of unwillingness to take responsibility. It is stated that “the extended family seemed to have conveniently forgotten them” (123). Such a stance places the burden on Sarai to look after her sick mother. In this case, the crisis-laden post-2000 Zimbabwean society is generally depicted as abusing children whose parents fall ill. The negligence in this regard is linked to the larger negative reality born of the crisis where the concept of family has been extensively redefined to a point where members of the extended family are fragmented.

One of the key principles of the New Historicism theoretical framework, which I am employing in this thesis, is the emphasis on the historical context of a text during analysis. In his engagements with New Historicism, Henning (2022) advances the idea that New Historicism intertwines texts within historical and cultural contexts. As a result, it generates disruptive readings by integrating contextual interruptions and anecdotes. In concurrence with the above assertions by Henning, the selected short stories in this thesis are products of a specific time and place. Over and above the economic woes that characterise the times under study, the HIV/AIDS pandemic is also prevalent in the society. It is, therefore, critical to explore how child characters survive or struggle an HIV/AIDS scourge occurring in context also marked by conditions of social suffering and extreme lack of resources.

Sarai's identity in "Mainini Grace's Promise" is filled with contradictions with her experiences reflecting a typical case where a child's rights are grossly violated. Sarai's mother is dying from an HIV/AIDS related illness while Sarai herself is forced to drop out of school to care for her ailing and dying mother as there is no other relative who offers to help. Universally, childhood should be a time when children acquire basic skills on how to survive when they become adults, without having to worry about adult issues. Yet, there are children like Sarai who are forced to shoulder the adult burden on their own. Thus, Sarai singlehandedly takes care of her sick mother, bathing and feeding her. Sarai is faced with the superficiality of society's attitude, where she must navigate detached empathy while dealing with the reality of a child performing adult responsibilities. While adults are typically expected to care for children, the reader sees a child taking on the role of a caregiver. This reflects an evolving childhood identity shaped by the ongoing crisis.

The vulnerability of children to marginalisation is heightened during times of crisis, as illustrated by Sarai's struggle to survive and navigate societal and familial challenges. Scharp, (2017) notes, regarding marginalisation of discourses, that there are different risks within particular social groups. In the context of this study, this implies that as the crisis deepens, children's vulnerability increases, as is the case with Sarai. At the same time, the portrayals of childhoods depend on how individuals and society react to the crisis. Sarai's existence is dependent on her family circumstances. Yet, true to the meaning of her name, Sarai which means farewell, has lost her father and two siblings to death, and is only left with her mother, who is on her death bed. The reader is made aware of the deaths in the family at the very

beginning from the revealing statement that “Sarai’s mother had concluded that it was not the three successive funerals but her own subsequent illness that finally did it” (123). The relatives distancing themselves from Sarai’s family is thus highlighted. Flemming et al., (2001) writes on the centrality of family life, remarking that [it] is a multi-dimensional set of private experiences, and public developments that leave no one untouched. As an institution, the family is also in a continuous state of flux. Therefore, the protagonist, Sarai, who is only a 15-year old teenager struggles to live in a normal way due to the negative forces of her family and societal environment. This critical examination of Sarai's experience underscores the broader theme of "stolen childhoods, unfulfilled promises, anger and anxiety" in “Mainini Grace's Promise”, highlighting how crises rob children of their innocence and potential, leaving them trapped in cycles of grief, neglect, and unfulfilled aspirations.

3.1.5 Disease and Death: Girl Child Roles

Sarai’s new role as a caregiver to her entire family as they succumb to HIV/AIDS poses limitations for her that are indicative of the intersectional challenges of gender, health crises, and socio-economic instability in accessing an education, and eventually dropping out of school. The author describes:

For Sarai, dropping out of school to become her mother’s carer was inevitable. She felt as if the family had washed their hands clean of the responsibility, before dumping it carelessly into her fifteen-year-old lap. (123)

Scholarship dealing with marginality, such as Kabeer (2005)'s work on gender and development, identifies educating a girl child as one sure way to empower and deal with problems associated with the marginalisation of women. Andrews (1991) also discusses the marginalisation of women, with a focus on how gender and power dynamics intersect in different parts of the world. She highlights the role of women and girls in postcolonial societies and the barriers they face in achieving equality. Such scholarship also shows that educating a girl child is not easy as there are unpredictable societal dynamics and complexities that threaten this girl child project to uplift herself. In the case at hand, Sarai loses her right to education, subsequently losing the opportunities of reconstructing her identity in the face of patriarchy on one end and the general national crisis on the other.

The writer highlights the ameliorating impact of education. There is a suggestion in the story that Sarai merely needs to hold on to the hope that one day she would return to school. The same hope of going back to school is also kept alive by her aunt, Mainini Grace, who stands out as a possible intervention for her future well-being. The reader notes that Mainini Grace “also promised that she would bring tablets for her ailing sister, as well as arrange for Sarai to go back to school” (123). Sarai believes that if she can acquire an education, she may improve her life and lead a better life than her current one. The author affirms this in the description that:

She allowed herself to hope once again that Mainini Grace would come ... Sarai knew that if anyone was capable of putting her back in school and giving her a bright future, that person was Mainini Grace. (129)

Even though Sarai is currently in a vulnerable position, she is resolute in her desire to succeed in her own right. She harbours the idea that a chance at education would propel her to her destiny. Sarai’s desire for education is equated to that of Tambudzai in Dangarembga’s *Nervous Conditions* (1988). Although their circumstances, contexts and epochs differ, the urge to acquire education for emancipation from societal oppressions is similar. Efforts to promote the emancipation of the girl child in Zimbabwe include the transformation of the education curriculum to remove gender bias (Gudhlanga, Chirimuuta and Bhukuvhani 2012). Yet in Dangarembga’s novel *Nervous Conditions*, Tambudzai loses an opportunity to go to school, in favour of the boy child Nhamo, despite Tambudzai’s academic prowess. In a similar manner, when Sarai loses the opportunity to go to school so that she can take care for her ailing family members, no-one cares that this would mean that she would no longer be in school since she is a woman, whose place is in the home. Sarai’s hope also stems from the fact that before she is forced by circumstances to drop out of school, she had always been at the top of her class. There is a desire in Sarai for self-fulfilment which she hopes is only possible by acquiring formal education, and this illustrates the agency in Sarai. However, she is trapped in a situation where she has to play an adult role of being a caregiver on one hand and be a child on the other. As a result, she struggles to pursue her education due to the negative forces in her environment.

The violation of children’s right to education permeates through the literature produced in the decade of the Zimbabwean crisis. The child narrator in Hoba’s (2005) “The Trek” (discussed in Chapter 2) bemoans the fact that the move by his family to occupy a former white man’s

sugarcane farm meant that he lost the right to education as there were no schools close to their new home. Baba Nina's children in Hoba's "Specialisation" also do not go to school and instead they are exposed to child labour practices such as weeding the fields.

In Chapter 2, reference is made to the father figure, Doubt in "Pay hell", whose father does not send him to school and thus, explaining in part the extreme hardships he now lives under. Doubt already begins to foresee that his own four-year-old child, Ndlala's opportunity of going to school is fast closing up. All these examples of a childhood deprived of education point towards childhood identities marked by anxiety, distress and helplessness. When Sarai's last hopes of regaining her childhood and being able to go to school are also shattered, she loses her emotional balance –which had not been fully developed anyway as a child due to her circumstances, and she kills her aunt, Mainini Grace, for epitomising the end of her hopes and the shattering of her dreams.

A brief context is perhaps necessary here. That is, as Sarai's mother is taking her last breath, Mainini Grace arrives from Botswana ravished by an HIV/AIDS related ailment. Mainini Grace symbolises the diasporic Zimbabweans or those who were forced to migrate to neighbouring countries in search of greener pastures as the crisis in Zimbabwe continued to stifle the little left in most adults. She is the fortunate one to have successfully crossed the border as Doubt's wife in "Pay day hell" was nabbed by the border control security and lost much of her possessions and goods, and returned home with literally nothing besides bitterness. Therefore, Mainini Grace is a returnee who comes back home to die. Her condition and associated shocking tone is described by author in this way:

The bizarre vision that she encountered was that of her mother standing at the doorstep ... Sarai stood frozen in shock as she took in the sunken eyes, the gaunt cheeks and the emaciated form that was dwarfed by an oversized coat. (130)

Thus, the unsettling vision mentioned above marks the end of Sarai's hopes, as Mainini Grace, too frail and resembling her own dying mother, represents a painful reality that Sarai struggles to comprehend. This situation is ironic, as Sarai had hoped to be freed from the adult responsibilities thrust upon her, but Mainini Grace's arrival seemed, instead, to signal yet another burden for her to bear. The added sorrow lies in the fact that Sarai's expected assistance will be given without the support of extended family members, who had already made their

lack of support clear during her mother's illness. Therefore, this explains why she strangles her aunt to death, while exclaiming, ““Why you too? Why you too, Mainini Grace?’ Sarai sobbed brokenly as they led her away to Mai Simba’s veranda” (131).

Thus, Sarai discovers that Mainini Grace had also succumbed to HIV/AIDS and is in a similar state to her dying mother. This realisation diminishes Sarai’s sense of self-worth, which she had been building on the possibility of going back to school and making something out of her life. Her inability to accept the inevitable scenario of continuing to live the same life with the same burdens leads to a loss of control. Sarai struggles to come to terms with what she sees as lies and betrayal from her aunt, as all her hopes were placed in her. She goes through suffering caused by betrayal. The break and violation of trust and confidence has tremendous psychological, emotional and moral effects on Sarai. It became clear to Sarai that she has been chasing a hope that continues to elude her and as a result, she finds it difficult to regulate her behaviour and emotions. The aggressive and impulsive behaviour that Sarai then exhibits is typical of a child whose hopes and dreams have been shattered by adults who failed to provide a safe environment for children.

Thus, I consider Sarai’s case as an opportunity to assess the narrative around the discourse of access to education for all children, preached by the ZANU PF government. Here, I drew on the Here, I applied the New Historicism theory, which validates literary criticism of politics, class struggles, and power, while also enabling interdisciplinary approaches to analysing fiction. I examine how literary representations reflect aspects of the social, political, economic, cultural life of their time, and also how various forces comment on or critique socio-cultural, economic and political realities. The recurring representations of the lack of access to education in the selected stories helps to send the message that the right to learn should be prioritised. Education helps children to develop a number of skills required to thrive in a crisis prone world.

Children must have access to enhanced well-being and a conducive environment for developing the self. This is why Sarai yearns to leave behind her disabling environment, exacerbated by lack of education, for something better which she believes can only be achieved through the acquisition of education. Sarai is beset by a life shaped by contradictions, lack of family and community support. She represents children who must navigate the burdens thrust on their lives by the crisis amidst unavailability of family or community support. As a result,

Sarai's heart aches with the frustration of not having the opportunity to attend school, despite being top of her class as mentioned earlier.

The writer paints childhood characters whose quest for selfhood and identity is curtailed by the socio-economic conditions in Zimbabwe. Sarai struggles with expectations and duty vis-a-vis her own hopes and aspirations for a brighter future. On one hand, she has the role of caring for her sick mother thrust on her, in the same way she cared for her departed father and siblings. On the other hand, she is aware that her disabling circumstances negatively affect her opportunities later in life, leading to a crisis in childhood identity. The failure to get an education results in a generation which is unable to feed their imagination, negotiate relationships and acquire problem solving skills. Their overall intelligence and social skills are affected.

Sarai also battles the stigma that comes with HIV/AIDS. There is a vivid description of how their friends, and relatives, gradually detached themselves from Sarai's family as more members of her family continued to succumb to the disease. This is shown in the description that:

Since her disclosure, things had gradually changed. In time, the subtle had become obvious ... Prior to that, their visits had been increasingly shrouded in an aura parallel to embarrassment and detachment. (123)

The situation becomes worse when Sarai's mother discloses her HIV status and the relatives' visits stopped completely. Reference is also made to the harsh economic conditions, which are typical of the crisis period that Sarai has to navigate concurrently with the burden of single-handedly looking after her sick mother. In her letters to Mainini Grace, Sarai would express her need for Mainini Grace to be present with her. It is indicated:

...just stopping short of hinting that the money she sent was never enough. Because of the shortages, grocery prices on the thriving black market were always exaggerated. (123)

This results in Sarai accomplishing the daunting task of caregiving with hardly enough resources. The shortages also extend to the health system which has been affected by the economic and political crisis as noted in shortages of medicines in hospitals. The narrator says:

There had been no medicines in the hospital pharmacy. It was the same last time, Sarai thought bitterly, making an effort to hold imminent tears of anger at bay (127).

The environment that Sarai is growing up in is frustrating and undermines her intention to complete her education. Sarai's life is characterised by scarred and unhappy memories, and she fails to summon any pleasant memories when she yearns for them. In short, she has had a stolen childhood, which has been replaced by memories of death, poverty and sickness.

Her relationship with her mother and Mainini Grace has been an ambiguous mixture of affection and suffering. She loves her mother deeply, but is weighed down by the responsibility that has been thrust on her. She has also cared for her brother, sister and father, who died earlier. When Sarai is soothing her mother in her last moments, she holds and caresses her hand and, "[t]he feverish hands quivered in her grasp, now so claw-like and wasted they could have been a child's" (127). A comparison is then made with the state of the other three departed members of the family whom she had cared for. The narrator says:

Her young sister's small hands had had a similar feel. Little bird's feet. The two little birds had flown, one after the other. But her father's journey had been a slower and more agonising, almost like her mother's. (127)

Sarai suffers the trauma of watching all her family members die, while a part of her almost anticipates her mother's passing as it would automatically mean the end of the burden of looking after her. The narrator says:

Despite her exterior calmness, a muddle of emotions wracked her. Fear and resentment at looming abandonment. Desire for her mother to live, to be well again, so that she could love and protect her, as it should be. Uneasy relief that finally it would be all over; her mother would find reprieve... (127)

Sarai is thus trapped between two worlds: on one hand, she wants the caregiving responsibilities to end once her mother dies, but on the other, she yearns for her mother to be alive and well, continuing to protect and care for her. She loses hope in the promise of her mainini Grace and her childhood is an endless emotional turmoil.

The psychological effects of shouldering adult duties are vast. Sarai constantly yearns for Mainini Grace to come and relieve her of the burden. The trauma wreaks havoc in her young mind. The narrator describes:

Her mind did not really register the red embers that lay glowing among grey, powdery ashes. She had an illusion of seeing through them into a vast, colourless place where she was held suspended at the edge of a precipice. (126)

The vision of herself suspended on the edge of a precipice is a powerful image which mirrors Sarai's life. She has endured trauma which her young mind cannot contain. The passage from "Mainini Grace's Promise" reflects a deep exploration of Sarai's psychological turmoil, using literary devices that evoke a vivid sense of her internal struggle. The imagery of the "red embers that lay glowing among grey, powdery ashes" creates a stark contrast between fire (symbolising life, energy, and perhaps hope) and the ash (representing death, desolation, and emotional exhaustion). This contrast emphasises the dissonance in Sarai's world, the tension between her own youthful vitality and the burdens of premature adulthood thrust upon her. The fire, though glowing, is dying, just as her spirit is worn down by the weight of caregiving and grief. The narrator's use of illusion in the description "she had an illusion of seeing through them into a vast, colourless place" conveys Sarai's detachment from reality. The lack of colour in the scene suggests an absence of hope, vitality, or future prospects, reinforcing the bleakness of her situation. The "vast, colourless place" symbolises an emotional void, an uncharted psychological space where Sarai's trauma exists. Her mind is overwhelmed by the enormity of her burdens and the impossibility of escape, a theme central to the narrative of marginalisation and stolen childhood. This imaginative landscape reflects the emotional and cognitive distance she has from her reality, as her psyche is unable to process the endless trauma she endures.

The metaphor of her being "held suspended at the edge of a precipice" serves as a poignant image of Sarai's fragile mental state. The precipice suggests the brink of collapse, a moment when the weight of trauma could cause a psychological or emotional fall. It also symbolises a state of liminality, whereby Sarai is neither fully grounded in her reality nor entirely detached from it. She hovers on the edge of an abyss, poised between survival and breaking down, illustrating her tenuous grasp on her own sense of self and identity. This image powerfully encapsulates her internal conflict: a young girl forced into adult responsibilities, grappling with the loss of family members, and unable to find relief or respite.

Overall, literary techniques employed in the quotation above, which are, contrast, illusion, and metaphor, serve to deepen the reader's understanding of Sarai's mental and emotional state, which is central to the novel's exploration of trauma and the marginalisation of the girl child. Through these devices, the narrative vividly conveys the psychological cost of Sarai's experiences, highlighting the devastating impact of crisis on her young mind.

The moments just before her mother's death reveal the emotions that Sarai experiences because of the heart-rending situation where in her mother says, "Be strong *mwanangu*. It will happen soon. I know it ... Be strong. Be strong." (126). The distressing scene of her mother telling her to be strong, and not to end up like her is emotive. It reflects burdened childhoods in crisis periods.

For a child in Sarai's predicament, trauma seems to be unavoidable. Her whole childhood existence is steeped in horrific scenes of sickness, death and poverty. Sarai is forced to construct her identity from the limited choices she is offered in a turbulent crisis that is compounded by the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Adult guidance and agency are absent for the child to emulate in the forging of her own identity. Hers is a typical childhood without mentorship. This results in her exhibiting an identity that is more mature than her age. She has had adult duties inevitably thrust upon her young life.

The stories expose child vulnerability where the girl child negotiates her identity amidst a combination of economic hardships together with patriarchal values that place adult expectations on the girl child and forces her into womanhood too early. As is the case with Sarai who finds herself in the caregiving role with limited economic resources, the situation deprives her of a formative childhood. The abandonment of Sarai and her mother by the extended family results in the lack of a coordinated support system for Sarai, which leads to prolonged and recurring trauma, as well as unpredictable behaviour. The trauma that Sarai endures causes her to have difficulties regulating her behaviour and emotions, culminating in her murdering her aunt (Mainini Grace). The trauma Sarai experiences leads to struggles in regulating her behavior and emotions, ultimately culminating in her killing her aunt (Mainini Grace) when she realizes that the aunt had betrayed her hopes for a better future, all while continuing to offer her false hope.

Representations of the Zimbabwe crisis period, therefore, portray childhood identities that exist in the absence of coordinated support systems as is the case with Sarai. This has the effect of producing childhoods with unpredictable social behaviour. Sarai's anxiety and anger, emanating from unfulfilled promises lead her to attacking and strangling her aunt. This raises concerns about her current mental health, which has been destabilized, clearly reflecting the impact of the traumatic life Sarai has endured. However, it also prompts another question: how innocent is she in the face of such a crisis? Sarai demonstrates that as a child, notwithstanding the fact that she was neglected, betrayed and psychologically tortured, her final act of strangling her aunt, Mainini Grace, to death does not exonerate her from being a perpetrator of violence. She is not innocent in this manner although one sympathises with her on matters regarding lack of parental guidance to manage her emotions.

Tagwira's narrative, in a way typical of New Historicism's focus on the interplay between individual lives and historical contexts, is quite instrumental in presenting the challenges faced by the girl child in the context of the post-2000 Zimbabwean crisis. Sarai emerges as the epitome of the troubled girl child whose wellbeing is heavily curtailed by the multiple challenges that girls must navigate in a patriarchal society. She demonstrates, in her reminiscence of the hardships she has endured in her young life, an awareness of the political decisions and actions that have worsened poverty in her country. She especially laments the lack of schooling opportunity for herself and other girls in her predicament and is heartbroken by the lack of functional health delivery system which makes it difficult for her mother to receive any meaningful treatment from the hospital. As a result, Sarai watches helplessly as her mother suffers without any form of medical assistance. This again is symptomatic of failed leadership in the postcolonial Zimbabwe. Sarai demonstrates resilience in the way she cares for members of her family as each one of them suffers from and eventually dies of HIV/AIDS related illnesses. Her endurance under the difficult circumstances is apparent. Yet, she eventually snaps from the burden when her aunt fails to fulfil her promises of sending her back to school to secure a better future for herself. Her strangling of aunty at the end of the story is a clear demonstration of the anger and anxiety emanating from unfulfilled promises, leading to violent murder.

3.2 Lonely and Depressed Childhoods

The stories also depict the ways in which child-parent relationships have undergone a significant process of social change due to the crisis. In the story "Forever haunted by Rita's eyes" by Stanley Mupfudza, the relationship between the protagonist and her mother is a strained one because of the way the mother prioritizes hustling. The mother's larger focus is on making money through her shebeen/brothel, at the expense of her child's physical, emotional and moral well-being. Rita does not get adequate time to interact with her shebeen queen mother as she is always busy with her shebeen and attending to her male clients. The environment that Rita grows up in is toxic for the child and has the added risk of making her vulnerable to sexual predators. As a result, Rita's early life is a turbulent one, where she faces multiple layers of violence and crises. Rita's body is presented as a site of sexual abuse, which is an embodiment and representation of the body as a site for inequalities and disadvantages faced by the girl child in crisis situations. My argument in my analysis of Rita's circumstances is therefore informed by the need to understand how children in crisis make meaning of the experiences of sexual violence related trauma and the kinds of childhood identities that are born thereof.

The physical, moral and emotional misery that Rita goes through results in her experiencing a lonely and depressed childhood. She is sometimes haunted by the idea of running away. Paying attention to how violence is experienced reframes how identity must be conceived through the lives and bodies of those, such as Rita, living amongst violence and crisis in their everyday lives. The narrator of the story, who happens to be the only childhood friend that Rita has, paints a clear image of the amount of pain and suffering that Rita endures. At the very beginning of the story, the narrator refers to the fact that Rita knew all about loneliness, being a child who lived in a house "where people were always milling about, but still remained one of the loneliest people..." (221). The narrator goes on to describe Rita as "the girl who carried shards of her broken heart and tormented soul in the landscape of her hunger-stricken features" (221). The phrase "carried shards of her broken heart and tormented soul" is a metaphor that powerfully conveys Rita's emotional fragmentation and suffering. The "shards" evoke images of something once whole, now fragmented and painful. This imagery suggests deep emotional scars and the burden of trauma, implying that Rita's emotional wounds are not only difficult to heal but are actively carried with her in her daily life. The imagery in this passage is indeed significant. Words like "shards," "broken heart," "tormented soul," and "hunger-stricken features" conjure strong visual and emotional pictures of pain and deprivation. The imagery links Rita's emotional distress with physical signs of suffering (hunger, brokenness),

emphasising the connection between internal trauma and its external manifestation. This evokes a visceral reaction in the reader, making Rita's suffering palpable.

Rita's mother plays an active role in her suffering: "There were times, too many of them, when Gogo Shupi, a large conspicuous menacing woman, would plod her way across the school yard and barge her way into our classroom. She would yank Rita up by her ears and drag her home" (221). This description of Gogo Shupi as a "large, conspicuous, menacing woman" paints a clear picture of a physically imposing and intimidating figure. This characterisation sets the tone for Rita's experiences of abuse and neglect, as it indicates that Gogo Shupi's presence is one of domination and intimidation. The image of a forceful woman pushing her way through a public space heightens the sense of Rita's helplessness and the inevitability of her suffering. The classroom, a place where Rita may seek some refuge, is no sanctuary from her mother's control. The overall tone created by this passage is one of violence and distress, evidenced by the physically aggressive image of Rita being yanked by the ears, which portrays pain and suffering. Gogo Shupi subjects her teenage daughter to emotional torture and humiliation, instead of loving her. She constantly goes to the school to embarrass her in front of other children and calls her names. This resulted in Rita being an anxious and fearful child.

Gogo Shupi had no love for her daughter. The trope of the keys that she always carried around is instructive here. The author notes that, "the keys were to all the rooms on her premises, but, sadly, she had none to Rita's heart. Rita lived in a secret room inside her head." (222) Therefore, Rita is an embodiment of lonely and depressed childhoods. The lack of motherly love restricts Rita's natural growth and leads to her depression and her inability to cultivate positive human contact and maintain childhood friendships. Titi (2023) writes on the need to move towards African centred childhood studies. Part of his submissions resonate with the New Historicism theoretical framework, especially where Titi (2023:231) observes that "[t]o fully understand the needs and socialisation of African children, it is crucial to examine their historical context." Rita's anxiety and fear is a manifestation of the lonely and depressed childhood that characterises her whole existence. Her isolation from normal and healthy family and social interactions impacts in various ways in the forging of her selfhood. Of note is her reluctance and or inability to interact with others.

The narrator of the story also refers to how he is Rita's only friend. The rest of the children "taunted her mercilessly" (221) resulting in her enduring a traumatic childhood. This results in

the absence of a psychological balance and development within the protagonist Rita. The narrator says:

She always started at the sight of big women, sudden sounds and movements. It was almost as if she saw shadows of her mother in all these things. (223)

The absence of a loving bond between mother and daughter results in Rita's constant fear and anxiety. She reveals to her only friend, the narrator of the story that she experiences bad dreams, and she cannot make them go away. The nightmares are the consequences of the constant harassment she endures at the hands of her mother and the rest of the society. Her bad dreams are, therefore, a permanent re-enactment of the trauma that mark her everyday life. The anomic landscape resulting from the crises had bred unendurable conditions for a girl child such as Rita, who must contend with the harsh debilitating conditions as she tries to forge her identity under difficult circumstances.

Subjecting children to sexual acts of violence leads them to unwanted and early pregnancies epitomised by the four boys who rape Rita. Rivera (1990) observes that abused and neglected children begin delinquent careers early. The four boys grow up in the same toxic and crises environment which has no regard for the young ones. Rita's mother (Gogo Shupi) openly runs her brothel, subjecting the children in her community to all forms of immoral sexual behaviour. Thirteen-year-old Thomas boasts of his sexual encounter with Fafi, one of the prostitutes who operates from Gogo Shupi's brothel. This in turn prompts Timothy and Luke to be curious and want to experience the same. Rita happens to pass by as the discussion is underway and is unfortunately gang raped by all the four boys, including the narrator who is forced to partake in the act by his friends. It can therefore be noted that children who are subjected to sexual violence often experience long-lasting psychological trauma which often results in difficulties in forming healthy relationships. Unwanted and early pregnancies resulting from sexual violence are a devastating reality as is the case with Rita. Violence against children can lead to unwanted pregnancies and points to the broader issue of systemic abuse and neglect, while exposing the complex interplay of trauma, societal structures, and society's failure to protect children from harm.

Rita must try to make sense of her world which is turned into a nightmare by the sexual violation of her young body. The society further blames and alienates her as if it is her fault.

Under such circumstances, it is crucial to understand the historical circumstances. Titi (2023:239) concurs, that:

Ultimately, understanding childhood and the context it occurs is crucial for practical interventions ... such as those aiming to reduce violence against children, develop interventions and promote social justice.

Though Rita's world has been shattered, she emerges from this experience a changed subject. Mentally, she is a new young woman, resilient and strong. In her case, the plot centres on the changeover process of the protagonist and how this is negotiated. There is the subsequent discovery of the self which crafts room for autonomous decision making and the choices that Rita makes to uphold her new identity. Though she has faced unimaginable cruelty, Rita is able to achieve a new self and the gift of love (for her own child) and she does so without having been taught how (to love). She chooses not to reveal the perpetrators of the sexual violence against her, even when people assume that she has been sleeping around with the numerous men who solicit sexual favours from the prostitutes who live in shacks in her mother's backyard. Rita manages to cut herself off from all the depressing challenges surrounding her and raise her child in a different manner from the way that she herself was raised which subjected her to all forms of vulnerabilities.

After going through a lonely, traumatic and depressed childhood, the crucial task that Rita faces is that of coming to terms with herself. The final blow that she handles is the pregnancy which results from the gang rape she endures at the hands of four young boys. In the end, Rita achieves independence. She makes the choice to love her child and run her mother's business, which gives her financial independence. She reconciles herself to her circumstances and assumes new responsibilities and now influences her daughter's identity. Rita emerges as the survivor who is able to come out of her brutal gang rape ordeal and takes over the running of her mother's shebeen, while raising her child as a single mother. Rita refuses to give in when the world crumbles around her. Instead, she demonstrates high levels of agency and resilience in the face of challenges that bedevil the girl child.

3.3 Institutionalised Violence on the Girl Child

The depiction of Fungai and Masimba's child headed scenario in "Not Another day" by Julius Chingono, makes fertile grounds to interrogate the multiple barriers that hinder some children from living a fulfilling life. The crisis has resulted in the marginalisation of families, such as that of Fungai and Masimba.

There is a child-headed home following the death of their parents due to HIV/AIDS related illness. A nine-year-old girl, Fungai, is now taking care of his seven year old brother, Masimba. The children survive under the most excruciating conditions of poverty. Fungai ends up being sexually abused by an old man who sometimes gives them food. This signifies the link between economic hardships and multifaceted forms of child abuse in the context of crisis.

Hussein and Anzar (2017) in their extensive research on marginalisation note that marginalised families refer to those receiving little support in their family and parenting roles, either from personal support networks or from community-based support services. Fungai and Masimba's child-headed home falls under what Hussein and Anzar identify as marginalised families. After the death of their parents, the two children do not receive support from relatives, the community or the state. Another researcher who focuses on the subject of marginalisation, Leonard (1984:6) asserts that:

Marginalisation is at the core of exclusion from fulfilling and full social lives at individual, interpersonal and societal levels. People who are marginalised have relatively little control over their lives and the resources available to them. They may become stigmatised and are often at the receiving end of negative public attitudes.

Fungai and Masimba's marginality is, drawing on the submissions by the above scholars, a result of changes in the social and economic situation. They no longer have anyone to cater for their basic needs. At the beginning of the story, a group of social welfare workers arrive at the child-headed home for a follow up visit, albeit after a long time since they had learnt about both children's vulnerable situation. The group is moved by the dire conditions of the home and the youngest child. The narrator captures the children's state of neglect in the description:

He held a ball made of rags, paper and plastic in one hand while the other held up his oversize trousers that would certainly have dropped down had he not done so ... His shirt had no buttons, it was torn at the shoulders and was very dirty. (1-2)

The social workers express their shock at how the two children aged seven and nine had survived up to that point.

How have these children survived ... there's no food?' ... there are no doors! ... And just one torn blanket! (3)

Descriptions of Masimba's oversized trousers, torn and button less shirt and dirty body paint a dreadful picture of poverty. At first, Masimba seems reluctant to recognise or be drawn into conversation by Theresa, the social worker who had visited before. Later, he simply says "You did not take us with you" (2). This shows how the child felt betrayed by the system which did nothing to assist two small and vulnerable children and left them to fend for themselves. The prevailing economic crisis has also contributed to the families of such young children not to be socially supported. The community members are also hard-pressed and cannot afford to look after the orphans. The state does not offer timely support, and the children are excluded from rest of the society.

In his paper which dwells on family and community background in the development of children, Hall (2017:6) points out that "the children in need tend to be the ones who are least likely to access support." As is the case with Fungai and Masimba, all the social workers that visit the child characters agree that the case at hand should have been attended to sooner. Yet the reasons why the children had not been timely assisted, include the lack of fuel at Head Office as well as the fact that the constituency had been won by the opposition, hence the government was not distributing food there. This epitomises Sutradhar's (2015) sentiments that marginalisation is a term used for those who have limited or no access to the social, economic and political, and not necessarily just the cultural ones.

Furthermore, Fungai and Masimba's circumstances mirror Hall's (2017) view that children from families who have poor social support and make limited or no use of community support services are at an increased risk of poor health and developmental outcomes. It emerges later that nine-year old Fungai was taken and sexually abused by vaHove, an elderly man, who lives nearby, in exchange for food for her brother and herself. When Masimba leads the social workers to vaHove's place, they find Fungai dead, having been strangled by vaHove who says he could not bear to see her in the excruciating pain she was in (because of the painful and pus-filled pubis). The story represents the untold suffering that the girl child endures due to lack of support, which exposed her to all forms of abuse.

For young children living in prolonged crisis situations, the disruption of their future in relation to failure to access education and other basic necessities is quite unescapable. Similar to Fungai and Masimba, their identities are shaped outside the structured framework of schooling or other services and programs designed to ensure that all children have an equal opportunity to reach their full potential. The fact that Fungai and Masimba live on their own leaves them with no safe space for physical protection. This makes it easier for a paedophile such as vaHove to sexually abuse Fungai. Fungai and Masimba have no access to sufficient nutrition, healthcare and a safe space to learn and play. As such, they end up forging isolated childhood identities. Instead of getting the conducive environment from adults to work through their trauma, the children in question find themselves living alone at the tender ages of 7 and 9. The Welfare Department also takes long to attend to their case, leading to lonely, isolated and neglected childhoods. The failure by the government and the community to provide a safe space for Fungai, the 9-year-old-girl who ends up being sexually abused by an older man for food, points towards failed social accountability and social responsibility that define most Zimbabwean communities during the post-2000 crisis.

Apart from lack of resources on the part of the government, one of the reasons given for failure by social welfare officers to timeously assist Fungai and Masimba is that the National Assembly seat for that constituency was won by an opposition party. This politicisation of social services, infrastructure and humanitarian operations leaves highly vulnerable children without access to adequate life-saving assistance and care. When they fail to access assistance, female children increasingly become targets of sexual abuse. Fungai's sexual abuse ordeal and subsequent strangling to death is an example of such a situation.

The social construction of childhood is also based on the location in which the child is developing. This is informed by Bakhtin's concept of the chronotope, which I referred to earlier in Chapter 1. A consideration of the role played by location, time and space in child development shows that representations of the Zimbabwean crisis childhood identities do not have access to opportunities. As such, they suffer from social exclusion, as typified by the lives of Fungai and Masimba. Hence, the location and prevailing circumstances of the children places them in a precarious state due to exposure to poverty which impacts negatively in the construction of their identities. In addition, Fungai's death is a reflection of the dire effects of the cost of failing to provide timely support to vulnerable children in crisis conditions. Fungai

and Masimba are traumatised by the idea of losing their parents at a young age. In such cases, problems worsen as they become more difficult and expensive to remedy, and families become more vulnerable.

3.4 Conclusion

The girl children represented in this chapter have to contend with patriarchal ideologies and a state in crisis as they seek to find their place. New Historicism often examines the role of dominant ideologies within a given historical period. The "patriarchal ideologies" referenced above reflect the gendered power dynamics at play within a specific historical and cultural context, in this case, Zimbabwe. Through a New Historicist lens, I consider how these patriarchal structures not only influence the lives of the girl children in the texts but are also products of a larger historical and cultural narrative. By analysing how the texts interact with these ideologies, I trace how literature both reflects and resists the prevailing power structures. Narratives of growth, such as the ones under study, portray how the child figure discovers the self through identity negotiation, encapsulated within the wider framework of a society where she participates in the process of transcending childhood into adulthood. The children struggle to develop cultural and gendered identities because of a system or an environment that is riddled with debilitating challenges in the form of the crippling economic challenges as represented in the selected literature. The crisis conditions impede the proper development of the children's identities. However, the protagonists tend to exhibit a strong will to survive, despite the limitations surrounding them.

Before the final betrayal, which leads to Sarai murdering her aunt, she (Sarai) rejects structures of entrapment, by continuing to believe in a better future that would be achieved through the attainment of an education, as promised by Mainini Grace. This is inherent in the contradictions between the restrictions imposed on the girl child Sarai, by all the hardships surrounding her, albeit, emanating from the crisis that is compounded by the HIV/AIDS scourge, and how she holds fast to the hope of a brighter future, as soon as she gets an opportunity to go back to school. Likewise, despite being failed by society and roughened up by life, Rita survives the sexual abuse and emotional plagues imposed on her mind as a young, troubled child.

It was also noted in the chapter that young people respond to violence and insecurity in a variety of ways. The way imagined childhoods rise above the challenges presented by the crisis, Sarai continuing to hope and Rita striving to create a better life for herself and her child, demonstrates that nothing is unquestionably permanent when it comes to children's identities within the framework of crisis childhoods. Sarai and Rita's envisioned futures reflect how the characters navigate the adult world, despite the instability in their childhoods caused by the loss of family and home. For Sarai and Rita, the process of transition is not always smooth as it is negotiated outside the security of family. Sarai is left with only her ailing mother, and the entire extended family neglects her. Rita's mother lacks the love and care expected of a mother and instead treats her with cruelty. Yet, the two protagonists endeavour to develop their selves despite the lack of expected support structures.

The analysis above also shows that the selected stories depict material and structural realities that oppress young girls and systematically deny them access to the fundamental requirements that help them navigate childhood and form positive childhood identities. The stress of family life reduces the amount of playtime and happiness, especially for children living in the rampant poverty in the selected texts, such as Sarai and Fungai. This in turn reduces the child's ability to forge desirable childhood identities. The protagonists in the selected stories demonstrated intersectional and complex factors that create barriers for education and any other form of advancement for marginalised children. This is indicative of failure by the government to ensure equitable and inclusive access to education.

The traumatised childhoods often lead to unpredictable social behaviour as is the case with Sarai. Girl children can become agents of violence too, albeit shaped by material, and social deprivation, and general inequalities. What made Sarai take the extreme step of murdering her aunt was a combination of stolen childhood, unfulfilled promises, betrayal entrapment and helplessness. The formation of childhood is largely dependent on the environment, time and place. According to Jones (1990) culture is key to the shaping of childhood, since children learn through human adaptation and the society plays a role in assisting the growth of a child. In other words, society determines the child's development as a child's identity and knowledge is shaped by the various aspects of society.

It is evident from in these stories that vulnerability is linked to broader social exclusion, conflict, education, health, gender issues and marginalisation. The consequences, beyond immediate risk of violence, are precarity and insecurity that become pervasive in young people's everyday lives. Some of the most vulnerable marginalised groups in almost every society are girl children. After failing to get deserved support from family, community and the state, the female protagonists under study go through the most troubled childhood. In Fungai's case, it even culminates in her death, over and above the poverty and sexual abuse that she suffers. All the above, represent the marginality and subjectivity of the girl child amidst social, economic and political crisis. It becomes clear that the degeneration of children and the consequent loss of their rights start when they are neglected. Times of crisis compromise the society and the government's attempts at providing security, opportunity and resources, resulting in children in general, and the girl child in particular, having challenges with transcending smoothly into adulthood as shown in the lives of the protagonists in the selected literature woven out of the crisis period.

The selected authors use literature as a mirror to society, in line with the New Historicism concept of the author's role in recording history. They unearth the immense risk that a protracted crisis, such as the Zimbabwean economic, social, and political one, poses for the future of an entire generation of children. Intensifying poverty resulted in more children such as Fungai and Masimba, living without access to basic needs like food and healthcare services. The lack of adequate resources at national level, in Chingono's story "Not Another Day" (2006), exposes children to lack of protection and dampen their prospects of their long-term well-being and future. If done timeously, the visit by Social Welfare officers to Masimba and Fungai would have gone a long way in helping the two to adapt and overcome the hardships that they face as young orphans living in a child-headed home.

Early intervention by the government for children navigating childhood in crisis conditions would help create better-supported children, enabling them to grow and develop in a less turbulent environment. When asked why the Social Welfare officers who initially visited Fungai and Masimba did not come back earlier to rescue them, given their dire condition, the reasons include the fact that there was no fuel for such. A closer look at the reasons given above shows some crucial lessons which the government may adopt to give children in crisis a conducive environment for forging their identities. One such lesson would be to implement several strategies to improve protection and food security as well as to provide essential

services to children in need. In contrast to the measures that may have been taken for Fungai and Masimba, the late response by the Social Welfare department speaks of lack of opportunities for the children in need of assistance to access aid. In the story in question, Fungai, the girl child, ends up bearing the brunt of the two children's difficult living conditions. Sexual predators such as vaHove exploit the poverty gap within the child-headed home of Fungai and Masimba by placing himself as a benefactor. He occasionally gives food to the children but ends up sexually abusing nine-year old Fungai. This further reveals the vulnerability of a girl child in a crisis period.

A recurring phenomenon for the young female protagonists in the selected stories A recurring theme among the young female protagonists in the selected stories analysed in this chapter is that their childhoods, depicted during the Zimbabwean crisis period, are marked by hardships and a multifaceted crisis that threaten their safety, health, and well-being. For instance, even though Sarai is at a tender age herself in "Mainini Grace's Promise," her resilience is put to the test. She repeatedly looks after her sick family members until she snaps when Mainini Grace also shows up ill at her doorstep. The families suffer from chronic poverty and food insecurity which stems from protracted economic crisis and political instability. The central government fails to provide for the citizens' needs, that is, the children's most pressing needs are not met. As a result, a girl child, Sarai must nurse her mother in the absence of medication.

I also established in this chapter that a child's development is linked to their educational journey. This makes it key for all children to have access to education to develop their social, intellectual and physical skills. Yet this is an opportunity unavailable to the child characters examined in this chapter. This is largely because socio-economic factors also contribute to a child's personal development. The excessive lack of resources, prevalent in the crisis period under study, hampers the construction of positive childhood identities, especially for the girl children.

Ultimately, the ongoing crisis has created significant challenges for children as they negotiate growth amidst such turbulent landscapes. The needs of children in vulnerable, crisis-stricken communities continue to increase, as illustrated in the selected stories. At the root of these life-threatening challenges faced by children in such conditions lies the issue of poor governance and corruption. The protracted crisis in Zimbabwe is depicted as disrupting all aspects of children's lives, violating their rights and threatening their health and well-being. The affected

children are at risk of violence and exploitation. These negative experiences, and exposure to insecurity, have a profound effect on children's psychological well-being and long-term mental health. This results in trauma, depression and anxiety as shown in Sarai and Rita's characters discussed above. Such scenarios have long-term effects on cognitive and emotional development. There is, therefore, significant protection concerns for girls as they are prone to danger in crisis environments.

By applying New Historicism, I demonstrate that the experiences of the girl children are shaped not only by their personal circumstances but also by the broader historical and political context of Zimbabwe. Patriarchal ideologies and the state in crisis are not isolated elements but are deeply intertwined with the social, cultural, and political fabric of the time. These forces influence the characters' lives, providing a nuanced understanding of the ways in which historical contexts and literature are mutually constitutive. The girl children's struggles to find their place in such a society become a reflection of how individuals and groups navigate and resist the historical and ideological forces shaping their world.

Chapter 4: Zimbabwean or Not? Identity Dilemmas of the White Child in Post-2000 Zimbabwean Short-Stories.

4.0 Introduction

In this chapter, I explore the identity dilemmas witnessed in white childhoods in post-2000 white writers. The chapter also analyses how the white childhoods depicted grapple with the sense of belonging and non-belonging amidst their changing conditions where their families have lost land, and belongings. The selected stories in this regard are Rheam's "Christmas" (2007) and Kerstein's "The Situation" (2011). These selected post-2000 and white authored short stories show new trends in white childhood identity formation, both through the child protagonists, and child-centred texts.

The analysis of these stories focuses on the thematic concerns: alienation, traumatic mental depression, despair and solitude; and education, social disorder, disillusionment, trauma, slippery identities, nostalgia, family disintegration, entrapment and misfits. These thematic concerns also permeate through other white writings such as Peter Godwin's novels, *Mukiwa: A White boy in Africa* (1996) and *When a Crocodile eats the sun* (2006). In *Mukiwa: A White boy in Africa*, Godwin chronicles his own experiences as a young boy growing up in the then Rhodesia and his own participation in the war which eventually led to the loss of power by white people and the beginning of black people's ruling. Later in *When a crocodile eats the sun*, Gordon describes the events related to his return to Zimbabwe at the onset of farm invasions in 2000, to care for his ailing father. Much like the father figure in the story "Christmas," who refuses to leave Zimbabwe when other whites are fleeing, Gordon's parents opt to stay in Zimbabwe and he has to travel frequently between his new home, New York and Zimbabwe, to care for them. In the stories selected for this chapter, there is an unmistakable violation of the white community's property rights and this permeates through the writings. This leads to some critics, such as Magosvongwe (2015) in her article on land and identity, to argue that claims of violation of property rights are unfounded, as the whites tend to forget that they also violated property rights, when they forcibly removed blacks from their ancestral land through colonialism. The colonial settlers went on to brand themselves as the rightful owners of the land having conveniently forgotten how they had acquired it. When the same happens to them, they then cry foul.

Mlambo (2007) refers to the role of the postcolonial state on the economy, political developments and the land question, and I look at the same with a bias towards the role it plays in shaping white childhood and childhood identities in the post 2000 era. Mlambo (2007) discusses the background to the simmering tensions between the black and white community, which albeit led to the land invasions, following the lack of progress regarding the land issue, despite Robert Mugabe's reconciliation speech at independence in 1980. The animosity between blacks and whites is exacerbated by sharing a geographical space, amidst the continued unequal distribution of land and wealth. Two decades later, Mugabe labels white farmers traitors of the nation who deserved punishment (Mlambo, 2007; Manase, 2016; Hove, 2009). Therefore, an analysis of the selected literature in this chapter seeks to determine the nature of the white children's experiences as they negotiate their identities in relation to matters of the land, belonging and the nation.

4.1 Slippery Identities, Hope and Hopelessness in "The Situation" (2011)

This story was chosen for the way in which it portrays the anxiety among whites during and after the post -2000 land redistribution programme. The lamentations evident in the thoughts of the child narrator in "The Situation," demonstrate the feelings held by whites as a result of the unexpected withdrawal of their selves from the land, to which they had a deep attachment. The sudden twist in the narrator's life because of the loss of land leaves the narrator struggling to comprehend. The story portrays how the trauma of land loss and the accompanying social changes disrupt the childhood identities of white children. The land ownership issues are not merely abstract political or economic concepts for the children – they represent a fundamental shift in their understanding of the world. The child narrator's sense of confusion and displacement is a direct result of the breakdown of the structures that once gave her life meaning, such as family ownership of land and the racialised status it ascribed. For these children, the loss of land is more than just a loss of property; it signals a loss of cultural identity and security, leaving them in a state of psychological confusion.

Change and crisis impact childhood in various ways. The fictional white children are impacted negatively by the land reform programme. It disrupted their sense of security and safety by taking away the land from their families. The 10 year old boy in the story "Christmas" and the narrator in "The Situation" both have their families lose their land as part of the Fast Track Land Reform Programme to restore land to the landless black majority. The loss of land leads

to disillusionment and this is reflected in the way the story itself is presented. It is written in alternating three font types, where one must follow the same font type while skipping the other font types, and then coming back to trace the other font type, all depicting the various, divergent thoughts going through the white child's mind as a result of the loss of land. By extension, this can be read to represent the fractured identities of the white children.

The thought patterns portrayed by the different ideas presented using the three different font types are symbolic of a desperate and disillusioned being whose world has been upset by the changes in the land ownership. The use of different font types to represent various thought patterns effectively symbolises the internal fragmentation of the narrator's psyche. This technique visually represents the disorientation and confusion the child experiences as she grapples with the upheaval caused by land reforms. The fractured fonts mirror the fractured identities of the white children in the story, whose once stable and privileged world is shattered by socio-political changes. This suggests that the trauma of land reform is not just a material loss but a psychological one as well, especially for those whose identities were built around a particular understanding of land ownership and racial superiority. The fractured nature of childhood identities portrayed in this story show confused white children because of the trauma brought about by their families' loss of land. In one of the thought patterns, the white child narrator demonstrates that the changes that she is lamenting about began when she was still in school and that she was still confused about it. Elements of confusion are evident throughout the narrator's thoughts as she attempts to make sense of "the situation" they find themselves in. The narrator says:

Sometimes I wonder what happened. Why did my world turn upside down? They said that a situation had developed. A situation if you asked me what it was, I might not answer. (36)

The specific passage quoted above highlights the deep confusion and trauma she experiences in relation to the changes happening around her. The narrator's rhetorical questions, "Why did my world turn upside down?" and her inability to explain "the situation," emphasise the disorientation that comes with witnessing a world upended by forces beyond her comprehension. The use of the term "situation" in this context, without clarity or understanding of its meaning, suggests that the child has limited insight into the broader political forces at play but is keenly aware that something significant has occurred. This illustrates the divide between the child's personal experience and the larger historical and political changes,

emphasising the innocence and helplessness of the narrator in understanding the full scope of what is happening. This shows the narrator's awareness of the various debates that surround the land reform programme. Earlier on in the presentation of their thoughts, the child narrator is forced to acknowledge the disparities in land ownership between blacks and whites, which contributed to the farm invasions by the blacks. Thus, she demonstrates that in a way she understood that the land reform programme was a result of a culmination of various factors. At one point she says:

Maybe reading between the lines, maybe looking at the different stories (all of which are true by the way) might suggest a larger truth. Maybe it wouldn't ... Possibly all the interpretations, all the stories are wrong. But perhaps they are all right. (36)

These ongoing debates in the child narrator's mind seem to augment the debates alluded to earlier, about the tensions brought about by the unresolved land disparities several years after independence. Thomas (2003:692) argues that "the land policy in Zimbabwe should be understood as primarily a legacy of colonialism." Hence, this white child narrator acknowledges that there is indeed a need to understand both sides of the debate to understand how things ended up the way they are now, with white families losing the land. Notably, the white children must now try to forge a new identity for themselves amidst the new circumstances brought about by the loss of land. The narrator is aware that her family has lost the land for good as noted in her statement that, "the police don't, can't and won't do anything. They aren't helpful. Despite eviction orders they haven't kicked the squatters off our land" (39). This demonstrates the awareness of the white child of her new landless situation.

Despite the confusion, the narrator's awareness of the land ownership disparities between blacks and whites shows that she is not entirely ignorant of the socio-political context. The land reform programme and its connection to the farm invasions by blacks, while still opaque to her, are acknowledged. The child narrator implicitly understands that the "situation" she is witnessing is not just a random event but the result of long-standing historical injustices - such as unequal land distribution and racial tensions. Her awareness reflects the subtle yet significant shifts in the younger generation's understanding of the nation's history. She is caught between the innocence of childhood and the stark reality of a changing world, which she is slowly beginning to grasp, even though she remains confused and unable to articulate it fully. At the same time, in spite of the subtle acknowledgement of the possible need to redress the land

situation, the narrator's use of a different font type illustrates her belief that the land reform programme has been a failure. She is aware that some of the new black farmers are failing to utilise the land they grabbed. This is noted in the way the narrator draws links between the failed land reform programme and the inflation that characterised the years after the land seizures and fast track land reform:

Because the situation out here has been deteriorating, without any end in sight, the local currency is now worthless. This country has endured rampant inflation, critical food and fuel shortages. ... Last Christmas the national rate of inflation surpassed one hundred thousand per cent, the highest in the world (38).

The inflation which is referred to in the quotation above is also cited in other stories which I analysed in this thesis. Particularly relevant is the story "A Land of starving millionaires" by Chinyani (2007) analysed in Chapter 2, which portrays, in great detail, the runaway inflation characteristic of the height of the economic crisis experienced in the 2000s as the fast-track land reform programme unfolded.

The portrayal of hyperinflation speaks to the New Historicism theory which I use in this thesis. This is because New Historicism emphasises the importance of understanding historical context while analysing fictional work. The widespread inflation depicted in "A land of starving millionaires," is with reference to suffering black families, in "The Situation" it is a white child who is lamenting the hardships brought about by inflation. The white child narrator endures the bite of inflation since white families have recently lost the means of production, the land, as a result of the land reform programme.

Hence, the child narrator gives her own thoughts on what she believes caused the high inflation in the confusion of trying to understand the new circumstances and the associated childhood. She notes that, "the current situation can be traced back to the violent seizure of land that began in 2000" (39). This assertion by the white child narrator is representative of the white community at large as they express their disgruntlement regarding the land reform programme. The same sentiments are expressed in other fictional and non-fictional white writings. For example, the same refusal to acknowledge the role of the colonial legacy in the fast-track land reform programme (FTLRP) is highlighted by Moyo (2013:29) in the observation that:

Most critics of the FTLRP (e.g., Cliffe et al., (2011) continue to underplay the significance of the settler colonial roots of Zimbabwe's land question.

The partial acknowledgement by the child narrator of the above factor, and their reluctance to fully acknowledge the same, results in conflicted childhood identities in the post land redistribution period. The white narrator does not want to fully acknowledge the role played by whites leading to the land disparities which the black wished to redress by repossessing their ancestral land

4.1.1 Reminiscences of the Land Reform Programme

The child narrator's analysis, as seen in the quotation below, stems from her observation that inflation is linked to the violent land seizures by black Zimbabweans, primarily supported by the ruling party and war veterans of the national liberation struggle against the whites. This issue has been a significant topic among both black and white writers of fiction and non-fiction. The narrator says:

The president maintains the reclamations were necessary because after years of colonial rule, much of the country's best land was owned by a small number of white farmers (39).

This utterance by the child narrator, with reference to the land that has been in the hands of the few white minority, has also been observed by other fictional and non-fictional authors alike. Moyo and Chambati (2013:1) note that:

The Fast Track Land Reform Programme (FTLRP) implemented in Zimbabwe [...] reversed the radically-skewed agrarian structure and discriminating land tenures inherited from colonial rule whereby over 6,000 large-scale white farmers ... controlled most of the prime land ... while relegating the majority of the population to marginal lands.

These debates, where most black individuals justify the land reform program while many white authors reject it, form the basis of the white child's dilemma as she struggles to make sense of the situation. This dilemma is what she alludes to earlier on when she says:

Maybe looking at the different stories (all of which are true by the way) might suggest a larger truth. Maybe it wouldn't. (36)

On one hand, she seems to acknowledge that the land disparities needed to be corrected while on the other hand, she does not like the fact that the land reform programme took place, as it left her family landless.

Mambondiani (2016) focuses on compensation debates involving white farmers who had lost their land and these are mostly in opposition to the radical black nationalist and de-colonial discourses evident in the Mugabe government's view about the post-2000 fast track land reform. The views expressed by the white farmers in the responses reflected that the farmers had bought the farms in question in the 1950s and 1960s and had heavily invested in them over the years only to be evicted. The message they put forward was that the government must compensate them. The report states that:

According to the Zimbabwe Farmers Union, a group of mostly black farmers, compensation for the white farmers must relate to land development and assets, not the land itself. . . The new (black) farmers must be levied and this levy should [be] used to pay the white farmers. We don't want everyone in the country to be taxed and the money used to pay the white farmers but we want those who benefited from the land reform to be levied. (Mambondiani, 2016, *Reuters*, <https://jp.reuters.com/article/us-zimbabwe-farmers-compensation-idUSKBN12V00W>)

The attitudes expressed by the white settler community were that the Zimbabwean government should show some humanity and compensate the evicted farmers, many of whom were elderly, destitute, and had known farming as their only livelihood. The issue, as argued by the Commercial Farmers Union (CFU), centered on the assets and improvements made on the land, rather than the land itself. The nature of the politicians the white farmers were dealing with, is reflected in Chimoto's message in Hoba's "Specialisation," where he wrote to Baas Kasi, informing him that he need not return to the farm, as everything on it now belonged to the new black farmers.

It follows that loss of the land by the white settlers and lack of compensation for the assets and improvements they had made on the farms for years, changed their economic circumstances for the worse. The ripple effect of this fall in white farmer economic status impact on the way

the white child negotiates their childhood. In this case, the contradictions in the narrator's mind are indicative of a childhood filled with a dilemma over what to believe and what not to believe.

The child narrator also expresses her criticism of the land reform programme. She states that:

The forced seizure of private property led to sharp falls in agriculture production and precipitated the collapse of the country's economy...People everywhere, particularly in the rural areas, are starving and many are forced to survive on meagre grain handouts (39).

Scholars, both black and white, often express the same sentiments as those of the child narrator who blames the land reform programme on the economic and social crisis that ensued. Gumede (2018) posits that the country was agriculturally self-sufficient before the land reform, but the programme collapsed the agricultural productivity by disrupting the ongoing activities such that the country now needed to import most of its agricultural products. The narrator goes back and forth between acknowledging the need for the land reform programme and blaming the same for the hardships that followed. This internal conflict experienced by the narrator reflects the broader identity dilemmas faced by white children in postcolonial Zimbabwe, as they struggle to reconcile their inherited privilege with the painful realities of a transformed social and economic landscape.

4.1.2 White Childhood Identities

The thoughts of the child narrator in "The Situation" also show white childhood identities marked by desperation and disillusionment. The child narrator is eager for the situation to return to the way it was. At the same time, they are torn between the hope for the same to happen, and the reality on the ground which reeks of the impossibility of such. The narrator notes:

The police were called but ... the police don't, can't and won't do anything. They aren't helpful. Despite eviction orders they haven't kicked the squatters off our land. (39)

The desire to have the police remove the black people who had occupied their land speaks of nostalgic white childhood identities that yearn to return to the privileged position they used to occupy in society before the land reform programme. Following the same line of thought, the

protagonist goes on to describe how the farm invasions occurred, and the way black people arrived and forced the white man and his workers off the land. Reference is made to "...the farm was being taken over by a local businessman who had reclaimed what was his" (37). Connotations of reclaiming point to the same notion that the way the white man had acquired the land, was by disposing the black man of his ancestral land, therefore, the black man has now simply reclaimed what was rightfully his. These sentiments are echoed by Thomas (2003:694) who notes that:

The first moral argument for land reform is that regardless of how it came about, land ownership is highly unequal and redistribution would increase equality and hence, social justice.

This speaks to the justification of the land reform on the grounds of unequal distribution of land, which has always been topical in land reform discourses. At some point, the narrator points out all the negative economic outcomes at the hands of the government of the day. She says, "Hundreds of thousands have emigrated, driven out by the crisis" (39). However, the narrator ends this line of thought on an optimistic note in which she expresses her belief that the situation is likely to improve as a result of the unity government between the ruling party and the opposition, since there are already notable, positive changes. The Government of National Unity in Zimbabwe refers to a power-sharing arrangement between the country's main political parties, specifically the Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) and the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). This government was formed in 2009 in response to the political and economic crisis that followed the controversial 2008 elections, which were marked by violence, disputes over the election results, and a severe economic collapse, including hyperinflation. The 2008 elections were marked by significant violence and allegations of vote-rigging. In the elections, opposition leader Morgan Tsvangirai of the MDC won the first round but withdrew from the second round due to the violence, which left Robert Mugabe and ZANU-PF in power. The economic crisis was also devastating during this period, with Zimbabwe facing hyperinflation, high unemployment, food shortages, and a collapse of public services. The Global Political Agreement (GPA), signed in September 2008, led to the creation of the Unity Government. The agreement was brokered by South African President Thabo Mbeki and was intended to stabilise Zimbabwe politically and economically. The government was based on a coalition, where both ZANU-PF and MDC had key positions in the executive, legislature, and other state institutions. This was meant to ensure that both major parties had a role in decision-making processes. The Global Political Agreement (GPA) and

the subsequent Government of National Unity (GNU) in Zimbabwe formed in 2009 provided a source of hope for many white Zimbabweans for several key reasons, particularly in the context of the political, social, and economic turmoil that had marked the preceding years. The GNU represented potential for stability, protection of property rights, and a degree of inclusivity that had been lacking during the years of economic collapse and political unrest under Robert Mugabe's ZANU-PF.

The writer discloses a somewhat schizophrenic nature in the white child protagonist, who battles the various fears that he has regarding his changed circumstances and the uncertainties surrounding him. The narrator's thoughts are presented simultaneously and are interwoven in such a manner that the reader has to trace each and every story line. That manner of presentation demonstrates the level of trauma endured by the displaced white child. The schizophrenic nature of the narrator in "The Situation" demonstrates how white children struggled to understand their own feelings and to communicate them effectively as a result of the loss they had experienced. Transition times usually involve complex and changing emotions. The narrator in "The Situation" displays feelings of confusion, uncertainty, worry, sadness, anger and anxiety at the same time. As result, the white child is overwhelmed and unable to make sense of the conflicting emotions she experiences simultaneously. In such circumstances, the child character displays her curiosity about the crisis and the situation she is caught up in, often asking questions to gain a clearer understanding of what is happening.

"The Situation" is a highly charged short story, which attempts to strike an identity balance and bring focus on the equity of humanity during the *Third Chimurenga*. Rugege (2009) in a report on *The Commissioner of Police v The Commercial Farmer's Union 2000 9 BCLR 956 (Z)* indicates that the CFU approached the High Court of Zimbabwe for an order to compel the Commissioner of Police to stop the land invasions. Despite the order having been granted, Rugege (2009: 109) notes that the government and "particularly President Mugabe, was encouraging the invaders to continue their occupation..." Ultimately, the police failed to execute the order for the simple reason that "the police were under a duty to enforce the law and to ensure that the right of everyone to protection under the law as expressed in the Constitution..." (Rugege, 2009: 109).

What becomes clear in the scenario referred to by Rugege (2009) is that the land invasions received the blessings of the politicians, n particularly the executive. In so doing, the

constitutional provisions were trumped upon rendering the police impotent. Such lack of action escalated the invasions, and the message was clear that politics guided the decisions. Sensing ultimate defeat, the CFU strategically conversed with the government, and courts, to negotiate and seek recourse at least for the new farmers to be levied, and taxed with proceeds to be used to compensate. It was reported that the CFU had indicated that:

The new (black) farmers must be levied and this levy should be used to pay the white farmers. We don't want everyone in the country to be taxed and the money used to pay the white farmers but we want those who benefited from the land reform to be levied.

In principle, this made sense, but the problem was that the new black farmers who had been the beneficiaries reacted by saying that they just did not have the money. Further to that, as the deepening economic crisis showed, farmers, especially the new farmers, did not have capital or capacity to run the occupied farms. Stories such as “Specialisation” and “The Trek,” aptly capture this fact. The economic crisis worsened as economic sanctions were imposed on the country resulting in aid, mainly from the World Bank (WB), International Monetary Fund (IMF) and African Development Bank (ABD) being suspended in 1999 (Mambondiyani, 2016).

Against such a historical reality, the affected white commercial farmers faced major difficulties. They include losing the land which had been the source of their livelihoods for years. Some white farmers had close to 50-years of investments on the farm, as exemplified in the case of the Kondozi horticulture export entity in Odzi (Mutare), that was reportedly valued at US\$1 million at the time of its invasion (Mambondiyani, 2016). In light of these challenges, the lack of compensation and the loss of long-term investments left the affected white commercial farmers in a state of economic hardship and uncertainty.

In their loss, the commercial white farmers, through the CFU, did not seek to reclaim the land or demand compensation for its value, as these legal issues would be difficult to justify, given that the land belonged to the state. The main point of contention was the assets on the farms. Ironically, these were the same assets that the new black farmers also wanted. Chimoto in “Specialisation” gives the narrator instructions to threateningly inform Baas Kaasi that the farm, and everything on it now belonged to the new black farmers. There is no doubt therefore, that for the whites in this regard, the *Third Chimurenga* was a difficult situation for them. The

land reform process was marked by violence, intimidation, and disruption, especially for the white farmers, and its effects were deeply felt by all members of the white farming families, including children. The assets on the farms such as houses, livestock, machinery, and crops were critical to the livelihood and identity of white families, particularly those who had owned large-scale commercial farms for generations. The Third Chimurenga, as mentioned, was characterised by the seizure of these assets, often without compensation, leading to significant economic and social upheaval for the white families involved. For white children, this meant a sudden disruption in their daily lives. Many white children were displaced from their homes and forced to leave their farms and resettle in urban or foreign lands. The narrator's sister Linda in the story "Christmas" now lives and works in England. The narrator says "She lives in London and works in a shop. She does the till." (104). For white children like Linda, this disruption meant a forced redefinition of their identities and prospects, as they were displaced from the rural, privileged lives they once knew. Living in a foreign land, with a job far removed from the life of ownership and privilege on the farm, Linda's experience reflects the broader sense of alienation and loss that characterised the post-land reform reality for many white Zimbabwean children. The move to England symbolises both the personal and collective dislocation that the Land Reform brought, forcing a recalibration of their lives in a world where their previous social standing and racial privileges no longer held the same weight.

There is another view to consider regarding the identity crisis and yearning to belong for the white child-protagonist in the story under analysis. The story alludes to how the whites lived and worked in the country. As the colonial government was in power, the relationship between the whites and blacks was based on racism. The colonial project used an apartheid model project. White settler livelihoods were designed deliberately to maintain clearly "geographical, social and moral boundaries between whites and blacks" (Kalaora, 2011: 750). It is this separation reportedly used by the whites which was contested by the land reform programme. The whites believed that having:

... uncontrolled or undefined contacts with Africans were often seen as a threat to settler's economic and political power [as well as]... protect the coloniser's identity, manner, values and way of life.

Kalaora (2011:750-751) believes that whites, especially those from the farming community, "attempted to exclude, gag or control members of settler society who challenged the principles of separation and white superiority." As a result, the Third Chimurenga shook the very

foundations of the white settler community's way of life. The disruption signalled "the end of our history" context since the invasions and final occupation of their land became the greatest "disruption ... experienced" (Kalaora (2011: 751). This explains why the whites, and their children whom dominate these stories are portrayed as white farmers. However, this is not meant to suggest that all whites in Zimbabwe were farmers. This disruption, therefore, highlights how the land invasions fundamentally altered the socio-economic structure of the white settler community, particularly those white farmers who had long relied on land as a means to perpetuate the system of racial separation and superiority.

A close analysis of "The Situation" reflects worry, trauma and uncertainty within a white-child who unaware of the history of the land. The white farmers in Zimbabwe lost far much more than the land and assets on them. They lost an entire history and way of life in a way that was surprising to them, leaving them confused and disoriented. The protagonist captures the very sentiment of surprise in the first and opening line of the story, "Sometimes I wonder what happened" (36). Hence, the only way to describe the crisis, *Third Chimurenga* and their wellbeing was that this was the situation. Comparatively, the *Second Chimurenga*, as Kalaora (2011) argues, was logical in the mind-set of the white farmers who, though living in fear, had some degree of protection from the Smith regime, and still remained occupying the land. The *Third Chimurenga* was very complex and dynamic and resulted in the scattering of white children to various parts of the world as shown in the story "Christmas" discussed in detail in the next section.

4.2 Nostalgic Re-connections

Rheam's (2005) "Christmas" centres on a 10-year-old narrator whose changed land ownership circumstances can best be dissected through the reactions of the white adults around him. I therefore, analyse the responses of white children, and young adults to determine how they forge new identities in light of their changing land situation. The description of the white family in "Christmas" demonstrates elements of family fragmentation, resulting in an alienated people, whose loss of land, which had been an integral part of their lives for so long, had thrown them off balance. The narrator describes, at the beginning of the story, how some members of his family have left the country as a result of their loss of land. For instance, the narrator points out that:

At Christmas they all pop again for the once-a year family dinner. Not that we'll all be together this time. For one, Nicholas and Lisa are in New Zealand. ... They said to me they'd try and come back for Christmas, but mom says they're really busy and do not have much money, so she didn't expect them home (104).

The narrator highlights how his family members can no longer come together as they once did when they all lived in Zimbabwe before losing their farms. He is now experiencing a lonely childhood, with no meaningful family connections, as the adults around him struggle to cope with the loss of land during the post-2000 land reform programme.

The narrator also divulges that her sister now stays in London and works in a shop as a till operator. The narrator's father does not approve of this move by his daughter as he struggles to understand, "why leave Zimbabwe to work in a shop when you can stay here and have a good job" (104-105). The narrator notes that his father is still living in the past, when whites held positions of privilege. In contrast, the younger generation appears to adopt a more practical approach to their changed circumstances. They are quick to explore new options and adapt, instead of hanging on to the nostalgia of the days when the land, which happens to be the means of production, used to belong to the white minority. The children and young people in this white family have to forge their identities around their new circumstances characterised by the loss of land.

Barclay (2018) contends that alienation occurs when a person withdraws or becomes isolated from the environment or from other people. She goes on to highlight that one of the effects of alienation is self-estrangement, whereby one gets out of touch with oneself in different ways, mostly being unable to form one's own identity. This is evident in the actions of the narrator's father that reflect his struggle to come to terms with his family's changed circumstances. Nonetheless, the child narrator in "Christmas" seems to be trying to understand his circumstances from the acceptance of the changes that surround the white community. The writer shows contradictions between the child's thoughts, versus those of the adults around him. His father, in particular, exhibits tendencies of denial and appears to be stuck in the era when whites controlled all the prime farming land. The father fails to cope with his separation from the land, which is an essential aspect of his life, and this has resulted in feelings of powerlessness and helplessness as observed by his son.

Representations of white childhoods in post-2000 white writings show how they try to adjust to the loss of land in a more realistic manner. For instance, Linda explains to her father that her friends, and herself, are prepared to sacrifice the harsh conditions that they must endure when they first arrive in England, knowing that eventually their lives will improve. In a way, the younger white generation has embraced the inevitability of their loss of land and have decided not to focus on it. Instead, the white childhoods are characterised by individuals who quickly react by working on something new and helping one another along the way.

The narrator satirises his father's reaction, showing contradictions between his father's dogmatic approach, and his own practical analysis of the situation. The attitude of the father figure in "Christmas" is unpacked through the observations of his ten-year-old son and narrator of the story. The narrator portrays how the legacy of the white rule fails to stimulate positive race relations. The father seems oblivious to the existence of blacks, or at the very least, their urgent need for the land as well. The father figure exudes deep seated hostility stemming from failure to acknowledge the inevitable changes that have been brought about by the changes in land ownership. White children, such as the narrator in "Christmas," are therefore, negotiating their identities under the care of adults who are bitter about being dispossessed of the land. The children, therefore, exude loneliness and a desire to keep to themselves as they try to navigate their new circumstances off the land.

4.2.1 Traumatic Experiences Arising from Farm Occupations

Trauma encompasses an event or series of events, along with the associated feelings and emotions, often resulting in negative mental and social consequences. Heidarizadeh (2015) refers to it as psychoanalysis trauma whose cause include sexual abuse (rape), police brutality, domestic violence, catastrophic events such as wars, betrayal among other issues. Trauma has received considerable attention in psychology, sociology, history, war and politics, and literature. As such, to better conceptualise trauma, psychoanalysis is better placed to provide some insights into how it gets to be handled in literature since the term trauma itself is usually taken from psychoanalysis when used for literary criticism (Heidarizadeh, 2015).

Despite how the land reform programme was carried out, which Kerstein (2011) describes as the situation, what emerged in the historical and cultural context of the programme took on various labels. In attempting to define the situation, the white-child protagonist in says:

The situation might be none of those things, it all depends on where you stand you or whether you think you are falling or flying. ("The Situation" 36)

The same can equally be extended to the way contesting and participating groups in the Zimbabwean crisis got to label the situation based on how they benefited or lost from it. The ZANU PF government, war veterans and other landless new farmers labelled it the land reform programme, an expression also used in government. The opposition, white settlers and those who strongly opposed it sided with expressions such as land invasions. The nonpartisan perhaps merely called it the crisis.

In "Christmas," the narrator presents a huge family, spanning through generations. The references to ancestry create connections between the founding members of the family, some of whom have passed away, like Dad's Pop, or are now octogenarians, like Gran. What is evident is how the family, due to environmental changes, has been compelled to have its younger members adapt and take on new roles. Most of the children and other extended family members are now in Britain, Australia or South Africa, common destinations which were favoured by most of the white farmers. Interestingly, new members to the extended family are also identified such as Delphine, the only character representing the coloureds in this story. Delphine is a young woman engaged to the narrator's uncle. One quickly notices Dad's initial negative reaction in the description that:

Dad rolled his eyes at first, but now he says she's OK and keeps Uncle Tony under her thumb. (106)

The separate ideological and cultural standing discussed above was the initial source of Delphine's rejection on the basis that she is a product of a union between black and white persons. However, given the winds of change prevailing, Dad is forced to accept the *status quo*. Metaphorically, the white settlers, as Kalaora (2011) observes, never trusted or desired to share space with natives. Even during the Third Chimurenga, new farmers are portrayed as invaders, and blacks, in general, are labelled as "liars," accused of never keeping their word. They do not trust anyone" (Kalaora, 2011:752). This means that allegiance and support rendered to the Smith regime was an obvious way of defending potential threats to their land. In the 2000 Referendum, they campaigned for and supported the 'No' vote which was led by the MDC. Given that Delphine is bi-racial, it may point towards the period of the Unity Government. The

Global Political Agreement of 2009 that ushered in a Unity Government helped neutralise the crisis in the country as the two opposing parties were bound politically to form a government. The period witnessed the easing of some challenges such as prices, availability of goods and services.

More broadly, however, the story “Christmas” is centred on the ramifications linked to loss of balance by the old generation of the white farmers. White children and youths forge new identities as the challenges linked to identity and belonging upset the white community. In the diaspora, the question arises on who the whites were, following their departure from the country and the father says:

You are either a Zimbabwean, or you are not. You can't be an ex. You can't divorce your country.” (106)

Thus, the farm invasions, as they would have them described, were the trauma of a lifetime. This also involves a loss of meaning as the new reality pushed the white farmers and their children in the ambivalent moral space where justice proved to be the very last option since the invasions were done outside the law.

Christmas is celebrated by most Christian churches, centred on the Biblical retelling of the birth of Jesus Christ. The season is marked by family gatherings, fostering a sense of togetherness. In this context, the child-narrator sees Christmas as the last remaining cultural reality that offers a chance for interpersonal connection with family and loved ones. At the same time, the figure of baby Jesus, whose birth represents salvation, contrasts with the struggles of the white farmer community in Zimbabwe, especially through the perspective of white children, who perceive their community's yearning for salvation and acceptance.

4.3 Conclusion

This chapter, which analysed the stories of white childhoods during the post-2000 crisis, argued that there is need to appreciate the voices from the white community in the making of the history of the *Third Chimurenga*. It is generally celebrated that the history of a people is written by the victors whose voices dominate. The Third Chimurenga is a contested space, and as highlighted in the story "The Situation," one's position depends on whether they are a victor or a loser, black or white, new farmer or not, child or adult, woman or man

What stands out in the stories analysed in this chapter is that the former white farmers, notwithstanding the violence and way the land reform programme was done, yearned for identity and belonging. The former white farmers and their children could not fit anymore in the Zimbabwean community/society, nor could they fit in the various countries they had migrated to. Despite this, some of the white farmers still harboured colonial-based arrogance and racist tendencies and as such, the social-economic and political changes arising from the post-2000 crisis caught the community off-guard causing loss of balance.

The short stories analysed in this chapter also depict the voices of whites who may have been engaged in other professions that are far removed from farming. This shows the interconnected nature of the *Third Chimurenga* and how the contest over land extended to other conflicts. The stories show that the rise in unemployment, inflation, liquidity challenges, poor services, food shortages and other crisis conditions were a result of the land reform programme. It should be noted, however that, as scholarship has shown, the Third Chimurenga disrupted farming activities on one end, and invited economic sanctions, on the other as the international community sympathised with the victims of land invasions and This contributed to the crisis economy of shortages depicted in the stories analysed in this chapter.

In “The Situation,” the perspective of the white child narrating how the land was invaded provides alternative voices to the origins of the crisis. As indicated in Chapter 1, the *Third Chimurenga* is traced to the 1890s, and none of the white voices trace the crisis to that period. White children were not socialised or exposed to debates of that period. It seems as though the white farmers were reluctant to revisit history to explain the land acquisitions of the 1950s, especially after the land had been protected by the Land Apportionment Act of 1930, the 1951 Native Husbandry Act, and the 1969 Land Tenure Act (Kalaora, 2016). In this context, New Historicism helps to debunk the narratives explored in the stories under study. Given that the stories “The Situation,” and “Christmas” are told from the perspectives of white children, the reader is expected to sympathise with the child narrators in the way the international community sympathised with the commercial farmers who framed their predicament as one that had roots in bad governance. There is less attempt to appreciate more explicitly and identify exactly where the rain began beating them, a la Achebe. The stories portray how the trauma of land loss and the accompanying social changes disrupt the childhood identities of white children. The land ownership issues are not merely abstract political or economic concepts for

the children; they represent a fundamental shift in their understanding of the world. The child narrator's sense of confusion and displacement is a direct result of the breakdown of the structures that once gave her life meaning, such as family ownership of land and the racialised status it necessitated. For these children, the loss of land is more than just a loss of property; it signals a loss of cultural identity and security, leaving them in a state of psychological confusion.

Chapter 5: The construction of childhood identities in turbulent landscapes

5.0 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the resilience of young protagonists who experience recurring forms of violence perpetuated by the crisis. It explores how each of them manoeuvres through harsh circumstances, ultimately leading to the development of violent childhood identities marked by social protest. The selected stories represent a generation of children and youth who are marginalised in postcolonial social environments dominated and rendered dysfunctional by the crisis. Discussions in the previous chapters illustrated the ways in which imagined childhoods are affected by the crisis in question and hence, this chapter considers the construction of childhood identities in the face violence and brutalities.

5.1 Instinctive rebellion by the youth

The protagonists in this chapter demonstrate instinctive rebellions that are born out of the youth because of their growing frustrations with the protracted economic woes. The stories analysed in this chapter are Mlalazi's "Dancing with life" and "Eeish" (2008), Ashley's "Tables turned over," (2005) and Saidi's "The winning side" (2003). The stories are chosen for the way in which they show changes in childhood identities amidst uncertainties through the navigation of turbulent political, social and economic landscapes and thereby demonstrating their agency.

Bhabha's third space concept is essential here because these children are neither wholly tied to the colonial past nor fully aligned with the post-independence vision. Instead, their identities are formed in the liminal space between these two poles. They must negotiate a new form of identity that reflects both the cultural dislocation caused by Zimbabwe's historical context and the immediate survivalist challenges they face. This hybrid identity is neither fully "Zimbabwean" in the post-independence sense nor fully "colonial" but is instead an amalgamation of multiple cultural forces. For example, the characters in these stories often embody resistance, whether through physical survival, defiance of authority, or by actively seeking to redefine themselves in the face of overwhelming hardship. The tension between the desire for a "better life" (inherited from nationalist ideologies) and the grim reality of daily survival in the face of political and economic collapse mirrors the hybridisation of their

identities. The intersection of their childhood innocence with the hard realities of life under crisis creates new forms of childhood identity, that of resilience, resourcefulness, and often disillusioned with the systems that failed them.

Homi Bhabha's idea of *the location of culture* is instrumental in understanding the formation of childhood identities during the Zimbabwean crisis. The intersection of colonial legacies, post-independence nationalism, and the harsh realities of economic and social disintegration forced children to navigate a complex cultural landscape. In this context, children's identities were neither static nor solely defined by traditional categories; instead, they were shaped by the intersection of various cultural influences, each with its own set of contradictions. The children in these stories exist in the "third space" of identity, where they are forced to create new, hybrid identities that reflect their complex and often painful experiences in a crisis-ridden Zimbabwe.

Fischer (1995:95) observes that "the centrality of identity is fundamental to the aetiology of conflicts." This translates to the idea that while social conflicts may be triggered by the denial of tangible resources, they are complicated by structurally embedded questions of identity. In this case, a new crop of childhood identities seems focussed on doing something about their situation. Sideris (2001) also asserts that repression and social conflict shape the identities of men and women in significantly different ways. As the economic conditions continue to deteriorate, and there is increased talk of change in "Tables turned over," the youth realise that there is not much hope for a brighter future for their generation. The author questions the postcolonial conditions that render the youthful population jobless and hopeless, leading to the countrywide protests against poor living conditions. A close reading of the selected stories reveals that identity is conceived in terms of agency, resistance, courage and confrontation. This points towards the role of children in social protest and violence. Bearing in mind that just as with other identities, childhood identities are social constructs that are influenced by opportunities and constraints that are consistently mediated by material conditions and the obtaining political and economic environment.

The reference to Fischer (1995), who highlights the centrality of identity in social conflicts, is directly aligned with the New Historicist view that individual identities are constructed within broader socio-political contexts. The social conflicts, often precipitated by material shortages (e.g., joblessness), are compounded by deeper, structural issues around identity. This aligns

with New Historicism's view that historical circumstances shape personal and collective identities, influencing actions like protests or social movements. The idea that "identity is fundamental to the aetiology of conflicts" reflects a New Historicist understanding that history (in this case, colonial history and postcolonial economic hardships) plays a pivotal role in shaping identity, and in turn, social struggles.

In the previous chapters, I foregrounded the importance of striking a balance between agency and the constraints which hinder children from exercising their agency. Representations of childhood identities show that while engaged in some form of agency, children are sometimes limited by situational constraints that curtail their ability to fully exercise their agentic choices. Hence, in this chapter I show the rebellious nature of childhood identities, emanating from the need to change their circumstances. I also acknowledge some negative outcomes that result from some of the agentic choices made by the child characters. Gillespie (2010) defines agency as the exercise of choice, where a socially located person acts independently of an immediate situation, weighing up and choosing between alternative responses to social demands in the light of goals that may be motivated by concerns outside the immediate situation. For instance, the teenage boy who throws the first stone which triggers looting and protests in "Tables turned over," is motivated by the immediate situation of the continued rise in the cost of bread, but reacting to other recurring challenges such as general inflation, hunger and never-ending poverty. At the same time agentic choices do not always yield desired results due to the existing situational constraints as depicted in the selected stories.

Childhood identities are also constructed from the way social forces relate to children, revealing that children are also affected by crisis conditions, such as the Zimbabwean crisis in question. This emphasises that while children may display vulnerability, a significant source of resilience can drive social protests with far-reaching political consequences. It is, therefore, pertinent to understand how the child characters negotiate, interpret and respond to the poverty and their position towards efforts aimed at fighting marginalisation, exclusion and exploitation which are widespread in the crisis conditions they are growing up in.

The behaviour of the protagonists in the selected stories are reminiscent of transformative acts that disrupt dominant discourse of fear that have been instilled in people. These discourses render society incapable of revolting against the government in the presence of vast economic woes. In "Tables turned over" by Adrian Ashley, reference is made to the fact that, "It was the

familiar fear that had kept the people in line for years now” (12). However, the worsening economic conditions and growing discontent among the youth seems to have given them the courage to rebel against the fear and confront the system which deprived them of a decent survival. The moment the imagined community dropped their fear, the country degenerated into mass protests that are punctuated by looting and running battles with the police and the army. It is pertinent to note that with respect to the story “Tables turned over,” the writer centres a young boy at the helm of the protests. The boy character is the one who throws the first stone when everyone else is afraid and hesitant. This buttresses the rise of a protest childhood generation that has decided to take matters into their own hands to chart their future.

Notably, the grievances that eventually lead to the protests beginning at the marketplace, revolve around unemployment, poverty and lack of basic service delivery. The children, and youth have been born into deplorable conditions and have lost all hope for change. Ukeje (2004) notes that the cycles of community protests and state repression have in turn triggered a vicious regime of violence and insecurity. In “Dancing with life” by Christopher Mlalazi, Mxolisi is arrested by the police and the community members make a concerted attempt to fight for him and have him released. Nonetheless, the centrality of economic crisis circumstances in the social protests and youth as well as larger society’s agency is evident here. Rothchild (1997: 209) echoes this in the observation that:

...when issues of identity and participation in matters of basic personal privilege are at stake; and when actions of one group infringes on the privacy and identity of others, the demands may be transformed into non-negotiable tangibles.” Whereby the non-negotiable tangibles include, “cultural identity status, participation, political and physical survival and other tangibles.

Therefore, the protagonists under study portray the observation made by Rothchild in various ways. In Mlalazi’s “Eeish,” Ndlala expresses his wish to escape, but does not know in which direction (29). He makes it clear that he will not take the violence from his father (and by extension, from the state) lying down. The deplorable conditions that characterise his life from early childhood up to his current teenage years impacts his personal identity status as well as his survival. Similarly, in William Saidi’s “The winning side,” Tichaona concludes that his rich uncle, who holds an important office in the government, will not be of any assistance to him. The uncle is merely concerned about his own comfort and welfare at the expense of the masses. As such, Tichaona gladly walks away from him, and decides to chart his own path in the streets

of Harare together with fellow street children. The dichotomy created here directly speaks, in metaphoric ways, to the title of the story itself. On one end, Tichaona speaks of his uncle in government, while on the other he unites and identifies with children living in the streets, who in this instance, may also represent the larger impoverished citizens, or the side that morally wins at the end of the day. While much of the discourse surrounding the Third Chimurenga has focused on the farms or rural settings, these stories introduce another dimension by drawing attention to the socio-spatial experiences of children in urban areas, particularly the high-density suburbs. Here, children face distinct yet equally severe challenges, complicating our understanding of childhood in the context of post-2000 crisis conditions in Zimbabwe. Finally, in “Dancing with life,” Mxolisi is described as having “tossed honesty out of the window”, after he realised that the education that he has received would not help him survive. He resorts to criminal means of survival by selling *marijuana* (dagga). Therefore, the representations above focus on childhoods and how this particular social group negotiates the worsening crisis economic conditions for survival purposes. The literature represents a sudden implosion of resistant childhood identities. Hence, the observation by Sideris (2001) which has been alluded to earlier in this discussion, that repression and social conflict shape the identities of men and women in significantly different ways.

The struggles that children face under the crisis are not peculiar to them alone but affect adults as well. Their struggles are not isolated from the larger crisis affecting the entire nation. Therefore, this chapter analyses the nature and effects of the post-2000 crisis and Third Chimurenga on childhood identities. This gives rise to a new generation of children and youths who are instigating and engaging in violent protests to address the ongoing social, political, and economic injustices. The major issue portrayed includes negating the crisis of perpetual poverty and the consequent challenging of contradictions inherent in the crisis and its effects on the children, as shown in the following analyses of the selected stories.

5.2 Uncertainty, futility and violent legacy in “Eeish!”

The story “Eeish!” by Christopher Mlalazi, is an example of how violence perpetuates itself in people and in the society. Mlalazi brings back Ndlala, the protagonist of his earlier fictional work “Pay day hell” examined in Chapter 2 of this study, now a teenager and living in the same deplorable conditions of massive lack and violence. In essence, Ndlala’s imagined life resonates with observations by Keshy et al., (2006) who notes that there are limited resources

available to children in coping with life's challenges in tough situations. In "Pay day hell," Ndlala's childhood is the epitome of generational poverty that is worsened by gross abuse of children's rights. Ndlala's grandfather, Mabhena Senior, has survived in agonising poverty and failed to send his children to school, including Ndlala's father, Doubt Mabhena. In the story "Eeish!" Ndlala is now a 19-year-old uneducated and unemployed youth, and with no hope for a bright future. His journey tells the story of the violent traits of childhoods fashioned amidst crisis. There are ways in which specific instances of violence (such as those witnessed in "Pay day hell") are embedded in a framework of insecurity that shapes everyday life and pre-occupies the young occupants of these societies. As such, significant questions are then raised (in Chapter 2) about the home and environment in which the violence takes place and about the social and economic factors of the set period which permits such violence on children. It is, therefore, significant to trace further the teenage Ndlala's experiences within crisis conditions marked by deprivation of children's rights and violence.

The very opening of the story "Eeish!" speaks of a reality marked by a continued presence and experiences of violence from early childhood. The protagonist and narrator Ndlala begin with the statement, "The slap landed again. Same cheek. I did not flinch. I did not want to give him that satisfaction" (22). Reference to not flinching speaks of a young man who has mastered the fortitude of endurance. Years of continued endurance of violence turn him into a character that has learnt to take all the negatives that are hurled at him as he tries to position himself in a crisis filled environment. Therefore, this chapter dwells on similar representations of childhood identities devoid of any more fear, and figures ready and willing to confront their desperate circumstances.

Ndlala's teenage life is haunted by past traumas and a present state of hopelessness. Images of Ndlala's father beating him up, and instilling (or trying to instil) fear, as he used to, continue into Ndlala's teenage years. Yet, Ndlala now evades his father and makes promises to himself that he will retaliate if he attacks him. The mentality of fighting back that Ndlala now embodies is closely aligned with confrontational childhood identities, recurrent in the selected stories in this chapter. Furthermore, hopelessness pervades Ndlala's entire existence and brings to the fore the notion of desperate childhood identities, destroyed by the political, economic and social crisis. This is noted in Ndlala's expression of his regrets for the lack of a better life, during his conversations with his neighbour Craig, the white man who has settled in the township. At one point, Ndlala suddenly blurts out "I want to escape all this ... But I don't

know in which direction, and it drives me crazy” (29). This sole statement by Ndlala embodies the thoughts and feelings of other children who have suffered similar stolen childhoods in this time of economic, political and economic crisis. Having been deprived of an opportunity to get an education, Ndlala stands little or no chance to live a meaningful and fulfilling life. The same applies for other imagined childhoods such as that of Sarai in “Mainini Grace’s Promise,” the narrator in “The Trek,” and Baba Nina’s children in “Specialisation.” All the above have similarly not been accorded an opportunity to get an education due to the disabling conditions of the crisis. This gives way to childhoods marked by personal unrest due to diminished expectations of a better life, in the absence of an education.

The impression one gets from the livelihoods is that the acquisition of formal education is the panacea to poverty and emancipation from oppressive circumstances. Evans and Acosta (2020) reflect on how education in sub-Saharan countries has been expanding and report that the percentage of children completing primary education expanded by 50% from 1970 to 2010. Evans and Acosta (2020) further unpack the efforts governments have been making to promote education in Africa notably implementation of feeding programmes in schools. The lessons drawn are that access to education, despite its quality, is the only way to alleviating poverty in Africa and to restoring lost opportunities among children and the youths.

Nonetheless, critical questions that arise compel one to re-examine Ndlala’s father, Doubt, and Mabena Senior, on the underlying circumstances of their failure to uphold the rights of their children. One obvious position this thesis highlights is that the government’s political and economic actions are the bedrock of the problems manifesting themselves in their citizens, and the children suffer the worst. It was noted in Chapter 1 of this thesis that the *Third Chimurenga* has its roots in the *First Chimurenga*. This means that colonial influence impacted on the politics as well as the social aspects of the people’s lives, positively and negatively since the advent of colonialism.

Formal education, for instance, replaced the traditional education system African societies had (Mosweunyane, 2013). In Dangarembga’s *Nervous Conditions* (1988), Tambudzai fights hard to get an education, and her journey illustrates how acquisition of education emancipated her from poverty, and other forms of patriarchal oppression. There are, however, negative effects of colonial education as represented by Nyasha who eventually suffers a nervous breakdown largely because of the cultural impact the education had on the psyche of the African. Much of

the African literature battles the loss of African values, culture, communalism, ubuntu among other aspects caused by western education. Freire (1970) describes the education as characterised by the banking system of knowledge and what follows are headless bodies (Ngugi, 1981) in African societies; p'Bitek's poetry anthology *Song of Lawino and Song of Ocol* and Soyinka's play *The Lion and the Jewel* is also a case in point. What is at stake, therefore, is the recognition that childhood during the crisis-ridden period in Zimbabwe presents a double-edged situation, where both colonial and postcolonial impacts shape it.

Ndlala as a youth, shows that generational political, cultural and economic problems catch up with him and the question is what exactly is sustainably required for generations in Africa to break the cycle of poverty despite expansion of education in the region? Colonial education has its advantages, but postcolonial realities have seen governments failing to avail facilities for Africans to acquire basic context-based education which can be used to anchor hope for the future. The narrator in "Specialisation" is a university graduate, and probably of the same age with Ndlala, but both are caught up in the same crisis. The narrator in "Specialisation" is more conscious of the politics of the day than Ndlala. Despite being in the same context, the two, Ndlala in "Eeish!" and the narrator in "Specialisation" react and are impacted in distinct ways due to their varying socialisations and experiences. Ironically, the helper to Sekuru, the spirit medium, is also a youth whose advice to the trio on the possible remedy to the failure of the farm is that they should work hard. The story "Specialisation," therefore, ends on a high note where the young generation are hopeful that they will move out of their comfort zone to turn around the situations they face.

The message in this case is that the future of the entire nation is at stake once childhood has been shattered due to parental negligence or parental deaths due to pandemics such as the case with the HIV/AIDS, political skirmishes or otherwise. This best explains how Zimbabwe's *Third Chimurenga* can also be partly described as a nation seeking to recover from a complex crisis that has a very huge impact on childhood, which is the foundation of any society. One sees the traumatic experiences laden in both the psyche of the nation as well as its physic.

In the story "Eeish!" Ndlala envisions a bleak future where his father, stepmother, and himself may end up homeless, unable to pay rent due to the shutdown of industries caused by the economic meltdown and rampant inflation. Ndlala's father, Doubt, had been fortunate enough to be employed by Malcolm Steel, a company where his father had also worked. However, the

company is described in the story as tethering on the verge of collapse and workers were reporting for work on fewer days of the week and working for a reduced wage. It is this situation which leads Ndlala to predict a future homeless scenario for his family, which spells intensified suffering of families at the height of the crisis. There is no end in sight for Ndlala's childhood woes which have characterised his life from birth up to his teenage years.

Thus, the years of protracted poverty and violence due to crisis, results in uncertain, futile and violent childhood identities. By extension, Ndlala is unable to see any hope beyond the Malcolm Steel, the company his father works for. The state of hopelessness and the existing squalid living conditions describe and mirror the extent of damage done to childhood and explain how nations also lose out from potential contributions the youths could make to the development of the same nation, in this case Zimbabwe. It implies that the future development of nations is being challenged or threatened. Ndlala exhibits no evidence of innovativeness and readiness to eventualities as his life was socialised and rooted at a steel company. It is through Ndlala that one learns of notions that make a nation strong or weak. In other words, nations that value and support childhood, either directly or through its adult population, are likely to be strong or stand ready to defend their culture, politics and even economies.

5.3 Restless and dangerous childhoods in “Dancing with life”

In Laye's *African Child*, the African childhood is heavily romanticised. For instance, the child is presented playing with snakes without being harmed, showing the harmony between Africans and their nature or environment. In Ngugi's *Matigari*, the same is realised in Guthera, and the children such as Muriuki, although these get to experience a rise in political consciousness and work towards changing the course of a Kenya reeling under neo-colonialism. As mentioned earlier, while children and childhood are often associated with innocence, they can also be sources of unrest and delinquency. This suggests that children should not be absolved of responsibility for their actions.

Based on the above, one can submit that persistent crisis in a nation tends to give rise to delinquent childhoods as portrayed in “Dancing with life” by Christopher Mlalazi. The story shows how children and the youth struggle against the limitations set by the political, economic and social crisis, inadvertently leading to criminal childhoods in the quest for survival. With reference to the deviant behaviour portrayed by the young protagonists, Hussein and Anzar

(2017) contend that there is no single root cause of crime, and that it is primarily the outcome of multiple, adverse social, economic, cultural and family conditions. Consequently, the deviant behaviour displayed by the protagonist Mxolisi and his peers may well be attributed to the effects of the crisis conditions that they have grown up in and seems to worsen by the day.

A critical analysis of the dynamics between authority and youth in this story demonstrates a deeper commentary on the erosion of fear as a tool of control. The story opens with a chase between Mxolisi and a policeman, and the very image of running battles between the police and the youth depicts a childhood hardened by conflict, unafraid of confrontation with the law. This scenario alludes to the use of fear as a weapon used by the state to maintain control over ordinary citizens, yet here, the force of authority is undermined. The policeman is described as shouting “in a harsh voice that has been highly trained to instil fear, and at once, instant obedience.” (35) However, this voice fails to elicit the intended reaction. Sarcasm is used to highlight the policeman's inability to instil fear and the failure of the “much-touted myriad economic turnaround programmes,” (35) suggesting that the youth, disillusioned by broken promises, have grown weary of passive submission and are now prepared to challenge the system at any cost.

Mxolisi's criminal experiences reflect instances of confrontational childhoods. Mxolisi is a former university student himself, but like most of his fellow graduates, still finds himself unemployed in a country plagued with corruption and economic collapse. Reference is made to how “Mxolisi tossed honesty over his shoulder a couple of years back” (35). As a result of years of enduring difficult childhood experiences, the reader becomes aware of the emergence of a liberated yet unsettled child, entering new environments and adopting new, often violent, and criminal identities. This is noted in the way Mxolisi spends his days selling marijuana outside a township sports bar. It also emerges that he steals money from his mother and her boyfriend. He goes on to work with his friend, Julukwa, to steal the black-market fuel that his mother sells, for onward selling of the fuel and pocketing the money himself. He engages in all the above criminal activities with no regret. The crisis has contributed to the emergence of dangerous and criminal childhood identities.

The youths have made the conscious decision to engage in criminal activities as a means for survival as there is no other way out of the persistent poverty brought about and perpetuated by the political, economic and social crisis. These experiences highlight the new crisis and

criminal divisions that now existed where among the youth, the male opts into drug peddling while their female counterparts resort to prostitution for survival. A young girl named Virginia also openly prostitutes herself at the sports bar where Mxolisi trades his marijuana. This cultural geography of the crisis is also marked by the rise of spaces of moral decadence and arenas of crime and desperation as symbolised by the sports bar where Virginia and Mxolisi ply their illegal trades. The sports bar draws parallels with Rita's shebeen depicted in the story "Forever haunted by Rita's eyes" by Mupfudza. Hence, Virginia could be one of the girls Rita's daughter referred to when she indicated that she was not one of those girls, after being offered too much money for a drink.

The crimes witnessed in this regard point to a very broad picture of the struggle children and the youths face, largely due to governments' failure to provide for their citizens especially the institution of childhood. Drugs and substance abuse have increased over the years, and this has escalated the turmoil in an already crisis-laden post-2000 environment in Zimbabwe. However, this bleak reality reflects the link between the use of drugs and the youth's mechanisms of coping with the traumatic experiences in the country. One of the recurring themes in most of the selected short stories in this study is hunger. The hunger is either physical or psychological and emotional. Thus, the abuse of drugs can be read as a way of making a living out of the peddling of the same drugs or taking them as a way of fighting the hunger to the detriment of one's health.

A critical analysis of "Dancing with life" reveals how unrest and socio-political upheaval in the story contribute to the creation of dangerous childhoods, where survival often overrides moral boundaries. The youth in this narrative are not merely passive victims of circumstance, but active participants in a world where they are forced to confront instability, poverty, and the collapse of societal structures. One key aspect of this unrest is the depiction of theft - youths are shown stealing their parents' goods, a poignant symbol of the breakdown of trust and security within the family unit. This act of stealing, rather than being framed solely as criminal behaviour, highlights the desperation and alienation of children who, in the face of economic and social collapse, view such actions as necessary for survival. It is an expression of how the traditional boundaries between right and wrong are increasingly blurred for children who grow up in an environment defined by loss, deprivation, and an overwhelming sense of uncertainty. In this context, the theft serves as a stark reflection of the dangers fomented by a generation

whose childhood is shaped by unrest, where even the sanctity of family and personal belongings become casualties of broader societal collapse.

As earlier indicated in this section, once childhood is not positively and adequately supported, the nation bears the brunt of delinquent behaviours that threaten the peace and health of the society. Abdullahi and Samast (2019) proclaim that substance or drug abuse is the major source of crimes in youth. In the story “Dancing with life,” the aforesaid proclamation is affirmed when Mxolisi gets actively involved in crimes such as theft and drug peddling. One can, therefore, infer that the presence of state apparatus, such as the police, meant to maintain peace and order, ironically highlights the state's role in contributing to many of the problems it now seeks to control or address. The contradictions of the state are also exposed in the various selected stories. In “The Trek,” the child narrator observes the presence of the police as they are being re-evicted from their seized sugarcane farm, making way for a potbellied man, who is assumed to be a politician. One can conclude that politicians also stole from their kith-and-kin with the help of the police. In “Dancing with life,” Mxolisi and his friends engage in running battles with the same police over drug peddling.

It follows that the presence of the police in Zimbabwe during the crisis-laden period meant different things to different people. Simpson and Kronke (2019) report that the Zimbabwean police, represented by the Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP), became a tool of the ruling party dating back to the period of the crisis. In this regard, the Afrobarometer (2019) reports that citizens had lost confidence in the police given its politicisation. It may explain why Rita, in Mupfudza’s (2005) “Forever haunted by Rita’s eyes,” never got to report her rape. Additionally, Mxolisi challenges the police, and by extension, the state, suggesting that he perceives the police as complicit in supporting the government's repression. His defiance also extends to individual officers who, in turn, seek bribes from criminals and citizens—such as youth like him, criminalized by the crisis—who are simply trying to survive.

5.4 Identities Isolated from Cultural Institutions in “The Winning Side”

The post-2000 crisis in Zimbabwe created homelessness among children. Either parents succumbed to the HIV/AIDS pandemic, were killed for political reasons or children ran away from their homes due to negligence, domestic violence and other reasons. The urban streets offered a sanctuary of some sort to the runaway children and youth. Notions of fragmented and

disintegrated families have permeated discussions on crisis childhood identities in the previous chapters with the street children portrayed in “The Winning Side” by William Saidi reflecting this state. The story describes the first days of the protagonist, Tichaona, as a street kid. We are told:

The last week had been awful: he hadn't known where to go, or what to do. He'd tried to avoid the *mbanje* smoking kids in Union Ave, and the touts who ran the station area (230).

The phenomenon of street children has become one of the mostly prominent social tragedies of our times (Capo-Chichi and Agbodannon, 2015). Children who are homeless often live in chaotic and unsafe environments where there is frequent exposure to various forms of violence, including sexual violence and this is reflected in “The Winning Side” by Saidi, examined in this section. Reference to sexual violence is made when the resilience of a girl, Tambudzai, is highlighted. She manages to avoid being sexually violated, unlike the other female street children, who are unable to resist the sexual abuse they face. We are told

In the two weeks that Tichaona had been with them, not one of the boys had tried to be funny with her as they were with the other girls, who succumbed because they said it made life easier. (231).

The experiences of homeless children, as depicted in “The Winning Side” by Saidi, highlight the harsh realities of survival in environments fraught with violence and exploitation. Tambudzai's resilience in avoiding sexual abuse, in contrast to the other girls who succumb to it, underscores the complex survival strategies children adopt in the face of such trauma. Her ability to resist sexual violence speaks to her strength but also exposes the broader vulnerability of homeless children, particularly girls, who are often forced to navigate a world where their safety is constantly at risk. This stark portrayal emphasises the urgent need for societal intervention to protect vulnerable children from such abuse and to address the root causes of homelessness and violence.

The protagonist, Tichaona, has recently joined the streets after the brutal murdering of his whole family by members of the ruling party ZANU PF as punishment for supporting the opposition in the country. In New Historicism terms, the violence in question can be located in the period following the initiation of the *Third Chimurenga*. Several reports have shown how violent the ZANU PF became at the time, forcing some reporters to conclude that the violence

was sponsored by the state as it fought for its political survival. This is despite the ZANU PF government's hijacking of the land reform programme rhetoric from the opposition party which had been formed in 1999 and had in its infancy won, following the 'NO' vote to the referendum in 2000.

In 2002, the Amani Trust reported that there had been gross human rights abuses by the Mugabe led government in the period preceding the June 2000 Parliamentary Elections. It is not surprising, therefore, that Amani Trust (2002: 4) concludes that:

Zimbabwe has an unenviable history of organised violence and torture over the past three decades. This has been well documented by both human rights organisations and historians, and it is not the intention here to summarise this.

To buttress the above, Sachikonye (2011) concludes that the state had turned on its citizens as 60 years of institutionalised violence in Zimbabwe. As far back as 2003 the United States Institute for Peace (USIP) noted that ZANU-PF for years had relied on the use of violence and coercive tactics to consolidate, and maintain, its power. Founded on this, manifestation of the violence in Zimbabwe has not been spontaneous, but somehow well-planned. Hence, Tichaona's parents in the story, "The Winning Side," die of political violence which has a long history and has been institutionalised (Sachikonye, 2011).

The historical reality and the political culture of ZANU PF are crucial to understanding the context behind what might seem like a sweeping statement regarding why Tichaona had to join the streets. The circumstances in this regard are that childhood is also betrayed by the state whose actions result in the sudden deaths of adults with responsibilities and there is no justice rendered to victims, mainly children, after such incidences.

Apparently, the continued crisis, coupled with corruption at the hands of the ruling party officials, has led to the formation of the opposition party, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). However, the ruling party attempted to thwart the growth of the opposition's support-base by brutalising those who supported it. In the story "Specialisation," the narrator reflects that one of the main problems the so called senior members of ZANU PF parliamentarians was investment of their energies in merely arguing and frustrating the

opposition in parliament and easily dismissing members of the MDC as toddlers,' yet providing no sustainable alternatives to the crisis.

Tichaona narrowly survives when the rest of his family is violently killed by agents of the ruling party. He is forced to watch the horrific rape, and murder of his mother as well as the murder of his father and two siblings. He watches the horrifying scenes from behind the granary where he has managed to hide. He escapes and ends up in the streets of Harare, together with a host of other street children, mothers and fathers. The narrative thus shows how horrifying political violence was in the rural set-ups and in that way justifying Sachikonye's (2011) conclusion that the state had turned violent to its citizens. The historical realities of the *Third Chimurenga* is thus given impetus and told from the perspectives of the children victims. This is a departure from the common standing where critics, political commentators and historians monopolise the documentation of the *Third Chimurenga*.

The story highlights how Tichaona and the other children living on the streets no longer have the protection of the family institution and must navigate growth and a quest for selfhood in an unsafe and unprotected environment. Ironically, for Tichaona, the only family member who can help is his mother's brother, Uncle Charles, who happens to be a big player within the ruling party structures and holds a top post in the ZANU-PF government. Uncle Charles is used to portray ZANU PF as a party that drove its members to be heartless even to their own family members. Uncle Charles could not use his position to protect his family members. The murderers were agents of the government and by extension ZANU PF, which means that Uncle Charles is equally responsible for the killings by association. One learns that political differences and the culture of intolerance was highly responsible for the disintegration of families and a central source to the betrayals of childhood in Zimbabwe. Ironically, the ZANU PF actions, which were disguised as defending the legacies of the *First* and *Second Chimurenga*, acted to the detriment of the entire nation, the youth included, and leaving both the ruling party, government and the nation weak.

The complex dynamics of loyalty and betrayal are central to Tichaona's internal conflict, as his hesitation to approach his uncle reflects the deep scars left by political violence and the breakdown of familial trust. Tichaona recalls that his family was violently murdered by members of the ruling party for supporting the opposition, an experience that fuels his resentment toward the regime. This trauma shapes his uncertainty about seeking help from his

uncle, a member of the very party responsible for his family's destruction. Tichaona's reluctance highlights the profound emotional and ideological rift between him and his uncle, compounded by the fear that his uncle may not accept him, given the political alignment of their families. This tension underscores the devastating impact of political violence on personal relationships, leaving Tichaona torn between a desire for support and the bitter reality of his family's tragic fate at the hands of the state. Eventually, Tichaona summons the courage to visit his uncle in the plush suburb of Borrowdale. The abundant wealth evident in his uncle's life (and by extension, in the lives of all other ruling party officials) is a direct contrast to the gnawing poverty endured by the rest of the people in the country, and by the homeless people such as Tichaona that live on the streets. Tichaona's uncle welcomes him into his home and offers him food, but he makes it clear that he cannot stay in his home. Instead, he offers him money and advises him to go away and start a new life. His uncle also professes his undying support for the ruling party, which he refers to as the winning side, despite the atrocities committed against his sister (Tichaona's mother) and her family. On the other hand, Tichaona's rejection of his uncle's financial offer further illustrates his refusal to be complicit in the moral decay he associates with the ruling party, signalling his unwillingness to reconcile with a system that has caused irreparable harm to his family and values. In this act of defiance, Tichaona not only distances himself from his uncle but also from a political system that has betrayed him, choosing instead to assert his independence and moral integrity, even at the cost of familial ties.

Tichaona goes back to the streets to join his newfound family of fellow street kids. The street kids live a life divorced from the traditional family structures which are expected to offer love and support to vulnerable children as they seek personal growth. The situation is worsened by the growing political, economic and social crises which has seen a proliferation of such childhoods identities isolated from cultural institutions. The conduct portrayed by Uncle Charles demonstrates how greed has distorted the cognitive vision of the country's elite, making them indifferent to the suffering of the masses. When Tichaona's uncle is defending the ruling party people who murdered his sister, Tichaona's mother, he says "I belong to the winning side ... This is my reward Tichaona. He spread his arms around the room: all this is mine" (235). This sentiment profoundly impacts the youths and children, who are acutely aware of the disparity between the lives of the powerful and their own harsh realities. For children like Tichaona, Uncle Charles' actions symbolise a betrayal of the very principles of family and loyalty. His uncle's wealth, amassed through association with a corrupt system, stands in stark

contrast to the poverty and violence Tichaona has endured, deepening his sense of disillusionment and mistrust. The youth characters, witnessing such greed, are forced to confront a world where survival is dictated not by morality but by power and privilege, shaping their worldview and sense of justice. As a result, they grow increasingly alienated from the corrupt elites, rejecting the hollow promises of aid or reconciliation and instead seeking their own path to survival, often through rebellion or self-reliance. The children's anger and resistance to authority reflect the emotional and psychological toll of living in a society where those in power remain blind to their suffering, perpetuating a cycle of distrust and unrest among the younger generation.

5.5 Resistance against Hegemony: Childhoods Marked by Social Protest in “Tables Turned Over”

“Tables Turned Over” by Adrian Ashley describes the experiences related to the effects of the Zimbabwean crisis conditions on children and childhood identities. The story presents children as active political and social actors. The writer centres a boy character as the initiator of the protests that are carried out against the worsening economic conditions. The description of the daily routine of two township women (Ruth and Mai Jira), who wake up at dawn to try and sell goods at the market, together with the routine of all the other people around them, paints a picture of gloom and hopelessness regarding the economic crisis.

Amid a country overwhelmed by corruption, dishonesty, bribery, greed, theft, and a lack of basic services, Ruth critically observes how the residents' survival activities reflect the deep grief and frustration simmering beneath the surface, threatening to erupt into spontaneous protests against the government at any moment. The narrator says:

She sensed – and this feeling was growing each day – a palpable edginess about them, a restless quality (7).

Ruth's observation alludes to a growing sense of unrest among the citizens due to perpetual poverty compounded by the further deteriorating economic situation. There are strong references to the growing uneasiness among the people. The narrator says:

'We are pressed' she heard people say more often. There was no money, no food. And the people in charge were not doing anything about it. (7)

The quotation above is an indication of the people's diminishing expectations for solutions from their government. The people are endlessly searching for hope in the newspaper headlines and unfortunately do not find it. Thus, the ordinary citizens are getting to a point where they could not contain their dismay anymore. This observation is strengthened by Mai Jira's sudden statement that "I hope change is coming" (8). The statement triggers a lot of excitement and questions for Ruth, and they discuss the issue of change for a while. The need for change is at the heart of all the other citizens as well. The country is tethering on the brink of an unspoken cataclysm. The high inflationary conditions that exist are also referred to when the bread delivery van arrives, and the driver announces that the bread price has gone up again. The announcement provides a spark that the people had been waiting for to vent their anger and pain at their deplorable conditions. The protests that follow are an embodiment of the mounting anger and discontentment that had long gripped the entire country and was seeking an outlet.

Of interest to note is the identity of the person who throws the first stone and triggers the protests. The reader is told:

A teenage boy, lanky and unkempt, bent down in a rush of blood to pick up the nearest rock (11)

There is a moment of uncertainty, attributed to:

...the familiar fear that had kept people in line for years now...the hesitation soon wanes and they could never return from that point. (12)

The image of a mere boy leading the massive protest depicts the role of resistant children in the politics of the day and the associated agentic identities they developed. At that particular moment, violence is seen as a significant resource for children to show their discontentment in a background of massive scarcity and economic instability. Eventually, the citizens go on a looting spree, violently taking what they believe is due to them. The story suggests a new crop of childhood identities focused on changing their situation, pointing to youth as key actors in social upheavals. New Historicism emphasises that history is made by those who hold power, but this perspective can be expanded by recognising the capacity for social protest to emerge

from historically marginalised groups, like the youth. The youth's involvement in protests is an active challenge to those conditions, a nuanced reading that broadens New Historicism's traditional focus on adult power structures.

The images of a boy at the forefront of the protests demonstrates the author's acknowledgement of the children's appropriation of violence to define, create and consolidate their selfhood. This is highlighted as an important means to secure resources and claims to power. The ongoing crisis has given birth to emerging childhood identities marked by fearlessness and a readiness to confront the disabling political and economic challenges head on.

5.6 Conclusion

The authors of the selected stories in this chapter revisit the childhood landscape, proffering agency and participation in politics by children and the youth. The chapter proposes that childhood identities, while socially constructed, can also be seen through the lenses of agency, resistance, and confrontation. This reflects a New Historicist approach by introducing children as active participants in social change, not merely as passive products of their historical context. In the face of economic adversity, the youth's involvement in social protest and violence points to their agency within the constraints of their socio-political environment. This aligns with the idea that history not only shapes individuals but that individuals, including children, can influence and alter their historical context through their actions.

The authors disrupt prevailing narratives about marginalised children as mere victims by portraying the resilience and protest nature of the children represented in the selected stories. The stories clarify the agentic nature of childhoods in postcolonial crisis situations when they rise against their debilitating circumstances. Having traced the challenges hindering the smooth negotiation of childhoods in the face of crisis, throughout the study, this last set of stories celebrates the coming of age of a generation that has decided to attempt to change their bleak future by ceasing to be spectators and becoming agents in changing economic and political conditions. Instead, they choose to be active participants in securing a possible better future for themselves.

The spontaneous resistance by the childhood generation in question can be best described as the effects of a protracted disillusionment with the corrupt government that had become inefficient and unreliable in curtailing the crisis. Insinuations of the lack of patience from the ordinary citizens can be read through the remarks and thoughts of some of the protagonists. In "Tables Turned Over," it is hinted that the government was not doing anything about it. This suggests that the youth's patience is running thin, leading to disillusionment, which ultimately results in the youth taking the lead in the protests that erupt across the country. It is evident in the above analysis that the youth have realised that the government takes no action towards redressing the misfortunes of the ordinary citizens who have struggled under the crisis for a long time. This position helps in establishing the conclusion that the contradictions that arise as a result of economic, social and political crisis, have altered and transformed childhood identities. This gives rise to childhoods characterised by social protest.

The violence that permeates the stories in this chapter has been affirmed by Sachikonye (2011) who notes that the history of Zimbabwe has been characterised by episodes of violence. The violence is evidenced by the looting spree that occurs at the market place when residents get agitated by the daily increase in the price of bread in "Tables turned over," In "Dancing with 4life", Mxolisi's run with the police and his subsequent capture speaks of the violent nature of the relationship between the police and public. The brutal murder in which Tichaona's family is murdered in "The winning side" because they support the opposition partly also reiterates Sachikonye's observations above on the patterns of violence, which characterise the postcolonial Zimbabwean history.

The various protest behaviours displayed by the protagonists have also been read in this chapter as consequences of a protracted crisis that has robbed young ones of their childhood. As the child characters approach adulthood, they realise the need to act towards changing their destiny for the better. The protest acts are therefore, symptomatic of the rot that has engulfed the state, mostly as a result of corruption and greed by the politicians of the day. The symbolic act of the "lanky and unkempt boy" picking up the stone, hesitating at first, and then being encouraged by the crowd to throw the second stone reflects the decision of the underprivileged, marginalised, and previously voiceless groups to confront state structures that have failed to address the suffering of the people for an extended period.

Therefore, the demands of the children and youth characters, along with their resistant and confrontational traits, are undoubtedly fundamental and rooted in their everyday survival. Ndlala is perpetually hungry, Mxolisi is educated with no prospect of employment and the boy who threw the first stone that triggered mass protests is living in hopeless times among people who are tired of excruciating poverty. The protests that eventually occur are “cognitive liberation” (Kurzman, 1996:154). He explains them as a situation where an oppressed people break out of pessimistic and quiescent patterns of thought and do something about their situation. The chapter not only fits within New Historicism's theoretical framework but expands it by introducing the roles of agency, resistance, and experiences of repression in shaping identities, particularly childhood identities, within a postcolonial context. It highlights how identities are socially constructed and influenced by material conditions, political environments, and historical legacies, illustrating the deep interconnections between history, identity, and social conflict. Through this, the chapter contributes to a broader understanding of how New Historicism can be applied to analyse the role of youth in socio-political transformations and struggles.

Chapter 6: Conclusion: Crisis-bred vulnerable childhoods

Throughout this thesis, I examined the representations and reconfigurations of childhood identities in selected short stories from Zimbabwe set during the period commonly known as the Third Chimurenga period and post-2000 era. I showed how recent discourses of Zimbabwe revolve around the daily struggles for survival during a period of economic collapse, hence, literature emerging out of the crisis periods is characterised by writers reflecting on the rural and urban lives of Zimbabweans. They also dwell on the suffering of children because of the situational constraints they encounter in forging their identities. The selected stories analysed in this study use the trope of childhood to frame a discourse on childhood experiences and identity re(construction) amidst crisis. I also demonstrated how a study of childhood identities can reveal the political, economic and social realities from the way childhoods are represented in those works. I did so by showing how the deteriorating economic and political climate affects the youth, noting their scuppered hopes for the future. This reflects the New Historicist focus on the impact of material conditions on individuals' sense of self. Just as New Historicists emphasise how historical forces and socio-economic contexts shape the behaviour and thoughts of people, the thesis suggests that childhood identities are not intrinsic or fixed but rather moulded by the prevailing economic and political conditions. This ties into the idea that identities are socially constructed and constantly (re)negotiated within particular historical contexts. In other words, I traced shifts in childhood representations during the era of land redistribution in Zimbabwe, amidst discourses of identity, history and the nation.

The thesis opens with an interrogation of childhood identities emanating from the Zimbabwean crisis. The driving forces influencing the nature of representations of childhood identities are complex and tease the lack of an enabling environment which contributes to the suffering childhood identities in fictional narratives of the *Third Chimurenga*. Vulnerable childhood identities result from an unstable and dystopic society where a positive childhood is constrained by the prevailing political, social and economic crisis.

As the thesis demonstrates, there are far-reaching factors that contribute to the formation of different childhood identities. The children reacted and transformed in response to the crisis that gripped the nation. Some of the determining factors include debilitating economic conditions, leading to excessive lack of financial and material resources in families. This in turn led to the trampling of children's rights.

The New Historicism theory, with its emphasis on the idea that literary works should be interpreted and studied within the context of both the history of the author and the history of the critic, enabled me to examine the stories for the way they offer a lucid understanding of the emerging childhood identities in the period under consideration. The thesis began with an analysis of literary works functioning as an entry point into the Land Reform Programme. This nadir marked the beginning of the *Third Chimurenga* era and the resultant social, political and economic crisis, as a contested political and cultural space where childhood identities are reconfigured. I discussed how childhoods were affected by the prevailing conditions, including the loss of an opportunity to get an education by children depicted in “The Trek.” The thesis then traced the heightened suffering in the ensuing years after the onset of the Land Reform Programme, culminating in what I dubbed protest childhood identities in Chapter 5 when the youth exercised their agency and protest against the debilitating circumstances they were born in and continue to grow up. They do so by leading the demonstrations against the continued rise in the cost of living.

It is vital to note that a New Historicist perspective considers literature from a wider historical context and examines how the work reflects the writer's times. As such, analysing the stories through the New Historicism lenses enabled me to examine notions of childhood as a creation of society and how a study of childhood identities can reveal the political, economic and social realities from the way childhoods are represented in those works. In this case, the historical context reveals the situational constraints that hinder children from exercising their agency. For instance, in the short story “Mainini Grace’s promise,” an analysis of Sarai’s circumstances exhibits the fluidity and precarity of childhood in the face of HIV/AIDS (over and above the economic and social crisis). Even though Sarai is eager to go back to school and knows her potential to succeed if she gets an opportunity at education, she is caught up in a caregiving role to members of her family who are afflicted and are succumbing to HIV/AIDS.

Throughout my study, I referred to the body of scholarly works which argues against stereotyping children as victims of social circumstances. Decades of research into the agentic nature of children accepts the position that children are capable of independent thoughts and actions, helping them to survive challenging situations. My analysis of the selected texts sought to show that insistence on agency alone has the potential to mask the constraints that hinder children from fully exercising their agency. For instance, agency may not be the best analytical tool to describe what nine-year-old Fungai finds herself in the story “Tomorrow is Not Another Day.” Fungai sleeps with older men to get food for her seven-year older brother and herself.

This type of agency creates more challenges for the child being abused. Hence, in my study, I identified the constraints on choices available to children in conditions of violence, poverty and abuse fuelled by the post-2000 crisis in Zimbabwe.

Furthermore, and in concurrence with the concept of agency, I acknowledged that representations of childhoods in the selected literature depict child characters who exhibit endurance, resilience, courage and fearlessness in their pursuit of selfhood in crisis situations. These child characters include Sarai depicted in “Mainini Grace’s promise,” who singlehandedly cares for her terminally ill family members. The child characters in Chapter 5 also stand up against their crippling situation, which robs them of opportunities in life. Characters such as the teenage boy in “Tables turned over,” who threw the first stone that led to protests, clearly take matters into their own hands to change their bleak future for the better. In all these observations, I strike a balance between agency and situational constraints, hence, I acknowledged the challenges which increase the suffering of children as imagined in the Zimbabwean crisis situation.

My analysis of representations of childhood identities in the Zimbabwean crisis confirms that children bore the brunt of the ongoing social, economic and political crisis. There is an undeniable link between economic crisis and stifled childhood development, whereby evidence shows that the young members of families are critically affected. The Zimbabwe economic crises amplifies the nation grappling with a crushing national food crisis that affected vulnerable children and families. Doubt’s family in “Pay Day Hell” by Mlalazi and Mr. Chimbadzo’s family in “These are the Days of Our Lives” by Chinhandu depict child characters experiencing a food poverty crisis, mirroring the broader national crisis. Positive policy interventions could alleviate the adverse effects of this crisis on children.

In this study, I also placed children in the context of the African family, community and the wider nation. The social and cultural capital that a child has includes supportive people and relationships. Yet, a reading of the selected stories illustrates that the social and cultural capital element is often missing in the crisis fracturing childhood identities. The social workers who visit Fungai and Masimba in “Not Another Day” by Julius Chingono give various excuses why such deserving orphans have not received help from the government. These include lack of fuel and a reluctance to assist victims in a constituency won by an opposition party candidate. The analysis of such a fictional scenario mirrors the everyday lives of orphans in child-headed homes in Zimbabwe, exposing the bleak reality. Such writings influence political outcomes

and decisions that cultivate positive childhood identities. My observations of childhood identities marred with negativity, suffering and lack of opportunity to exercise agency clarify to policy makers the need to put develop long term policy and structural changes assuring the welfare of children. In other words, this study brings child welfare to the centre of debates surrounding the Zimbabwean crisis, where relevant stakeholders are indicted to safeguard children's rights in crisis situations.

The international support and awareness of the needs of the child generates prospects of public expectations and understanding of childhood as a development index of the nation. Brizee and Tompkins (2011) state that in most countries, legal framework and its espousal of the right of the child provides legislative protection for the street child, the abused child, the sexually abused child, the labouring child, the girl child, the child without access to education, the disabled child, the delinquent child, the child with no legal guardian. However, representations of crisis childhood identities evident in this study clarify the lack of a positive childhood, with its lack of concomitant privileges (education, nurturing, home and other life changes). Sarai and Ndlala's situation in the stories "Mainini Grace's Promise" and "Pay Day Hell" prompts the reader to revisit the entrapment of young people. Investment in the wellbeing of children averts the deplorable children's conditions represented in the selected literature. The mature Ndlala in "Eeish!" expresses his need to extricate himself out of his current deplorable situation but has no means, especially having received no formal education all his life. Likewise, Sarai's preoccupation with going back to school and her subsequent murdering of her aunt shows the extent to which crises haunt marginalised children. These issues become policy related in redressing the challenges faced by children in the Zimbabwean social, political and economic crisis circumstances and other similar postcolonial African states.

The study noted that there has not been sustained government commitment to children nor a significant improvement in their well-being. There is widespread family poverty stemming from poor health and education, inadequate housing, unemployment and underdevelopment. All the above become constellations for the social exclusion of children living in disadvantaged families. The recurring representation of lack of access to education in the stories studied drives the message that the rights of a child to learn must be observed. Through such critical engagements, I complement the work of other stakeholders working in child development to assess the impact of the Zimbabwean crisis on childhood identities.

The study also argues, based on observations made from an analysis of the selected stories and the various debates surrounding childhoods emerging from the Zimbabwean crisis, that the lived experiences of children must be taken seriously by parents, caregivers and governments. However, the crisis severely impacted families' livelihoods, making it increasingly difficult for families and by extension, society and the nation to meet the children's most basic needs. Consequently, the childhoods depicted in the selected fictional works are defined by poverty, homelessness, neglect, hunger and domestic abuse, all without support from adults. The adults should be offer support and guidance to children and youth as they navigate their childhood years. More must be done to protect the rights, future, safety and health of children in Zimbabwe for the (re)construction of positive childhood identities.

One of the contributions from this study is that the current imagined childhoods fall short of the ideal. A shortage of food and inadequate education systems are common and yet there are no critical protective measures to address these vulnerabilities. Therefore, national governments must set aside funding to support children with long term development, cushion children during crisis periods, and enable the children to overcome hardships.

The Zimbabwean crisis experiences continue to find representation in fictional works, whose authors draw from the experiences of those who live in the crisis. The authors of the selected stories craft the crisis childhood experiences into coherent narratives that interrogate the ruling elite in crisis-filled postcolonial Zimbabwe. The effects of the crisis on children and childhoods have remained a subject fit for sustained scholarly review given its implications on the larger national political, social and economic discourses. From my engagements with various childhood notions in the previous chapters, I conclude that childhood relies on different social factors and therefore, it is indeed socially constructed. The way the child characters navigate their sense of self is deeply influenced by the lack of protection from the harsh realities of the crisis. As a result, these children struggle to build self-esteem, which ultimately hinders their ability to cope with challenges in the future.

The constant reference to deteriorating economic conditions and the postcolonial realities that leave youths jobless and hopeless points to a historical and socio-political backdrop that directly influences the characters' identities. New Historicism advocates that literature cannot be separated from the socio-historical environment that produces it. In this case, the characters' emerging childhood identities are shaped by the postcolonial struggles and economic crises that impact their lives. The youth's disillusionment and sense of agency emerge as a response

to these oppressive historical forces. New Historicism is concerned with how individuals and groups contest their circumstances through agency, and this is evident in the analysis of childhood identity provided throughout this study. The youth's recognition that they have little hope for a better future leads them to engage in social protest and violence. Their identities, then, are constructed through resistance to the systems of power that marginalise them.

In this thesis, I conclude by urging all relevant stakeholders to develop and implement policies that enhance sustainable living conditions for children. This should be an area of focus for future research, tracing the recommendations proffered in this thesis. By extension, the need for solutions to the challenges bedeviling children in crisis-ridden Zimbabwe as imagined in literature, is set to continue drawing scholarly attention on the impact of socio-economic circumstances on imagined childhood identities. Therefore, pursuant to the observations made in this thesis, I suggest that future research could analyse representations of governance systems and how they impact on childhoods, research that appeals to the novel study of literature, children and the law. This way, literary studies challenges existing contexts of the law and governance.

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