INTRODUCTION TO STUDY

This study seeks to investigate short stories written after the official endings of the hostilities caused by apartheid and colonialism, but before the turn of the twenty-first century, in South Africa and Zimbabwe respectively. This periodization (Attwell, 2005: 57) or ‘boxing-up’ is but a useful intellectual packaging necessary for me to determine where I am going to begin and end. However, it is easier said than done. Determining an epoch is in some sense arbitrary, because there can be continuities from periods before (and possibly those ahead), as this study will reveal. Almost all of the selected stories were written between these two, but very distinct and important epochs: after independence and before the year 2000. This gives South African writers a span of seven years and the Zimbabwean writers close to twenty years. Granted, this is an uneven number of years, but it is not the number of years that is important, rather it is how the writers capture contemporary reality. In South Africa the history of apartheid, of resistance to apartheid and the liberation of South Africa have all created that ‘life-giving drop - sweat, tear, semen, saliva’ that Nadine Gordimer, a prolific South African writer, believed would ‘spread an intensity on the page’ (cited in Malan, 1994, x). Simply put, South Africa has had a more aggressive and extensive history of European contact with two antagonistic European invaders, plus apartheid, whilst Zimbabwe had a shorter encounter with its colonizer. Therefore, the particular human rights violations in South Africa’s past make it a worthy country to investigate, in spite of the few years under investigation. According to Gordimer, “Before we look forward into the twenty-first century, we have the right to access what we have come through” (cited in Malan, vii). This statement alone offers enough rationale for an investigation of this kind.

The selected stories lend themselves well to an investigation of what writers from South Africa and Zimbabwe have been writing about their contemporary societies. More than that, the two epochs in these two countries offer writers a warehouse of experiences which they can portray in their writings. Even though most of the stories were written post-independence, many of them are set before independence, which allows a glimpse back into the past. The time under scrutiny engages a great deal with upheavals in society as one epoch closes and another opens; for example, the euphoria of independence begins to dissipate and the harsh realities of contemporary society are foregrounded as the countries spiral towards the twenty-first century.
The important question here is whether the journey towards the new millennium will sustain hope or end in disillusionment. Across a spectrum between hope and disillusionment are ensconced the many and varied struggles that people experience after independence.

In the process of navigating or directing hope after independence, the people are sometimes left bereft as disenchantment with politics sets in, thus leaving people to search instead for hope in their ordinary lives involving marriage, birth and friendship, which are also fraught with conflict, hate and betrayal, therefore, making hope uncertain and frightening. John Halloway, a professor in sociology, says that hope means a present that is open, filled with many possibilities, whilst disillusionment blots out possibilities of the future and locks people into an absolute present, which sets them on the highway that leads towards the destruction of humanity (2002: 6). It is possible to see hope as the rejection of disillusionment; however, to reject disillusionment is not to ignore the bitterness of history.

The dismantling of colonialism and apartheid seems to have left people in a problematic and contradictory space of ambivalence: uncertain whether momentarily to re-invent themselves or to let themselves be assimilated within the establishment; whether wholeheartedly to embrace the new dispensation or to distrust it. Should people celebrate joyfully or indulge in a bit of healthy skepticism? Should the unified and uniform identities be erased in favor of diversity and difference? People find themselves caught wanting to help in buttressing the new political and economic structures and wanting to overhaul them totally; to reform or revolutionize; to be loyal or disloyal; to be pessimistic or optimistic. Did they prefer to opt out of the swirl of change? More to the point of the question, could they? It is my hope that this study will answer some of these hard and important questions.

The histories of apartheid and colonialism have elsewhere been documented extensively in texts and museums across the world by a wide spectrum of writers from many fields. Hence, a lengthy discussion of these two historic phenomena is not necessary here. However, of importance to this study are the subtle similarities and glaring differences between them, which ultimately influence the writing produced in each of these countries.
Apartheid and colonialism in their overt forms denied human rights to human beings whom they subdued by violence and kept by force in a state of misery and ignorance, which Frantz Fanon (1969), an important African political theorist, following Karl Marx (1848) rightly called a ‘subhuman condition’ (12). Albert Memmi, the Tunisian anti-colonial revolutionary and intellectual, observes that in a stubborn effort to dehumanize the colonized, the colonizer was preoccupied with making the colonized undergo urgent and irreversible changes. In essence, one after another, all the qualities, attributes, values and beliefs which defined man, nationhood and society in respect of the colonized crumbled away, leaving colonized individuals (2003: 83).

Colonialism for the Zimbabweans meant a definite power relationship between Europe and Africa, at a particular moment in history. It is a relationship of power at economic, political and cultural levels. So to discuss colonialism in Zimbabwe is to describe what Walter Rodney, a prominent historian and political figure, has written clearly about in *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (1982). He writes that colonialism was a venture undertaken by the European powers to enhance their economic, social and political development as well as to extend their empires. It was a system of exploitation and relocation of profits to the mother country, where the colonizers looted and plundered the Zimbabwean resources and economy (mainly land) without restraint (162). This, however, is not solely a Zimbabwean phenomenon, as other African countries experienced this as well.

On the other hand, apartheid in South Africa developed a more systematic negation of life for those classified as black or colored. According to South African scholars Willem Campschreur and Joost Divendal, with the enactment of apartheid laws in 1948, racial discrimination was institutionalized. Apartheid was the inculcation of fear in both blacks and whites about each other. The laws of apartheid were a conscious act by the white regime to ensure that blacks were subordinated to whites; this was achieved through a systematic despoiling of everything human for blacks and the legalizing of the ownership of the land and economic means by white settlers through violence (1989: 13-15). There was an “us” and “them”, say the critics, Paul Landou and Deborah Kaspin; each pronoun stood on either side, creating a permanent divide (2002: 6). In 1950, the Population Registration Act required that all South Africans be racially classified into several categories: white, black (African), or coloured (of mixed decent) and Indian.
Classification into these categories was based on appearance, social acceptance and descent. Race laws touched every aspect of life. Apartheid was definitely more than just a master-servant relationship.

Nevertheless, there are similarities in the experiences ascribed to characters living in the two countries. These exist because writers share similar experiences across the borders and a geographical proximity. South African and Zimbabwean short stories reveal how the inhabitants of these countries have responded to and experienced the political transitions from white minority rule to democracy. Other than sharing a border, both countries have histories of race-based colonial land dispossession, which led to settler colonies dominated by white commercial farmers and rural underdevelopment and impoverishment of black Africans. Therefore, both are former colonized states, now independent but underdeveloped. Not only do these countries share a history of colonialism, but the colonization of Zimbabwe and South Africa is unusual in that the colonizers settled in these countries and attached themselves to land and property and were reluctant to leave, which prolonged colonial occupation (Goebel, 2006: 209). When compared to other former African colonized states, such as Tanzania or the Republic of Congo, though South Africa and Zimbabwe are unusually developed; both countries had relatively large settler populations who identified with the colony rather than the metropolis and they had manufacturing as well as extractive and agricultural industries. Consequently, when colonial rule ended, both countries had to accommodate the former colonizers so as to negotiate an official end of tensions between the major warring sides - black and white. Hence, there are many comparable conditions portrayed in short stories from both countries, as well as contrasts, that this study will explore.

One also needs to consider the differences between Zimbabwe and South Africa, in terms of the type of colonialism, the attainment of independence, the length of time after independence (portrayed in the short stories), and the different political, economic, social and psychological, and perhaps environmental experiences in the countries. These offer striking points of comparison and contrast as well, apparent in the selection of short stories to be analyzed. The difference between apartheid and colonialism suggests the major differences between South African and Zimbabwean writing. Actually, the historical and political backgrounds of each of
these countries play an integral part in the analysis of the stories. They not only assist in the interpretation of the stories themselves, but help the reader to focus on thematic concerns raised by the writers and reveal links between hope and disillusionment in each of the country’s histories.

I have decided to use a method of structuring the analysis of stories for each of these countries so as to allow for a well-informed comparison. A variety of approaches could be applied in the analyses of these stories. However, the one chosen will have to accommodate the similarities and differences mentioned above, including a great deal of political, economic, social, psychological and cultural, perhaps even environmental, information.

A socio-historical perspective and a postcolonial reading offer the fullest insight toward an understanding of these complex issues. A socio-historical perspective provides an understanding of the times when these stories were written, thereby giving a wide canvas for description, interpretation and evaluation of the stories. Vimbai Chivaura, an author and English lecturer at the University of Zimbabwe, says that literature is a product of history, thus a good piece of art should reflect and also shape the history that has produced it (cited in Spencer 1998: 87). As a result, I will attempt to structure the socio-historical approach in a chronological order. Adopting a chronological sequence is also an intellectual endeavor, which will prove to be a bit messy and thorny during the analysis of stories. But the underlying assumption for the reader is to see this study as a narrative on its own informed by the fundamental grand narrative of each country’s history.

A postcolonial reading will complement this approach because it is argued by scholars such as Leela Gandhi that the unbroken term ‘postcolonialism’ is more sensitive to the continuing history of colonial influence: colonialism and neocolonialism (1998: 3). Officially colonialism has ended, but the word ‘postcolonial’ defiantly does not mean ‘after colonialism’ because that would imply an end to the process of imperialism, as some of these stories show. It is suggested by some critics, such as David Atwell, a Professor in the English Department at the University of York, that postcolonial theory captures contemporary reality well because it is neither bound to nor before or after one epoch. Its fluid or shifting nature allows it to move easily from pre- to
post-independence without difficulty and even further into the present (2005: 55-59). It is my hope, therefore, that a combination of a postcolonial reading and socio-historical approach will work well for this comparative analysis.

Although independence represented a clean break from colonialism, the colonial legacy has remained in evidence ever since. In South Africa and Zimbabwe many of the Europeans did not pack their bags at all, but remained and continued to enjoy possession of much of the best land and other economic prerogatives. The international economic structures established in colonial times continued to determine much of the relationships of wealth and power in the newly ‘independent’ states. There were even continuities in respect of the international structures controlling what takes place in Africa, continuing colonial relationships between the colonizer and the colonized. These stories indicate the patterns of human optimism and pessimism among people living under varying kinds of political systems and at various stages of social and economic development in post-independent South Africa and Zimbabwe. A conceptual framework to discuss the issues of hope and disillusionment is presented in Chapter One.

These depictions of hope and disillusionment are evident in short stories, but one might ask, why short stories? Michael Gardiner, a prominent academic writer, described the short story as “something infinite that can be held in a human hand and something eternal that can be read in less than sixty minutes” (cited in Van Wyk, 2003: 9). Following Gardiner, I have realized that the short story is potentially a bright, lively and productive sample of writing after independence. Short stories can be used to investigate contemporary society, although academics in Zimbabwe, and especially South Africa, such as the Association of University English Teachers of South Africa (AUETSA), tend to pay insufficient attention to them. Short stories have been neglected as a genre depicting reality, as compared to other genres such as the novel and novella, yet most short stories are seen to be quite critical of contemporary reality, as this study shows.

Why short stories in particular? Irene Staunton, the editor of Writing Still: New Stories from Zimbabwe (2003) and Michael Chapman, a scholar from South Africa, agree that the short story appears to be more accessible to a reading audience than the novel. This is why Staunton compiled her anthology. The stories also show a range and quality of writing in Zimbabwe at the
turn of the century, and a reflection of the years since independence in 1980 (xv). Chapman suggests that the imaginative climate in South Africa after apartheid is conducive to short stories as opposed to novels. Additionally, perhaps the shorter form reflects the intense, brief narratives told before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). Chapman goes on to say that unlike large, unified plots the short story permits smaller, various, often unconventional images. These find consonance in a country in the complexity of its transition from a colonial to a postcolonial era (1996: 228), because short stories can deal directly and quickly with issues that this study will explore.

The following chapters offer close readings of stories from four anthologies. The primary texts to be analyzed will be short story anthologies from South Africa, namely: At the Rendezvous of Victory and Other Stories (1999) edited by Andries Oliphant and Identities: South African Short Stories (2002) edited by Leon de Kock and Peter Southey. Two short story anthologies from Zimbabwe are used: No More Plastic Balls and Other Stories (2000) compiled by Clement Chihota and Robert Muponde; and Writing Still, edited by Irene Staunton. All that has happened in these two countries before and after independence is valuable to help readers see how the writers depict and capture the contemporary reality of their countries.

I study selected stories from South Africa in Chapter Two and from Zimbabwe in Chapter Three, trying to focus on a chronological series of events depicted in the selected stories in order to see the unfolding history of the societies under investigation. These two chapters search out in the selected short stories how glimmerings and sprinklings of hope (and shadows of disillusionment) are dramatized. A serial comparison will take place during the analyses in these two chapters, but Chapter Four will offer a detailed conclusive comparison. The conclusion will discuss the implications of the study for South African and Zimbabwean contemporary reality and for the current nature and direction of Southern African fiction. But first, Chapter One concentrates on my underlying conceptual framework.
CHAPTER ONE

CONCEPTUALIZING HOPE AND DISILLUSIONMENT

This chapter conceptualizes the issues of hope and disillusionment in the South African and Zimbabwean socio-historical contexts. It is necessary to embark on a brief historical and political background of these two countries. Hope and disillusionment can be traced in the peoples’ encounters with their history of apartheid and colonialism. Postcolonial theories as literary and critical approaches examine many issues for societies that have undergone colonialism and attained liberation from their former colonizers: for instance, nationalism, the question of identity, community, gender and modernity. It also looks at the progress of these countries years after they have attained their independence, focusing on the inheritance the newly independent countries were bequeathed (Young, 2001: 5). Therefore, the following analysis will investigate the socio-historical factors which influence the type of writing being produced.

Indeed, writers of all kinds, fiction and non-fiction, have been struggling to come to grips with the changes in different contemporary societies and the ‘smooth’ transition to democracy throughout most of Africa. Hence, it is imperative to investigate some non-fiction and fiction writings in order to take note of the kind of socio-historical factors they are representing. The non-fiction writers will provide relevant commentaries on the political, economic and historical accounts of these countries with actual dates. These dates help to structure the analysis of stories in a chronological order of the events they depict. This chronological order leads to conclusions about the depictions of contemporary society, indicating how in each country hope and disillusionment intermingle at the turn of the twenty-first century. It is also important to look at fiction writers because they depict the people involved in the political, economic and historical events. Ordinary people are the focus of this study because they are the ones who experience hope and disillusionment. Not only that, but some writers of fiction are also writers of non-fiction, for example, Chinua Achebe with his Things Fall Apart (1992) and Hopes and Impediments (1988) and also Ngugi wa Thiong’o with his A Grain of Wheat (1967) and Decolonising the Mind (1986), respectively. But before looking at the non-fiction and fiction
writings, this chapter will begin with a brief historical and political background of the two countries.

The arrival of English settlers in the 1820s marks the beginnings of a true culture of literacy in Southern Africa, with increased publishing in English, Afrikaans, and, in time, mostly thanks to missionaries, first isiXhosa and then other major African languages. Until the arrival of the white man, most of the South African and Zimbabwean people could not read nor write. Rino Zhuwarara, former chairman in the English Department at the University of Zimbabwe, notes that it was largely an agrarian society whose cohesion and continuity stemmed from the pervasive influence of an oral tradition within which history and literature found expression. Different clans and tribes lived in close proximity with each other; some tended to dominate others, but their presence did not alter fundamentally the complexity of the others’ culture. Both South Africa and Zimbabwe had Bantu-speaking groups whose sensibilities and ethos were sustained by a deeply cherished tradition of story telling. These groups possessed vast reservoirs of traditional myths and legends, folktales, fables, proverbs, ideophone s and praise poetry which sang about the beauty of their world and the valour of their heroes. They had their own stories summarizing the history and movements of their ancestors (2001: 10). Johnny Masilela’s story ‘The Day the Rain Clouds Returned’ (see Chapter Two) depicts this pre-colonial society. (Though it is set in South Africa, the culture it depicts would be similar to those found in pre-colonial Zimbabwe.)

Ndabaningi Sithole, a teacher, clergyman and politician who played a critical role in the early nationalist movement in Zimbabwe, describes these pre-literate South African and Zimbabwean societies as having vast internal education systems sustained by a network of skillful story tellers, orators and tribal poets who ensured that the ways and memories of the tribes were passed on to subsequent generations (cited in Zhuwarara: 12). Thus when the settlers came and occupied territories amongst the tribes, the people at first were not unduly alarmed because their traditions and customs were deeply rooted in their societies (see Masilela’s story in Chapter Two).

Kizito Muchemwa, author and writer, observes that in general, African fiction is responsive to and reflective of African history. There are parallels which underscore the strong relationship between history and fiction. This tie is both a South African and Zimbabwean phenomenon; it
has existed in the history and literature of other African societies in which oral culture was an integral part of the history and religion of the people. The historical experience sheds light on the tone, form and thematic preoccupations of their fiction (2001: 111). The stories from South Africa and Zimbabwe reveal this connection.

Muchemwa goes on to say that when the white ‘visitors’ began passing laws and levying taxes and driving the indigenous peoples off their lands and later forcing them to work on farms and in mines, it dawned on the Africans that the settlers had come to stay. It became clear that the interests of the settlers and the indigenous people were in fundamental conflict. In both countries people fought for their liberation in fierce battles. Unfortunately the bows and arrows, assegais and ancient Portuguese guns were no match for the British maxim gun (112). The Africans repeatedly lost, and the consequences of that loss were to haunt the imagination of generations from the 1820s up to 1980 in Zimbabwe and 1994 in South Africa. After the defeat of the African forces, the white settlers went on to implement some of the harshest measures that could be imposed on a subject people.

The colonial era - the nineteenth and twentieth centuries - was an abrupt and brutal entry into the so-called ‘civilization’ inflicted on the South Africans and Zimbabweans, and many other Africans across the continent. Everything about the colonized - his complexion, physical appearance, intellectual capabilities, abilities and physical and spiritual values - was attacked, criticized destructively, weighed and discarded as amounting to nothing. Albert Memmi, the Tunisian anti-colonial revolutionary intellectual, queries how the colonized could avoid reacting (positively or negatively) to this portrait when constantly confronted with this image of himself, set forth and imposed in all institutions and every human contact. The colonized ended up recognizing such an image or portrait as one would a detested nickname, which has become familiar and loathsome (2003: 87).

It is a moot point whether the encounter with the South African colonizer was really worse than that with the Rhodesian colonizer, but considering that in South Africa it culminated in the unique racial oppression of apartheid and lasted several centuries, it became national policy with devastating consequences. In both countries the relationship between colonizers and colonized
was neither amicable nor desirable. The only choice for the African was to wish to be as white as possible (see Collin Jiggs Smuts’s story ‘The Divine One’ in Chapter Two) or to react by resisting it. There are numerous stories that depict different forms of resistance against the colonizers. They portray the horrors of the liberation wars of Zimbabwe and the protracted struggles in South Africa. Some post-apartheid South African writers (Gordimer) and post-independence Zimbabwean writers (Freedom Nyamubaya) tell of these earlier struggles. (See the selection of stories analyzed in Chapters Two and Three, respectively.)

The hope of being white could not be realized then, during the colonial era, or now. A great many characters in African fiction depict this hopeless endeavor to acquire the qualities equated to whiteness. For example, there are characters such as Lakunle, in Wole Soyinka’s *The Lion and the Jewel* (1963), and Ocol in Okot P’Bitek’s *Song of Lawino and Song of Ocol* (1966), who mimic the Europeans in dress and manners. However, the scales were gradually falling from the eyes of the Africans, increasingly after they went to fight together with the whites during the Second World War. This resulted in Africans organizing themselves into more purposeful anti-colonial organizations to fight for their own liberation.

This awareness brought to a head the fiercest and successful liberation struggles in Africa, creating a domino effect which ended colonial rule across the continent. The colonized realized that the only real hope left was to fight for liberation from oppression and exploitation from the colonizers, and not to wish futilely to be white. Hope for the Zimbabweans came in the form of armed struggles, known as the First and Second Chimurenga Wars, and for the South Africans protracted liberation struggles and mass action movements ultimately resulted in the negotiations that led to independence through democratic elections. But unfortunately, these wars did not guarantee that the colonized would stop pursuing the hope of being white. Today, one needs only to remember the news story of Happy Sindane, which hit the headlines in South Africa.¹ He is a black boy who claimed to be a white child abducted by a maid from his family home and made into a slave. There is also Michael Jackson’s futile attempt to change his skin pigmentation. Deep ambivalence about one’s identity and even self-hatred figure in many stories discussed below.
During the struggles for liberation that led to the independence of many African countries, the general democratic goal was often expressed through the concept of ‘peoples’ power’. Lars Rudebeck, in his study of liberation movements in Mozambique and Guinea, observed that in ideology and theoretical documents of liberation movements and socialist oriented regimes in the Third World the concept of peoples’ power was genetically rooted in socialist theory. The Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU), African National Congress (ANC), Front for the Liberation of Mozambique (FRELIMO) and African Party for the Independence of Guinea (PAIGC), defined it as an integral means and a necessary condition of such development. Peoples’ power meant power exercised in close connection with working people and legitimized by the fact that it met concrete and fundamental interests of the people as experienced by them (cited in Galli, 1992: 37). Elements of such peoples’ power did develop in practice during the independence struggle as necessary for unification against the colonial enemy. (Writers such as Gordimer, Nyamubaya and Derek Huggins explore this concept, as shown in the following chapters.)

In the history of South Africa and Zimbabwe, disillusionment and despair date back to the origins of black-white confrontation. As early as when the Dutch anchored their ships on the coast of South Africa and when the first Europeans began to settle and peg land for themselves in Rhodesia, it became abundantly clear to the Africans that trade was not all that ‘the men with no knees’ (because of the illusion of their long trousers) sought. From the earliest beginnings in history and in fiction, the European looms large as the chief architect and player in this tragic drama.

It is also from looking back at these origins that many postcolonial theorists, such as Gandhi, argue that the postcolonial condition is inaugurated with the onset rather than the end of colonial occupation (3). The prefix ‘post’ makes sense as ‘after’ because of its literal meaning ‘behind’, such that upon the first reading of the term ‘postcolonial’ one immediately assumes ‘after independence’, the term implying that colonialism has ended (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 1998: 68). Even though the word’s immediate associations are with the end of colonization and after independence, ‘postcolonial’ does not mean ‘after colonialism’. Postcolonialism recounts the whole history of colonialism from the beginning to long after the official endings of
colonization marked by independence. This ‘elasticity’ of the theory makes it useful for this study, because many of these stories, though written after independence, depict events that happened before. These events made a great impact on the peoples’ lives long after independence.

In spite of the scars left by colonialism and apartheid, Zimbabweans and South Africans were uplifted by hope through winning independence. In the newly liberated countries, there was a state of euphoria amongst the people. This was epitomized by the kind of celebration that took place at Rufaro Stadium in Harare and elsewhere in Zimbabwe on 18 April 1980. The joy and jubilation on the streets of Cape Town, Johannesburg, and elsewhere in South Africa on the 27th of April 1994 were depicted in various works celebrating freedom. Most of these came in the form of speeches, poems and songs delivered, recited and sung during and soon after independence. The moment, as President Robert Gabriel Mugabe of Zimbabwe put it, “demanded a spirit of magnanimity rather than that of arrogance, a spirit of national unity rather than that of division, a spirit of reconciliation rather than of vindictiveness and retribution” (cited in De Waal, 1990: 46). This spirit is the attitude that Victor (in Lawrence Bransby’s story ‘A Reflection of Self’, cf. Chapter Two), tries to emulate on the first Election Day in South Africa.

Reading these short stories from South Africa and Zimbabwe raises critical questions. What has happened in these two countries since independence? In the case of Zimbabwe, according to Victor De Waal, a British Anglican priest who knew the story of Rhodesia rather intimately, the roots of nationalist dilemma may be tracked back to the Lancaster House Agreement of 1979 and to the policy of national reconciliation. This agreement could be regarded as an anti-climax in the conflict between the two contending forces, the white settler regime and African nationalists. By reserving twenty parliamentary seats and guaranteeing the security of private property for the white settler bourgeois, the agreement ensured the perpetuation of colonial structures in independent Zimbabwe. The policy of reconciliation was contrary to the radical nationalist spirit that had guided the armed struggle right up to the time of the Lancaster House Agreement. In fact the policy seemed to be reminiscent of the philosophy of colonial liberalism, by encouraging the creation of racial partnership between the colonial master and African moderates (123-124). This
co-opted partnership is evident in Gordimer’s story ‘At the Rendezvous of Victory’ (see Chapter Two).

In a case study of Zimbabwe, Susanna Smith, a recognized charity worker, notes that in 1980 when the long struggle for majority rule and independence was over, the poor of Zimbabwe were left with a legacy of unequal access to land, employment and basic services such as health, education and agriculture support. Zimbabwe also inherited an economy heavily dependent on foreign investment, particularly South African and British, and on the capital and skills of the settler community (1990: 213-214).

Smith goes on to observe that a curious feature of post-independent Zimbabwe has been the lack of significant land reform. For decades the inequitable nature of the land distribution has been widely recognized. In an unusual meeting of equals Alexander Kanengoni in his story ‘The Ugly Reflection in the Mirror’ in Writing Still pits white landowner against one of the newly-landed war veterans. During the nationalist struggles of the 1960s and the guerilla war of the 1970s, both main political parties, ZANU and Zimbabwe African Peoples Union (ZAPU), committed themselves to radical land reform on achieving political power. They attracted massive support from rural peasants because of this promise. So there was a high expectation of rapid change in 1980. Yet, after a decade of independence under a ZANU-led government, the land issue remained strikingly unresolved, and the position of the white commercial farmers appeared more secure in 1990 than at any time previously (213-214). Of course, this was all to change with the referendum of the year 2000 that began the land invasions graphically portrayed by Russell Kaschula in his novella Mugabe Was Right for the Wrong Reasons (2006).

The independence constitution stated that property could not be seized without good reason and adequate compensation. The policy of national reconciliation led to the betrayal of the nationalist revolution’s promise of justice and equality for all. Smith observes that the Lancaster House Agreement granted the white community privileges which would remain a permanent feature of the post-independence state. The terms of the constitution ensured that foreign and minority interests would be protected for the first ten years of independence. The most important provisions concerned property rights. No matter how land or mineral rights had originally been
obtained, they could only be changed hands on a ‘willing-seller, willing-buyer’ basis. The protection thus offered to settler and foreign investors meant that they would continue owning more than half of the economy, most of the productive land, nearly all the mines, and nearly all of the manufacturing industries and other businesses (209). Yonah Seleti, a Southern African political analyst, argues that the policy of national reconciliation marginalized nationalist ideology; instead of bringing about the desired peaceful co-existence between the races, it tended to allow the perpetuation of the very things against which the African masses had fought in order to remove them - oppression and exploitation (2004: 212).

Bureaucratic structures of the Rhodesian state, observes the historian Paul Nugent, remained in place and were simply taken over by ZANU. The element of continuity was obvious in relation to the functioning of ministers, which continued as before, but it was even more starkly apparent with agencies like the Police and CIO. It would arguably have taken greater single-mindedness than ZANU possessed for the politicians to have reshaped the bureaucracy and the security apparatus. Although the government sought to bring local party supporters into elected District Councils, these were comparatively weak and were largely under the control of local civil servants. The result was that the rural administration functioned in a manner which rank-and-file supporters often found difficult to fathom. This was the case, for example, when peasants were turned off lands which they tried to occupy (2004: 292).

Indeed ruling in Zimbabwe from 1980 on was done in a conciliatory manner, writes Nugent. However, there was an underlying conflict between the two leading national parties, namely: Mugabe’s ZANU, which was predominantly Shona, and Joshua Nkomo’s ZAPU, which was predominantly Ndebele. Each of these parties had their guerilla wing: Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army (ZANLA) and Zimbabwe People’s Revolutionary Army (ZIPRA), respectively (292). The problems began with the unification of these two groups into one army called the Zimbabwean National Army (ZNA). Increasingly animosity between the two perpetuated by the white security forces turned into violence. After a number of clashes, in which ZIPRA tended to come off worse, many former guerillas absconded. The perceived discrimination against ZIPRA fighters within the fledging ZNA only added to a sense of a malaise which increasingly assumed ethnic overtones in the whole country. Many former ZIPRA
fighters crossed the borders to South Africa and Botswana in search of work. Predictably, the white minority regime under Pieter Willem Botha recruited some of them into an insurgent army, dubbed Super ZAPU, which launched raids across the Botswana border. Others wanted nothing to do with the South Africans, but nevertheless attempted to fight a government which they regarded as bent on eliminating the Ndebele from the political equation (293).

The Mugabe government interpreted the insurgency as evidence that ZAPU leadership had not reconciled itself to electoral defeat. The Christian Commission for Justice and Peace (CCJP) in 1997 reported that the government then proceeded to unleash a reign of terror within Matebeleland, in which the notorious Fifth Brigade was the principal culprit. This brigade, which was trained by the North Koreans, physically eliminated ZAPU activists at the local level and anyone else who was perceived as being sympathetic to the ‘dissidents’. At least 15 000 people may have been killed in this manner. (Reliable estimates put the number at 20 000.) Through their own distorting lenses, the combatants of the Fifth Brigade, who were almost all ex-ZANLA fighters, interpreted themselves as liberators of Zimbabwe and the ‘dissidents’ as merely the old enemy in another disguise. The conflict was a difficult moment for the young Zimbabwe. It showed just how complicated ‘independence’ was. The conflict itself further divided the country. With continuing impact on recent politics, these post-independence factional struggles (black-on-black) somewhat resemble the pre-election bloodshed in South Africa, especially between the African National Congress (ANC) and Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP); both countries’ struggles get depicted in some stories discussed below.

After having ruthlessly crushed the insurgency in Matebeleland and come to terms with ZAPU with the signing of the Unity Accord in 1987, Mugabe declared an amnesty the following year, and what remained of the rebels returned to civilian life (cited in Nugent: 293). In 1987 the two leaders made a new attempt to resolve the nation’s divisions by merging the parties as ZANU-Patriotic Front (PF) making Zimbabwe effectively a one-party state. At the same time the constitution was changed to give Mugabe the role of executive president. Nkomo subsequently served as vice president until his death.
The triple legacy of Zimbabwean independence was to have important consequences for the landscape of ideas which manifested itself over the first decade. First of all, the failure of ZANU-PF to follow through on promises of land reform contributed to a sense of disillusionment amongst party stalwarts and ordinary people. Matters were not helped by the revelations that senior politicians and civil servants, with loans from the Agricultural Finance Corporation, were acquiring access to prime land, which had hitherto been farmed by whites under state lease-hold (Nugent: 294). Secondly, the inheritance of Rhodesian bureaucratic structures made a sham of independence and thirdly, the dissident war, dubbed ‘Gukurahundi’ (meaning ‘the rain which washes away the chaff before spring rains’) disillusioned a great many Zimbabweans about the possibility of forging one nation.

In the early 1990s, because of severe drought, there was a move away from Marxist policies to a more open market system to boost the economy of the country. The country accepted the World Bank’s Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (see Chihota’s story), which was referred to by many Zimbabweans as ‘Ende Satan Ari Pano’ (ESAP), meaning “surely Satan is here”, because of its devastating effects on the people’s lives (see Brian Chikwava and Robert Muponde’s story, discussed in Chapter Three). There was also a token gesture towards multiparty democracy, though this did nothing to prevent ZANU-PF from winning 98% of the seats in parliament in 1995. In 1996 Mugabe was elected unopposed for a new four-year term as president.

Meanwhile, a new opposition party, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), was formed, led by trade unionist Morgan Tsvangirai. Chris Wilson in his story “The Twelve Chitenges” (Writing Still) embarks on a mission to expose the ongoing tension between the ruling party and its main opposition. The MDC showed the signs of being able to mount a very serious challenge to ZANU-PF in forthcoming elections before 2000 (Kagoro, 2005: 8). Wilson’s ‘The Twelve Chitenges’ depicts people’s disillusion with the ruling party and seems to portray people’s hopes on the opposition party (see Chapter Three).

In Rhodesia, the settlers posed a great stumbling block because they fully intended to hold on to their economic advantage. But they were such a small minority, that when the liberation
movements escalated the war, they had to give in. However, in South Africa, the white population was much larger and even more obdurate. Therefore, the challenge facing African nationalists was even more daunting. The elections of the National Party in 1948 brought a regime to power which promised its supporters that it would make no concessions and ended up taking segregationism to its logical extreme in the shape of apartheid (or separateness) (Nugent: 295).

South Africa’s formal status as a colony had ended with the granting of effective independence by Britain much earlier in the twentieth century, but power was only transferred to the majority in 1994, as had happened decades earlier elsewhere in Africa. Colonial rule had survived in South Africa as white minority rule, and the end of that system was a form of decolonization. With the negotiated settlement reached in 1993, the country became truly independent. Everywhere in Southern Africa, the struggle for independence had been against colonial rule. The South African case is a further example of decolonization taking the form of neo-colonialism, of one elite surrendering power to another, with the incoming one agreeing to govern in a way acceptable to the outgoing (Seleti: 194-198), as will be shown in the analysis of Gordimer’s story, “At the Rendezvous of Victory”.

At the start of the 1990s, there was every possibility that South Africa would slide deeper into chaos. Peter Hain, a prominent anti-apartheid supporter, writes that various branches of the security apparatus had established a measure of operational autonomy and were actively fomenting violence in an attempt to disable the opposition. Meanwhile, ANC and IFP supporters fought for control of KwaZulu/Natal. That the apocalypse was averted owes everything to the willingness of the major protagonists to pull back from the brink. As early as 1989, President Botha had been engaged in exploratory talks with the country’s most illustrious prisoner, Nelson Mandela. However, it fell to Frederik Willem De Klerk, who ousted Botha in August of that year, to break with the Nationalist Party dogma that the ANC was nothing more than a terrorists’ organization hell-bent on turning South Africa into a Communist satellite. The implosion of Communism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe came at a rather fortuitous moment. In February 1990, De Klerk surprised Parliament when he announced that he was unbanning the ANC, the South African Communist Party (SACP) and other proscribed organizations, such as
the Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC), in order to persuade the black mass constituency to accept the idea of negotiations (1996: 19).

De Klerk went on to repeal the state of emergency provisions and released Mandela without conditions. According to Sebastian Mallaby, columnist of the Washington Post, the major step taken towards the success of the negotiations was the release of Mandela; it seemed to be the key to peace among South Africans - black, brown and white. In the dark days of the mid-1980s when policemen shot at black protestors every month, many blacks longed for Mandela, the one leader who might talk sense into the white government and restraint into radical blacks. Whites were pinning their hopes on Mandela too. The freeing of the world’s most famous prisoner demonstrated the government’s openness to change (1993: 11-12). As political commentator Alistair Sparks has indicated, the negotiations succeeded because of the fear of failure. Political violence helped push the negotiators towards agreement on key contested issues, and all preferred the compromises made to the alternatives of economic collapse (1995: 8) and greater violence. These concerns of violence are humorously depicted in ‘The Matric Ball’ by Nomavenda Mathiane (see Chapter Two).

The instrument which was authorized to usher in a negotiated settlement was the Convention for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA). According to Nugent, CODESA was a more exclusive club than that of other national conferences, in that only eight political organizations took their seats in 1991. The Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC) and IFP remained outside the negotiations, because they disapproved of the concept of negotiations and implied a secret compact between the ANC and the NP. Despite the conspiracy thesis, the relationship between the main parties was characterized by acute mistrust, and in 1992 the ANC withdrew from CODESA after the killing of its supporters at Boipatong by hostel dwellers, apparently aided by the police. However, in September of that year a further mass killing at Bisho (in Ciskei) was followed by a resumption of the CODESA negotiations, lest the process break down completely (431).

The NP and the ANC set about negotiating the conditions under which political rights for all South Africans could be enjoyed whilst reassuring the minorities. Equally, as the ANC began to operate above ground, it had to satisfy its own mass constituency by pushing for the rapid
dismantling of apartheid. As had been predicted, Nugent writes, the ANC demonstrated its overwhelming popular appeal, winning 252 of the 400 seats in the National Assembly and control of seven provinces. On the back of the 1994 elections, Seleti concludes in his case study on South Africa’s transition, Mandela was installed as president, while De Klerk became one of the two vice presidents. The ministerial portfolios were distributed between the ANC, the NP and IFP as the only parties which had polled above five percent (199).

Although there were inevitable stresses, the Government of National Unity managed to transact its business in a consensual fashion. The political violence which had continued in the transition phase was brought under control and a new constitution was finalized at the end of 1996. This was the document with which all parties felt relatively happy, especially in its guarantees for individual rights; see Ann Oosthuizen’s story ‘House Keeping’ (Chapter Two) and the gender equality portrayed in numerous other stories. Nugent observes that the importance which was attached to judicial independence was underscored by the submission for approval of the draft constitution to the Constitutional Court. The latter in fact insisted on certain modifications, which had to be inserted. After the adoption of the new constitution, the NP withdrew from the government, with the view to plotting its success at the next set of elections scheduled for 1999 (432).

After 1994, Lawrence Schlemmer and Valerie Moller, Quality of Life researchers and practitioners, observe that the ANC appeared somewhat vulnerable for two main reasons. On the one hand, there were signs of division within the party at both provincial and national levels. Local black leadership, just as in the case of Zimbabwe’s ZANU and ZAPU, was never fully united down south as well. There was a split between the majority-based Freedom Charter supporters (Charterists), the ANC in alliance with the South African Communist Party (and other Marxist inclined groups), the smaller Pan Africanist Congress with a more “Africanist” emphasis, a “Black Consciousness Movement” and the predominantly Zulu-based IFP movement (which has followed what the ANC regarded as a more collaborationist strategy of institutional opposition) (1997: 17). On the other hand, Nugent notes that the ANC was unable to satisfy the aspirations of the popular constituency (2004: 432) and this concerned the majority of South Africans most of all.
Hein Marais, regarded as one of South Africa’s most thoughtful political journalists, writes that in 1994 the government had launched the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) which envisaged the injection of large sums of money into education, housing, land redistribution and other programmes designed to mitigate the legacy of apartheid. But unfortunately these did nothing much to improve the lives of the majority (1998: 177-182). There was also the TRC, which was intended to peacefully resolve entrenched differences through the unique promise of ‘truth for amnesty’. Veerle Dieltiens, an independent consultant of the Center for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation, puts it simply by saying:

Perpetrators of political violence had to fully disclose details of their past crimes in order to qualify for amnesty. Simply put, it was agreed that justice would be overlooked provided that the perpetrators publicly told the truth. The truth, it was hoped, would help the process of healing individual victims and the nation. (2005: 5)

Dieltiens notes that TRC chairperson Archbishop Desmond Tutu (1999) said that without the compromises made during the negotiations to ensure majority rule in South Africa the country would have gone up in flames. From this perspective, it follows that the agreement by the ANC to grant amnesty to perpetrators of apartheid violence was a pragmatic choice. Amnesty was the price, albeit a costly one for victims, for saving the innumerable lives that would have been lost if the conflict had continued. Unlike the practice in most transitional societies to date, however, amnesty in South Africa was neither blanket nor automatic (2005: 5). ‘Healing’ through the TRC is perhaps better understood as occurring at a national, rather than community or individual level. An example of how the TRC proves inadequate is Achmat Dangor’s ‘Bitter Fruit’, where Silas and his wife are still haunted by their traumatic encounter with Du Bois.

Apartheid in South Africa did not collapse overnight on 27 April 1994, but in stages through a series of negotiations between the National Party (NP) and the African National Congress (ANC). All this was so remarkable that Mandela himself spoke in May 1994 of a miracle having occurred. Without remarkable women and men like Mandela, Archbishop Tutu, De Klerk (the then president), Cyril Ramaphosa (ANC) and Roelf Meyer (NP), the founding elections of 27 April 1994 would not have taken place peacefully. The transition ushered in an era of political
stability in the establishment of a stable post-apartheid order and the TRC was set up by the first post-apartheid government as a way to deal with the past (Seleti, 193-194).

However, in spite of the Election Day and attempts by the new government to implement programmes to alleviate problems amongst the people, black South Africans continued to be faced with massive unemployment, inadequate housing and lack of basic amenities. To compound the malaise, a crime wave (born out of poverty) made the lives of urban dwellers a daily misery (Marais: 183). The people’s growing sense of disenchantment with politics, probably because of corruption and opposition to the government, was reflected in the next elections when a reduced number of people actually turned up to vote, as compared to the first. It was estimated that perhaps as many as 91 percent of the adults voted in 1994, but only 60 percent did so in 1999 (Nugent: 431).

While politicians struggled with politics and administration after independence, trying to impress the electorate, there are rivers of political, social and economic feeling in society that they can do little about, as shall be shown in the selection of stories. All this, perhaps, is the direct result of a heritage (or heritages) of violence and disruptions, social and political explosions and implosions. Thus, to expect the societies emerging out of the twin nightmares of colonialism and apartheid to adjust quickly and find new beginnings would be to underestimate the long-term damage done to society. In the atmosphere of suspense after the official end of hostilities (1980 in Zimbabwe and 1994 in South Africa), identities (and lack of them) and loyalty to nation-building can seldom be taken for granted. Men and women’s lives undergo a labeling and mislabeling and are lost and found, then lost and found again once more, showing that the contradictory space was not only confined to one side or the other. There were spaces between the two extremes in which people got lost or remained out of the sheer fear of choosing either. The scars of conflict brought about by colonialism and apartheid go deeper still.

The historical survey does not provide an exhaustive account of socio-historical and political background to South Africa and Zimbabwe, which require substantial monographs on their own. Its purpose, however, is to convey some sense of what the people in these two countries have
gone through historically. Instead of proceeding with the historical background and risking turning this study into a historical one, at this point I will move on to discussing fiction writers.

Both fiction and non-fiction writers, as analysts of contemporary society, make many and varied assessments of what they perceive as the healthy and unhealthy state of the nation. Earlier in parts of this chapter, non-fiction writers from different arenas - political, economic and literary - outline the backgrounds of Zimbabwe and South Africa’s transitions in the periods before and after independence. But it is principally the works of fiction writers that are my focus. Therefore, at this point it is important to consider some critical approaches and some fiction texts that touch on the issues discussed in this thesis.

Fiction writers portray people who know conflict, oppression, betrayal, poverty, want, invisibility and perpetual second-class citizenship. They depict people whose future is not simple. It is rather a vast and difficult sea of trials and tribulations, buildings, erosions, possibilities, collapses, triumphs, defeats, fulfillments, disposessions, coalitions, fragmentations, disjunctions, dispersals, contests and discontentment. The following chapters will focus mainly on Zimbabwean and South African fiction written after the independence era. Most of the issues dealt with by African writers a few years after the independence era are inscribed in disillusionment, in works by writers trying to grapple with the legacy of colonial rule and the transition from it. For example, Ayi Kwei Armah’s bitter trilogy - *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born, Fragments* and *Why Are We So Blest* (1968, 1970 and 1972) - captures the disenchantment and despair of the people.

From a wide range of perspectives, scholars have interrogated the challenges of governance and development in contemporary Africa. Since the decades of 1950s, the quest of African nations for political liberation and socio-economic transformation has remained at the fore of discourse among politicians, social researchers, intellectuals and artists - a group to which fiction writers belong. Expectedly, prescriptions for the continent’s development are as varied as the perceived symptoms of its ailments (Mazrui, 2005: 65). I will examine the perspectives and prescriptions of these writers’ imaginations in the stories below.
Some non-fiction writers use a factual and historical approach to capture the political, economic and social ills bedeviling their countries. Imagination is the power which inspires poets, painters, playwrights and short story writers. People are beings with imaginations (Zamora, 1997: 3). Literary works are deeply and intuitively informed by what is happening, what has happened and what will happen. In the words of one South African scholar, And’r’e Brink, the aim of fiction is not reproduction, but imagining. Brink goes on to say that fiction gives a second handle to reality, enabling writers and their audience to encounter these periods from the dimensions of make-believe. In many cases, fiction is used to frame historical events, creating a distance that allows reflection (1996: 5).

Long before African social scientists had discovered the social movements in the 1980s, African writers anticipated that the masses would be dissatisfied and hungry for meaningful change soon after independence (Zeleza, 1997: 426). The rhetoric of nation building and development could not fool Ousmane Sembene’s restive worker (1970), Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s militant peasants (1967), Bessie Head’s rural exploited women (1969) and Buchi Emecheta’s urban working class (1974). Thus the social forces behind Africa’s present struggles for democracy have been consistently chronicled, dissected and applauded in African literature for more than three decades. We now know, as many writers warned, that the hopes of a new beginning and the beliefs that independence marked a revolutionary world in Africa were illusory. The weight of Africa’s pre-colonial and colonial pasts was heavier than most realized or cared to admit in the intoxicating moment of independence. It cannot be sufficiently emphasized that contradictions within African societies were not transcended but given new complications by the impact of colonialism (cited in Irele, 1992: 297).

The nationalist inherited, in Basil Davidson’s memorable metaphor, an independent ‘dish’ that ‘was old and cracked and little fit for any further use. Worse than that’, he continues, ‘it was not an empty dish’. For it carried the junk and jumble of a century of colonial muddle and ‘make do’ which the new ministers had to accept along with the dish itself. What shone upon its supposedly golden surface was not the reflection of new ideas and ways of liberation, but the shadows of old ideas and ways of servitude. The nationalists, in other words, inherited colonial structures with all their authoritarian flaws. Davidson goes on to argue that the failure to mend these flaws reflected
both the class interests of the new rulers and the weaknesses of the anti-colonial movements, and these countries’ continued vulnerability to hostile international forces (cited in Zeleza: 428).

Paul Zeleza, historian and literary critic, observes that African writers were among the first to note that the emancipatory potential of independence had been overestimated. As the writer Per Wastberg puts it, African writers had already discovered that the post-colonial emperor was naked. The failure of independence became the overriding theme of African literature in the 1960s. Already in the 1950s, writers such as Peter Abrahams were warning against exaggerated expectations, indeed, predicting that disillusionment would follow independence (cited in Zeleza: 430). Thus literature in independent Africa was even more political than it had been during the colonial period. The reason for this is simple: the barbarities of colonial and post-colonial rule were too great to allow African writers the indulgence of posing the small questions of post-modernist literature. This indicates that writing in the colonial era demanded that the writer depict the atrocities of the regime, but now that colonialism and apartheid have come to an official end, the question arises: what are the writers writing about? The British critic, Peter Lewis, thus noted that many African writers viewed indulging in parody and pastiche and playing with words and form, (during this time) as the nadir of aesthetic decadence (cited in Zeleza: 431).

Disillusionment turned into actual disenchantment in Chinua Achebe’s *A Man of the People* (1966) and Soyinka’s *The Interpreters* (1965), then into despair in Armah’s bitter trilogy (1968; 1970; 1972) mentioned earlier, and in Kofi Awoonor’s *This Earth, My Brother* (1971). In the 1970s, Wa Thiong’o channelled the critique of the moral bankruptcy of Africa’s post-colonial ruling elite in a commitment towards their overthrow in *Petals of Blood* (1977) and *Devil on the Cross* (1982). Thus, post-colonial novels in Africa, as Kwame Appiah states, ‘are novels of delegitimation rejecting the Western imperium, it is true, but also rejecting the nationalist project of the post-colonial national bourgeoisie’ (cited in Zeleza: 431).

Nevertheless, a great deal of hopeful literature marked the independence celebrations in the form of songs, poems and speeches, for example Amon Matika’s song “Eve of Freedom” which celebrates freedom for the people of Zimbabwe. It says: “…We are all free/ Zimbabwe *yavatema* no longer Rhodesia …” (cited in Chapman, 1996: 299). Another important type of song sung in
celebration by the hopeful at independence was the national anthem. In Zimbabwe it was “Ishe Komboreraiafrica” – “God Bless Africa” which was recently changed to “Simudzai Mureza WeZimbabwe” – “Lift Up the Flag of Zimbabwe”. In South Africa it is “Nkosi Sikelel iAfrica”. The depiction of Zimbabweans and South Africans after independence by both fiction and non-fiction writers is no exception to the general picture of the rest of Africa. The optimism of independence had mostly evaporated not long after it had started.

In the light of the above information, there is no doubt the post-independence contemporary society in both Zimbabwe and South Africa inhabits ‘skeptical times’ as the political analyst Peter McLaren puts it (1995: 201). There were changes in the demographic profiles during the transition. After the war an extraordinary acceleration of urbanization ensued, reaching a peak in the years leading to independence. Hence, population swelled. Bindonvilles and shanty towns sprang up in an uncontrolled fashion due to the inability (or unwillingness) of the authorities to keep pace with the demand for housing, and even in the approved townships overcrowding became endemic (Nugent: 58).

The underside to urbanization was, however, the addition of certain volatility to urban politics, as incomers jostled for living space and employment with each other and with the supposed indigenes. A number of stories to be analyzed deal with this crisis for space, namely ‘At the Window’, ‘Seventh Street Alchemy’, ‘A Breach of Trust’ and ‘Milk and Honey Galore, Honey!’ To sympathetic external observers, “tribalism” represented an immediate problem at the time of independence, an issue addressed by the story ‘Torn Posters’.

The enforced intimacy of the city often spawned a vibrant popular culture, in which the influences were drawn from the widest possible orbit: migrants brought elements of their own cultures from the outlying regions, where they intermingled and were transformed in the process, whereas other influences were drawn from Europe and the West. This cultural cocktail brought forth some remarkable innovations in music, theatre and dress. This cultural hybrid is shown in Gomolemo Mokae’s story ‘Milk and Honey Galore, Honey!’ Urban dwellers began to live their lives in a manner which differed from that of their country cousins. To live in the city was to be quintessentially modern, which meant dressing, speaking and acting differently from villagers
who had no reason to conceive of leisure time as something to be filled in a refracted image of work time. Thus, when Terrence goes to live in the urban areas, in Shakespeare Nyereyemhuka’s story, ‘A Breach of Trust’, he becomes estranged from his rural mother. Many a fresh arrival in the city had to endure the embarrassment of being regarded as a villager before learning the rules of the metropolis. Those who returned to their rural homes typically went out of their way to demonstrate the extent to which they had transcended the rural milieu, thereby feeding the ambition of the next cohort. If the villager was perceived to lie at one end of the spectrum of modernity, the ‘been-to’- that is, someone who had traveled abroad – lay at the other extreme. During the interwar period, the minority of Africans who had received the chance to experience the world outside gained enormous social respect (Nugent: 58). Fiction writers address issues concerning politics, economics and society in their works, highlighting people’s hopes and disillusionments. They depict the dismantling of colonialism and apartheid as having left people in a problematic and contradictory space.

Anthony Giddens, a sociologist, cites Archbishop Wulfstan who said that the world is in a rush, and is getting close to its end, in a sermon given in York - in the year 1014. It is easier to imagine the same sentiments being expressed today. Are the hopes and anxieties of each period merely a carbon copy of previous eras? (2002: 1). Probably not. Each era had its own particular hopes and anxieties. The following chapters examine the issues of hope and disillusionment portrayed by Zimbabwean and South African short story writers during the transition period. Giddens poses another question: ‘Is the world in which we live, at the close of the twentieth century, really any different from that of earlier times?’ (1). It is. We have been living through a major period of historical transition, and the changes affecting us are not confined to any one era or area of the globe but straddle different eras and stretch almost everywhere. The following chapters investigate hope and disillusionment straddling the colonial and post-independence eras in South Africa and Zimbabwe before the turn of the twenty-first century.

In the attempt to conceptualize hope and disillusionment, a number of theories have presented themselves as possible frame-works for this study; namely, Marxism, Afrocentricism and Postcolonial theories. Marxism features prominently in the liberation struggles of Zimbabwe and South Africa. It was used to mobilize the people for war and it was a strategy that both countries
were willing to embark on after independence. However, it is abandoned by Zimbabwe when the economy of the country seemed to be going the way that Communism went. The ways of Marxism went down faster in South Africa with Mandela declaring on May Day 1994 that: ‘There is not a single slogan that will connect us with any Marxist Ideology’ (cited in Marais: 146). Despite being a promising theory, it falls short of adequately encompassing the concerns of this study. This is not to say that there are not going to be any short stories that tend towards this theory, as shall be seen in the analyses.

Surely when one engages in a discussion of hope for Africa, the ideologies of Molefi Asante seem to come to the fore. Afrocentricism is a theory about Africa for Africans. It was a movement created out of the black experience globally and which set out to educate blacks about their history and also to educate white people about the true history of African and black people. It is an ideology of hope telling the readers (black men and women) who they are, what they can know and what they must do.

It would have been a good framework for conceptualizing hope for Africans, but as Visnathie Seupaul observes, there are a great many references to an ‘African identity’, ‘the African condition’, ‘the African experience’ and ‘the African world view’. The Afrocentric theory works on the presumption that that there is a common African identity, condition and experience and this becomes problematic when one uses this theory to address, say, the Rainbow Nation of South Africa, which is peopled among others by characters like Victor in Bransby’s ‘A Reflection of Self’. Seupaul goes on to quote Fanon who says that there are common experiences in response to the impact of colonialism and racism, the struggles against oppression and white domination, and the struggle against the imperial gaze of shame induce by the colonizer (2004: 5). However, as bell hooks (1990) and Appiah (2001) observe, common experiences and struggles do not translate into a black essence and a single African identity. When writing about African identities, Appiah cites Achebe who acknowledges that there is no final identity that is definitely African. Appiah further notes: ‘Like all identities, institutionalized before anyone has permanently fixed a single meaning on them…being African, is for its bearers, one among other salient models of being, all of which have to be constantly fought for and re-fought for’ (2001: 225-226). Therefore Afrocentricism becomes inappropriate because of its rigidity and limitations.
My study, therefore, will mainly be guided by postcolonial critical theory, because that discourse utilizes fluid concepts, techniques and terminologies. Accordingly, it is argued that the unbroken term ‘postcolonialism’ is more sensitive to the long history of colonial consequence: colonialism and neo-colonialism (Gandhi: 3). Officially colonialism has ended, but the word ‘postcolonial’ definitely does not mean ‘after colonialism’ because that would suppose an end to the process of imperialism and as this study will show, that would be to misread present realities.

In a conversation with Neeladri Bhattacharya, Suvir Kaul and Ania Loomba, Edward Said, an outspoken proponent of postcolonial theories, stated:

Colonialism in the formal sense is over, but I am very interested in neocolonialism, I am very interested in the workings of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank… I care very much about the structures of dependency and impoverishment that exist, well certainly in…my part of the world and in all parts… (cited in Goldberg, 2002: 2)

From the above statement, it seems the history of colonialism will haunt the newly liberated nation states even after independence has been won. Joseph Stiglitz and other scholars show how it could be perpetuated. Their studies indicate how neo-colonialism in its modern and covert nature gives its victims a false sense of security, freedom and economic prosperity through veiled philosophies and expressions such as globalization, free markets, judiciary independence, human rights, democracy, rule of law, good governance, free press and the like (2002: 12). One can surmise that the basic principle underpinning this development is the promotion of good healthy relationships, trade practices and dialogue between races, ethnic groups, tribes and clans alike. But in reality, questions have to be asked as to whether such developments are merely to promote good relations amongst people of the world or to sweep the causes, problems and effects of colonialism and racism into convenient spaces that become self-perpetuating, despite the rhetoric.

Stiglitz goes on to observe that the entire world now operates within the economic system primarily developed and controlled by the West, and it is the continued dominance of the West, in terms of political, economic, military and cultural power, that gives this history a continuing significance (2002: 13). Political liberation did not bring economic liberation – and without economic liberation there can be no political liberation, as Robert Young, a postcolonial scholar,
claims about newly liberated countries (2001: 5). Chihota’s “Shipwreck” in *No More Plastic Balls* and Gordimer’s “At the Rendezvous of Victory” in *At the Rendezvous of Victory* further illustrate these relations.

According to Bill Ashcroft and others in *Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies* (1998), the term neocolonialism suggests that, although African countries have achieved technical independence, the ex-colonial powers and newly emerging superpowers such as the United States continue to play a decisive role through international monetary bodies, through the fixing of prices on world markets, multinational corporations and cartels and a variety of educational and cultural institutions (162). Therefore, neocolonialism becomes more insidious and more difficult to detect and resist than the older overt colonialism.

William Graf, political and economic analyst, suggests that neocolonialism should not only be depicted as an externally imposed system of exploitation. He argues that it is important not to omit the crucial position of indigenous elites within the world capitalist system, a factor very much at work in South Africa and Zimbabwe as this study will show. Imputing neocolonialism exclusively to outside forces and agents in a very real sense mystifies its dualist quality and helps to exonerate African comprador and dependent elites from any accountability for their role in the neocolonial system of extraction (1981: 601).

Memmi has argued that the colonial aftermath is fundamentally deluded in its hope that the architecture of a new world will magically emerge from the physical ruins of colonialism. He maintains that the triumphant subjects of this aftermath inevitably underestimate the psychologically tenacious hold of the colonial past on the postcolonial present. In his words:

> And the day oppression ceases, the new man is supposed to emerge before our eyes immediately. Now, I do not like to say so, but I must since decolonization has demonstrated it: this is not the way it happens. The colonized lives for a long time before we see that really new man. (cited in Gandhi: 7)
If the colonized lives for a long time without seeing that really new man, then the same can be said about the colonizer. Similarly, Fanon argues that reconciliation could not fulfill the expectations of national independence and self-definition.

Postcolonial studies emerged in the 1980s, writes theorist Laura Chrisman. By this time, the great era of Third World anti-colonial nationalism was at an end, and violent ethnic communalism was beginning to assume global dimensions. Such political shifts fed the tendency of postcolonial studies to regard nationalism as inherently dominating, absolutist, essentialist and an intensification of capitalism. This led to the popular academic view that the era of nation-state was itself nearing a close and that nationalism was therefore redundant (cited in Lazarus 2004). These tendencies were further fueled by developments in critical theory. These encouraged postcolonial studies to view nationalism as a primarily cultural and epistemological, rather than social-political, formation. This accompanied the view that nationalism was, as theorist Gayatri Spivak suggested, “a reverse or displaced legitimation of colonialism”, doomed to repeat the “epistemic violence” of the colonialism it rejected (1990: 62). Less antagonistic are the approaches associated with Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities*. In these, nationalism is construed as Janus-faced, paradoxical in its cultural, temporal modernity and simultaneous reliance on the past to define and legitimate itself (cited in Lazarus, 2004: 183).

Chrisman argues that there is a view which sees anti-colonial nationalism as derivative of, and imprisoned within, the mental framework of the “Western” conceptual apparatus. At times the critique of anti-colonial nationalism’s “discourse” extends to the political structures of the nation-state. The concept and political practice of the nation-state are accordingly seen as “Western” inventions that colonialism has imposed on colonized peoples. By adopting the nation-state as the object and medium of social liberation, anti-colonial nationalism dooms itself to conceptual self-contradiction, cultural inauthenticity, political failure and inevitably, repetition of the dominatory modes of thoughts that led to its imposition in the first place (cited in Lazarus: 184).

Scholars in postcolonial studies frequently characterize nationalism as a movement that promotes the interests of a particular group while claiming to represent the whole. It is the elitist interests of the bourgeoisie that nationalism is alleged to serve, necessarily sacrificing or “ignoring” the
interests of “subaltern” groups (Spivak 1999: 146). Similarly nationalism has been defined as a patriarchal project that opposes the needs of women and the goals of gender equality (McClintock 1995; Parke et al. 1992; Spivak 1999), as shall be shown in some of the stories to be analyzed. Many intellectual elements feed these tendencies. One is a concept of the “will-to-power” (Nietzsche’s concept originally), which is held to animate human activity; thus all action stems from self-interest and an irrepressible urge to dominate, be it through direct or indirect (ostensibly egalitarian) expression. This conception, says Chrisman, is based on conviction, and as such it is not open to argument. Alternatively, as noted by Chrisman, materialist explanations can, however, be found for human practices (cited in Lazarus: 187).

But, after all is said and done, Chrisman asserts that it is important to credit nationalism – in particular, socialist forms of nationalism – with the capacity to generate a class-conscious, critical analysis of nationalist elites. It is also important to credit nationalism with the ability to envision and attempt liberatory government and wealth redistribution. However, Chrisman also maintains that this is not to suggest that the heterogeneous elements of the population historically involved in socialist national struggles were always united in their motivations and values. Nor is it to suggest that the nationalist activists and theorists always correctly interpreted the class and social dynamics of the struggle to which they belonged (cited in Lazarus: 188).

Homi Bhabha, one of the proponents of an influential strand of postcolonial theory, has drawn attention to the way in which postcolonial discourse rejects all the popular binarisms that divide life and matter into either black or white, oppressor or oppressed, center and periphery, negative image and positive image, male or female, global or national, majority or minority, and so on. Such binaries, he says, entail a hierarchy in which one term of the opposition is always dominant and imply that, in fact, the binary opposition itself exists to confirm that dominance (1994: 26). As a mode of analysis, Neil Lazarus, another postcolonial theorist, explains that the postcolonial perspective in literary studies resists attempts at holistic forms of social explanation. It forces recognition of more complex boundaries that exist on the cusp of those opposed spheres, such as the question of identity and culture. To support Bhabha’s argument, Lazarus goes on to say that at the most general theoretical level, the postcolonial project seeks to explore social pathologies that no longer simply cluster around class antagonism but break up into widely scattered
historical contingencies. Postcolonial criticism bears witness to the unequal and uneven forces of representation involved in the contest for political, economic and social authority within the modern world order (2004: 5).

Postcolonialism does not only deal with the challenges and problems that arise for the newly independent nation states on a political and economic level. It also engages with the nuances found in these societies such as issues surrounding identity, culture and family. In postcolonial societies, identities are made and remade, negotiated and renegotiated. The official end of apartheid and colonialism forces one to recognize the changes in identities that were brought about by the end of these twin nightmares. The white narrator in Wilson’s story ‘The Twelve Chitenges’ ‘remembers who he was’ in a bus full of black people and humbly makes his way to the back seat of the bus (see Chapter Three). Independence brings about a new realization to former enemies that they are now one people, though this is not realized by Victor in Bransby’s ‘A Reflection of Self’ (see Chapter Two). However, for the people to appreciate this new-found identity they have to be aware of their essential identities first.

Theorists such as Spivak (1990: 82) and hooks (1989: 14) contend that there is a real need for a “strategic essentialism”, a very necessary moment from which everything stems and begins. hooks asks: where would we be without a touch of essentialism? In the light of this question, I am in agreement with both Spivak and hooks. How can one appreciate new forms of identity if one is unaware of his or her original identity? People are nothing without a solid sense of their history, heritage and community, hence the need to recollect the past in some of the stories. If one were to forget where one came from, how can one know where one is going? However narrow one’s history may be, one cannot afford to have this diluted yet. Other dilemmas of developing national identity in the wake of colonial rule are illustrated in numerous stories in the anthology Identities.

Among all the changes that happened leading to the time of independence, none were more important than those which happened in personal lives – in family, marriage and relationships. There was a revolution that went on in terms of how people thought of themselves and how they formed ties and connections with each other. It was a revolution advancing unevenly for different
people. In some ways, these were the most difficult and disturbing transformations of all. Some people chose to tune out of larger problems for much of the time, because it was difficult to work together to resolve them (Giddens, 2002: 51). A case in point in this study would be the TRC of South Africa. However, a few people realized that they could notopt out from the swirl of change because it reached right into the heart of their emotional lives. Silas and Lydia in the story ‘Bitter Fruit’ kept holding on to the little bit of hope available because of their marriage, troubled as it was.

There was also the issue of culture. Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (1990: 43) argue that culture must be made less reactionary, that is, it should be pluralistic rather than monopolistic, when populations of different cultures, races, classes and genders come together. For instance, the rainbow nation of South Africa came into being as a result of the mixture of White, Black, Colored and Indian African people. A postcolonial analysis of culture advocates transcending historical boundaries and the formation of a new, dynamic culture through hybridity, which commonly refers to the creation of new transcultural forms within the contact zone produced by colonialism (Aschcroft, Griffith and Tiffin, 1998: 43). However, as is evident in these stories, culture is not necessarily something which is ‘made’, and the ‘rainbow nation’ of South Africa deserves interrogation. Stories to guide this investigation include Bransby’s “A Reflection of Self” and Mokae’s “Milk and Honey Galore, Honey!” Again hybridity is something which is negotiated: hybridity is not necessarily something to be celebrated, nor is it always dynamic if it means union with, and subjection to, a culture which has become dominant due to non-cultural factors such as financial poverty, unemployment, immigration, etcetera.

In view of what has been said, my thesis develops a postcolonial mode for a number of reasons. Postcolonial theory privileges fluidity and ambivalence, so that it is well suited to accommodate the issues of hope and disillusionment as they are always bound by political, economic and social events. It is the expansiveness of postcolonial theories that has allowed me to analyze the selection of short stories using insights from this broad-spectrum theory. More and more, life after independence in Zimbabwe and South Africa is a life more attuned to feelings of hope and despair, visibility and invisibility, contentment and angst (McLaren: 205). Thus only a naïve critic would dismiss the possibilities that post-colonialism promises.
All hope anticipates a better world in the future, and in the modern world every act of hoping aims to create that world. But a twenty-first century hope, as the work of Ronald Aronson (“Hope After Hope”) indicates - one containing a vision of human possibility that might inspire people to struggle for a better world - will be meaningless without squarely acknowledging the subtleties and contradictions afflicting contemporary society (1999: 473). As McLaren has suggested, the twenty-first century inhabits skeptical times, historical moments spawned in a temper of distrust, disillusionment and despair. Social relations of discomfort and diffidence have always existed, but our time is particularly invidious in this regard, marked as it is by the ugly past of colonialism, apartheid and oppression, socio-economic underdevelopment, economic dependence, poverty, isolation and alienation of the individual, severe economic and racial injustices and heightened social paranoia (201). Chapters Two and Three reveal how writers from South Africa and Zimbabwe have been grappling with the issues of hope and disillusionment after independence.

My reader might think it anachronistic to have devoted a section of this thesis to the background of South African and Zimbabwean literature and the historical and political backgrounds of the countries. After all, was a new chapter not begun with the demise of white minority rule in favor of black majority rule? And is this study not investigating literature in the post-independence era? These are questions worth noting, but there is a good reason for tackling the study in this way. Few critiques would dispute that colonialism left a legacy which endured beyond independence, and many would contend that its echoes still resonate at the start of the 21st century. Hence, the clock cannot realistically be started in 1980 for Zimbabwe or 1994 for South Africa - the so-called years of independence. At the very least, one would also need to take account of the background of literary studies in these two countries if one is going to embark on such an analysis, because the permutations of the literature prepared the ground for much which was to follow. With this summary background of South African and Zimbabwean history, I now turn to the selected stories.
CHAPTER TWO

HOPE AND DISILLUSIONMENT: SOUTH AFRICAN SHORT STORIES IN THE POST-APARTHEID ERA

The overwhelming injustice inherent in the apartheid-era social formation is something that cannot be ignored under any circumstances. But now that this system has come to an official close, the nature of writing is expected to change to suit the new era, some critics argue. Njabulo Ndebele, a luminary literary scholar and author, suggests a ‘rediscovery of the ordinary’ in his 1991 book. His argument hinges on the idea that post-apartheid writing should not be too ‘narrow and constricting’; in apartheid writing, ‘this [is the] weakness has been premised on the demand that everything must have a spectacular political statement’ (55). The habit of looking at the spectacular has forced writers to gloss over (the nooks and crannies of) the ordinary daily lives of people that could be the direct focus of writers as many writers seem only to be focusing on the commitment to protest writing.

Similarly, Albie Sachs, an ANC activist and legal expert, points out that this behavior - focus on the spectacular - seems to have dulled art and literature to such an extent that if one were to look at most of the art and literature of South Africa produced during the transition one would probably think South Africa was the greyest and most somber of all worlds, completely shut in by apartheid (cited in De Kok and Press, 1990: 21).

We have published so many anthologies and journals and occasional poems and stories, and the number that deal with love do not make the fingers of a hand. Can it be that once we join the ANC we do not make love any more, that when the comrades go to bed they discuss the role of the white working class? Surely even those comrades whose tasks deny them the opportunity and direct possibilities of love, remember past love and dream of love to come. What are we fighting for, if not the right to express our humanity in all its forms, including our sense of fun and capacity for love and tenderness and our appreciation of the beauty of the world? (cited in De Kok and Press, 1990: 20-21)
This comment could apply to much of South African writing during apartheid, as mentioned earlier in Chapter One. It could be borne in mind that when Sachs said this, the Election Day had not passed and these comments were meant to awaken writers’ minds in order to open up to new possibilities in the ‘new’ South Africa. This selection of stories offers glimmerings of hope amidst residual disillusionment.

Sachs and Ndebele seem to be calling for a new approach to writing about South Africa in the post-apartheid era. It is a good call, considering that a new epoch was beginning. Have the writers responded to this call? This chapter, therefore, surveys selected South African short stories published after 1994. Some of the writers heed the call made by Ndebele and Sachs, to focus on the ordinary lives of the people. Generally speaking, most of these writers fulfill Ndebele and Sachs’s call for new South African writing and manage to engage with and articulate the very commonplace issues of life, such as marriage and birth in Sipho Sepamla’s story ‘Ike and Phindi’ and Masilela’s ‘The Day the Rain Clouds Returned’.

This chapter examines the following anthologies: De Kock’s and Southey’s *Identities* and Oliphant’s *At the Rendezvous of Victory*. In the introduction to *At the Rendezvous of Victory*, Oliphant writes: “This anthology attempts to provide a perspective on narrative responses to recent changes in South Africa. These changes center on the advent of democracy after centuries of minority domination” (7).

Originally conceived around the theme of independence, the anthology developed in scope to take into its purview a variety of themes concerned with social change, such as the question of identity, nationalism, community, modernity and gender relations, which are very often the central issues that arise after a country’s independence. He also states that while apartheid did end in 1994, its effects will be felt for many years to come, and the memory of it will never disappear from the country’s consciousness (1999: 10). As De Kock says in his introduction, this is a result of the restrictions imposed by the racial system of political, social and economic discrimination. Apartheid was based squarely upon a rigid system of ethnic identities in which people were told, ‘you shall be defined as this, that or the other, and you shall live in these places only, and you shall mix with such and such only’ (2002: 4). The removal of these restrictions no
doubt left a great many South Africans questioning who they were now in the ‘new’ South Africa. Not surprisingly, De Kock and Southey’s collection of stories center on this issue of identity. According to the editors,

This may seem a simple matter, but in South Africa over the past few decades the issue of identity – framed as the question, ‘who are you to tell me how or what to be?’ – has been the business of much conflict, deep suffering and, ultimately, liberation. The stories in this challenging collection invite the reader to think about personal, social and political identity. (4)

Therefore, the editors have collected stories that engage with the issue of identity because it is one that a great many South Africans continue to grapple with even after apartheid.

One example is Mokae’s ‘Milk and Honey Galore, Honey’, where it emerges that a definitive African identity is difficult to pin down. As Achebe acknowledges, there is no final identity that is definitively African (cited in Appiah, 2001: 223). There are issues of racial identity - black, white and colored - discussed in Phil Ndlela’s ‘A Question of Identity’, Bransby’s ‘A Reflection of Self’ and Smuts’s ‘The Divine One’, respectively. The stories from South Africa, more than the Zimbabwean stories, explore the theme of identity because of the rigid, oppressive racial identities prescribed by the colonizer. All of the stories have this theme threaded into them; as the major theme in some stories and just a sub-theme in the others. One way of structuring this analysis, therefore, would have been to follow the string of this theme as it is woven into the stories by the writers. But instead, as already mentioned in the introduction, my analysis follows a socio-historical approach, which is chronological according to the events depicted by the stories. Thus one can journey through South Africa’s history depicted in the stories so as to come to the projected picture of contemporary reality towards the turn of the twenty-first century.

The first story is Masilela’s ‘The Day the Rain Clouds Returned’, which depicts a typical pre-colonial South African setting. Then comes Bransby’s ‘A Reflection of Self’, which recounts the joy and jubilation that some people had at independence. Next, Gordimer’s ‘At the Rendezvous of Victory’ straddles both the colonial and post-colonial eras. Granted it is a great leap in history, but a leap which is easily filled by the historical and political backgrounds mentioned in Chapter
One. Mathiane’s ‘The Matric Ball’ comes next. It throws us slightly before independence to capture the turbulent times of the transition in a humorous way that can only be depicted now because the time in question has passed. Smuts follows with a portrayal of life during and after apartheid in ‘The Divine One’. Obviously, there are difficulties in putting different stories in a chronological order. The transition from one historical event to the next is uneven because the stories bounce around in time and similarly the transition in history itself was not smooth, flowing from one to the next in an orderly manner. The rest of the stories include: Oosthuizen’s ‘Housekeeping’; Sepamla’s ‘Ike and Phindi’; Ndlela’s ‘A Question of Identity’; Sandra Lee Braude’s ‘A New Dispensation’; Dangor’s ‘Bitter Fruit’; Ahmed Essop’s ‘The Silk Scarf’ and lastly Mokae’s ‘Milk and Honey Galore, Honey’.

Masilela’s ‘The Day the Rain Clouds Returned’ is a seemingly simple story about birth, which reads almost like an oral story. Its rural setting almost resembles the old pre-colonial days, endowed with a celebratory mood, which is graphically depicted by half-naked maidens dancing the qobosha dance. The life amongst the people is very simple, and the hierarchy of authority is reminiscent of the olden days where everyone was accountable to the king of that particular tribe who in turn was answerable to the ancestors. The way the pre-colonial tradition is described by Masilela in the story is very orderly, almost as if he is nostalgic for this tradition, futilely wishing it could be brought back into the new South Africa. Perhaps not so, necessarily, but he could be asking for people to revisit, recapture and rework the old tradition into the new South Africa. It is not just naïve romanticism. Coming from a historical background as brutal as that of South Africa, it does not sound naïve at all, but nonetheless, cannot be recaptured.

Traditionally, typical of almost every pre-colonial African society, a ceremony to the ancestors required the people to assemble at the king’s kraal ‘to plead with the ancestors to send rain’ (11). The people of Mabhoko have had a prolonged, anxious wait for the rains, which have not yet appeared. ‘The tribespeople scanned the skies with their eyes, hoping for the gathering of the rain clouds’ (11). This anxious wait can be paralleled to that of the majority of South Africans who also waited hopefully for their independence to come. Read allegorically, the story provides an extended commentary on this time of transition.
The birth of the child signals the coming of the rains. When word went round that Masilela’s daughter-in-law was going to give birth, the weather began to change. When the child was born, ‘the winds started blowing from the direction of the faraway seas’ (11), bringing the rain clouds together;

suddenly the winds blew strong, but at intervals the tribespeople looked at the skies … and watched with wonder as rain clouds started forming and re-forming themselves in wondrous shapes. (12)

The birth of the child can be a metaphor for the birth of the ‘new’ South Africa after apartheid. It is surprising that Masilela fails to mention the labor pains that the mother goes through when giving birth, which would recall the pain that the people of South Africa had to go through to become independent. The baby motif is used by many African writers - Ngugi, Achebe, and Emecheta and especially poets such as the Zimbabwean Chenjerai Hove, in ‘A War Time Wife’. The anxiety of the mother for the unborn child resembles the anxiety of the people who were struggling for their liberation.

Every birth is followed by celebration. There was much ululating, dancing and whistling after the announcement of the birth.

Eu! Eu! Eu! Eu! The village women howled. The men cleared their throats and whistled … Vooo! Vooo! Vooo! Vooo! Those with the bullhorns drew their lungs full of breath and blew a tricky but popular tune, triggering ululation from the women and whistles from the older men…the villagers leapt into the air, some landing on the hard ground on one knee, while the younger and stronger warriors turned somersaults and hit the dust with bare backs … The men rolled their fingers into fists, moved them in half circles, this way and that way, and haibo! ... (13)

Great excitement marks the celebration of the birth of a baby and the coming of the rains because thunder was rumbling and lightning was flashing in the background, a thrill which can be extended to the optimism and excitement for the celebration of independence in South Africa. It can be compared to celebrations in the streets of Cape Town and Johannesburg when Mandela was released from prison. The falling of the rain signals the day when the elections took place.
and everyone could now be seen as a new South African. In the story, those who were once Dlambili and Masilela had now become one people, the people of Mabhoko. Similarly those who were once designated by complexion - black, white, colored and Indian - were one people in the new South Africa, identified by their land, and not color. The burying of the umbilical cord in the earth is significant in showing that for one to claim to be a South African one needs to be born in South Africa.

Certainly there was much to celebrate after the gaining of independence in South Africa. Speeches were given, songs were sung, ceremonies were held and rituals were performed to show happiness about the new dispensation. But the people of Mabhoko, just like the South Africans, were soon to realize that their happiness was to be short lived. The rain, for which they were anxiously waiting, came and destroyed fields, uprooted trees, drowned animals and caused floods. For the South Africans, the euphoria of independence soon dissipated to expose salient issues of race, the question of how people are supposed to define themselves now that apartheid was over: the harsh realities of life after apartheid that revealed that nothing much had changed after all. It was the hope of the majority that independence would guarantee them happiness, but unfortunately, independence did not necessarily mean power, security, equality and prosperity for all; the wide-spread feeling that flag independence had failed to deliver genuine liberation was disillusioning to the people (Nugent: 8). Most people were disenchanted because there was not enough that was new about the ‘new’ South Africa - as is depicted in Essop’s ‘The Silk Scarf’ below.

Masilela’s representation of South Africa is very allegorical, a direct opposite of Bransby’s and Gordimer’s depictions, which are almost literal. In Bransby’s ‘A Reflection of Self’, Victor wakes up elated and excited to the break of dawn; the dawn of independence. He wakes up to his father saying: “Welcome, son of mine, to the New South Africa!” (117). His excitement for the new South Africa can be paralleled to the young men and women in the story above. The whole family was ecstatic about the birth of a new nation and the fact that apartheid has now been consigned to history. Victor remembers the events on television, the night before, when the old South African flag was replaced with a new flag.
His parents reminisce about the past, talking about their adventures and misadventures of protesting against apartheid. These stories make Victor also yearn for those days long gone. He had wanted to be part of the protests too. Hence he feels cheated at not having had the opportunity. Victor had wanted to be part of those who marched with placards and defaced ‘Whites Only’ signs on toilets and benches. He had thought about these things often and he believed, had he been older, he would have done a better job than his parents: going beyond the destruction of the petty structures of apartheid. He had envisioned himself being a great revolutionary, martyr and liberator of the oppressed.

He is sent by his mother, after their ten o’clock coffee, to the café to buy rolls for their lunch. It was his first time outside that day and he could feel a change in everything. He desires to walk up to the first person he sees, who is a black man, and call him brother, but he does not. Outside the café he wanted to join a group of people, presumably black, who were standing outside speaking in Zulu, but again he does not. Instead he dutifully goes about shopping for the rolls. He is overjoyed that everyone had an equal stake in the country now that apartheid was over. He is, however, oblivious of his progress to the till to pay for the rolls. His speedy progress is propelled by the recognition between him and the Greek-Portuguese shopkeeper, who smiles at him. After handing over the rolls and the money his progress is halted, as he realizes what it means to have moved to the front of the queue, past all the waiting black bodies in front of him. He found himself caught between a rock and a hard place, and it was all but damning for him to see the wordless reproaches exchanged by the black people he had just overtaken in the queue. He could not stand being in their midst, so he pushed his way out. This white guilt features largely in the story, which ultimately reveals the shortcomings of liberalism.

In the atmosphere of suspense after the official end of hostilities, identities can seldom be taken for granted. Victor, the protagonist in the story, whose name seems to mock him, thought he had found a true identity now that he was in a new South Africa, but is forced to reflect again on his new-found identity. It seems Victor has been unwittingly masquerading as a ‘new’ South African when in fact he is not. He is compelled to re-examine his identity as a ‘new’ South African in the light of the situation in which he finds himself.
The reader is left to wonder what Victor found in his reflection of self. Does he get to realize that apartheid did not vanish immediately with the announcement of its official ending? Victor knew that he could not just walk up to a black person the day after independence and call him brother (121) and neither could he easily walk up to group talking in Zulu and say: ‘I’m South African now! So are you! We’re real at last!’ (121); Victor himself cannot even speak Zulu. The structures of apartheid were still apparent and had been ingrained in all institutions and everything South African. As much as he knew that independence gave him and others like him (whites), a reprieve, ‘It’s like forgiveness…’ (119), he realized that it is not only guilt he has to deal with, but his lingering assumption of racial superiority. A similar sense of innate superiority plagues another white character in Wilson’s ‘The Twelve Chitenges’ (see Chapter Three). Victor still has a long way to go until he can overcome his sense of racial superiority. He hesitates to mingle with the blacks because, like his father, he inherited the guilt of his forefathers: the guilt of apartheid. He was obviously not directly to blame, but he and his parents were unfortunately the direct descendants of the oppressors, marked indelibly by the color of their skin.

But because Victor’s parents were white and had fought together with the oppressed against the oppressors, their actions showed that identities were already changing. The issue of identity no longer inhabited the space that it was originally given: for example, the assumption that white people shared the same identity because they are of the same race, or that black people shared the same interests because of the color of their skin. Such thinking is shown in the story ‘The Divine One’ (see below). The siblings in Divine’s family found themselves relating to each other because of the color of their skin: the girls on one side because they could pass as white, and the boys on the other side because of their ‘kroes’ hair. Continuing to look at the issue of identity in this light will not only prove problematic but would be a misreading of contemporary society. It is now much harder to cleave to the identities that were created during colonialism because they no longer dictate who we are now, because things have changed. How will humanity hope for a better future if such issues are not addressed? Although starting with hope, this story contains within it seeds of disillusionment. The young protagonist in ‘A Reflection of Self’, realized that it was not going to be that easy to be a ‘new’ South African because the lowering of one flag and the lifting of another could not have easily erased the problems caused by apartheid.
During colonialism, the colonized had been forced to identify with a certain type of description of self so as to perpetuate colonialism. The oppression and exploitation of the colonized had depended on the binarisms that were established, typified by the master-servant relationship, as portrayed in Doris Lessing’s *The Grass Is Singing* (1973). The way these separate identities had been implemented should have indicated how they were going to be difficult to eradicate. The apartheid regime had been notorious for its implementation of policies of segregation, such as the Population Registration Act, Mixed Amenities Act, Group Areas Act and the Bantustans. Therefore, it was naïve for the protagonist to think that it was a matter of going up to the ‘black man, shak[ing] his hand, call[ing] him brother’ and saying, ‘I’m South African now! So are you! We’re real at last!’ (121). When new identities are being made, they have to go through negotiation and renegotiation before they are accepted or rejected, just like the political discussions leading to the formation of a post-apartheid South Africa.

One also wonders whether if Victor realized this, he would be able to act upon that knowledge, bearing in mind that he seemed unaware of the different identities created by apartheid. He did not know if the man at the till was Greek, or Portuguese (121). The phrase ‘something like that’ which follows could mean that the shopkeeper could have been Indian, but that this would not have made a difference to Victor because he is not fully aware of people around him.

Gordimer’s story also depicts a typical African country’s transition from a colony to an independent state, beginning with hope immediately followed by disillusionment. It traces the life of a young black boy, Sinclair Zwedu, from his youth as a post office messenger in a farmer’s town, to being General Giant, a liberator, and then finally a remnant of a former liberation fighter who is disillusioned to find that he has no place in the country.

Though it was written much earlier (in the 1970s), Gordimer’s story offers a prediction of either South Africa or Zimbabwe during and after colonialism, or any other former African colony for that matter. General Giant, like the revolutionary in Huggins’s ‘The Revolutionary: A Brief Encounter’ (Chapter Three), also suffers from neglect by the nation as a former liberation hero. The Youth Group of National Independence in the story could easily be representative of the parties that were also being formed in Zimbabwe during the 1970s to fight against colonialism,
for example ZIPRA and ZANLA forces. Zimbabweans, just like South Africans, and many other Africans from countries like Mozambique and Angola, also escaped across the borders to receive military training. Zimbabweans went to train for military combat in Mozambique at Chimoio and Nyadzonia, whilst South Africans went to Zimbabwe and other neighboring countries.

The interference from modern Western neo-colonialists - the British lawyers and African experts from America - reminds one of the ‘Western voices from above’ shown in Chihota’s “Shipwreck” (Chapter Three) that ‘swished and swashed’ their commands to the captain of the ship, whilst giving the ship directions to the twenty-first century. Professor Makapela in Ndlela’s story also comes to mind.

The battles at the war front led by General Giant, as in a future South Africa during apartheid, resulted in Peace Talks which General Giant had to attend at the behest of the future Prime Minister. He was there more as a reminder of what would happen if peace was not made than as a participant in the discussions. In exile, General Giant attended important meetings in foreign capitals now and again, with the Organization of African Unity and the United Nations, but he only made appearances at and no contributions to these meetings. He would enjoy the pleasures of the capital - alcohol and women - whilst waiting to go back to Africa to his headquarters in the bush. Gordimer does not glorify General Giant’s character as a hero in the way that guerillas used to be romanticized in early fiction stories such as Solomon Mutsvairo’s Mapondera: Soldier of Zimbabwe (1978). In re-imagining the guerillas, she depicts them as ordinary humans - according to Sachs’s observations - with their vices and follies. General Giant was occupied with the night life in clubs, at parties with Arabs, in cinemas, museums and making love to ‘a not so young’ (264) Jamaican singer who taught him to drink Scotch whiskey.

After the proceedings of the conference, in a discussion held with British lawyers and African experts from American universities, the future Prime Minister is told to give General Giant a safer portfolio after independence, like Minister of Sport and Recreation. This appointment is a sinecure and shows the stranglehold that Western imperialism still has on its colonies. As Kwame Nkrumah, one of the most important African nationalist leaders, said:
Every African state is in theory independent and has all the outward trappings of international sovereignty. In reality its economic system and thus political policy is directed from outside. (cited in Buthelezi and Le Roux, 2002: 247)

The Prime Minister follows the ‘advice’, an early sign of nationalism evaporating.

After independence he is featured a number of times with the Prime Minister and in his own capacity as Sport and Recreation Minister. His post did not require him to make many speeches, but when he did, he embarrassed his government by giving opinions that contradicted government policy. Nevertheless, because of his conviviality he was targeted by overseas journalists who recorded and printed his comments which the local press could not print. For instance on one occasion,

He said that the defense of the country might have been put in the hands of neo-colonialists who had been the country’s enemies during the war and he was powerless to do anything about that. But he would take the law in his own hands to protect the National Independence Party’s principles of a people’s democracy … Hadn’t he fought, hadn’t the brothers spilled their blood to get rid of the old laws and the bosses, that made them nothing? Hadn’t they fought for new laws under which they would be men? He would shed blood rather than see the party betrayed in the name of so-called rational alliances and national unity. (268)

International advisers of Government thought the speech was best ignored. Members of Parliament and cabinet wanted the Prime Minister to get rid of Zwedu. The Prime Minister was angry with his cabinet members and his friend for the inconvenience he caused. So he opts to reprimand Zwedu to stop drinking and giving interviews. However, the Prime Minister is guilt-ridden because he knows he is partly to blame for what Zwedu and the country have become, because he has been ensnared in the web of Western influence.

This story illustrates how the social, political and economic structures established during colonial rule continued to inflect the cultural, political and economic life of post-colonial nation states. The Prime Minister adheres to the advice from the British lawyers and African experts from American universities. His life in exile and interaction with the instigators or colonialism have diluted his nationalist consciousness. Like earlier anti-colonial intellectuals such as Frantz Fanon
Spivak emphasizes how anti-colonial nationalism assumed a distinctively bourgeois character, and was thus perceived by many to reproduce the social and political inequalities predominant under colonial rule (Morton and Spivak, 2003: 28). Just like a bourgeois the Prime Minister wore a ‘dark suit whose close weave was midnight blue in the light’ (262), as compared to the ‘bush outfit…put together by men who lived less like men …’ (263) that General Giant wore to his first meeting abroad in London. Inevitably, as General Giant rose in command, his outfit elaborated into a ‘combat uniform befitting his style, title and achievement’ (263). In no time, soon after independence General Giant looked very handsome and bourgeois in a pin-stripe flannel cabinet minister’s suit that the Jamaican Singer had ordered at his request, and brought from London (269). Whilst in the background his wife and children - wallowing in abject poverty in the slums of the ghetto - stand in stark contrast to his affluence. More of this materialistic behavior will be seen in Essop’s ‘The Silk Scarf’.

Getting rid of Zwedu did not prove too difficult as the Prime Minister dropped him in the reshuffle. Simultaneously, his Jamaican singer left him, and then he came to realize that he is estranged from his children and his wife to whom he never returned after independence. ‘[H]is way of life did not recover; could not recover … and the black Government did not yet exist’ (269). The story ends with the country still depicted as – to borrow Charles Mungoshi’s coinage - ‘waiting still’, for liberation from colonialism. The country’s political and trade missions were still allied to the old white Government’s partners in the West. The former Chief-of-Staff of the white army was retained as chief military adviser to the Defense Ministry. Blacks still felt confined in post-apartheid South Africa, as compared to whites, which is reflected in the behavior of the children at the airport: “Black children were spores attached to maternal skirts. White children ran back and forth to the bar counter, buying crisps and peanuts” (270).

We last see Sinclair ‘General Giant’ Zwedu not so much as an antithesis of what he was - he still enjoyed frolicking with women - but definitely a telling example of many former liberation fighters left disillusioned with the country that they fought for and which ignored them after independence, just like Munashe in Kanengoni’s Echoing Silences (1997).
The emergence of ‘anti-colonial’ and ‘independent’ nation states after colonialism is frequently accompanied by the desire to forget the colonial past. This ‘will-to-forget’ takes a number of historical forms, and is impelled by a number of political motivations. Principally, postcolonial amnesia is symptomatic of the urge for historical self-invention or the need to make a new start – to erase painful memories of colonial subordination (Gandhi: 8). The insistence that General Giant drop his name ‘Sinclair’ because it was the name of the farmer his parents worked for is one such example of desiring to forget the past. It was a slave name and a reminder of the painful years of colonization. But the writer Chris van Wyk is of the persuasion that South Africans still need such reminders. While apartheid did end in 1994, its effects will be felt for many years to come, and the memory of it will not easily disappear from the country’s consciousness; Van Wyk certainly hopes it never does (2003: 8) and this is probably in the hope that the history of apartheid would not be repeated. Gordimer’s story bears prophetic resemblance to a more recent South Africa, a caution about what a victorious future holds.

One cannot discuss South Africa without including the issue of mass action because it played an important role in the struggle for liberation in South Africa. Protest was one of the major themes in the apartheid era and a great many mass action protests and violent black-on-black struggles were carried out during the transition period during the 1990s. Escalating protests in the townships threatened to destabilize the negotiation processes that led to the Election Day. Ironically, it is actually the numerous protests that were being carried out that propelled the negotiations to move faster and succeed because they hinted at the possibilities of untold bloodshed to follow if the negotiations were not fruitful. Mass action has played a significant role in the history of South Africa and it still does. The frequent mobilization of people to protest against injustice has been a familiar sight, and it has become a signature of South Africans to ‘toyi-toyi’. Not only is it a signature peculiar to South Africans who participated in the struggle, but an identity that brings together the majority of the South Africans who were oppressed. Mass action fostered hope amongst the people that together they could build a better future for South Africa, similarly to how the mobilization of Zimbabweans during the liberation struggle brought hope amongst the people.
Mathiane’s ‘The Matric Ball’ in *Identities* takes a look at one such fictional incident of unity brought about by a young girl’s protest against her parents. The girl, who is not named, carries out a protest against her parents for not allowing her to go for the matric ball. She is militant in her protest to the extent that she carries a banner which reads: ‘My parents won’t let me go to the matric ball’ (101). Passersby stop to look at her and continue on their way; even the girl’s mother ‘peeps through the window, smiles and shakes her head’ (101). Her protest, though passionate, is not threatening at all until she is ‘accosted by a youth’ (101) who suggests that ‘what they need is something more than a picket’ (101).

What happens next is an unfolding of a dramatic picketing cum protest turning into a violent revolt. The youth brings with him a group of boys ‘chanting the current freedom theme…Siyayinyova oh Siyayinyova’ (102), meaning ‘we are doing it by force’. The protest led by the youth has all the characteristics of ‘hell breaking loose’; leading one to imagine a mob with stone-throwing, petrol-bombing recalcitrant youths. What was once a tranquil picket has now turned into a nightmare both for the girl and her parents. The boys also wave their banners which say: ‘Down with irresponsible uncaring parents’; ‘Release her or we will burn your house’; ‘Our parents are P W Bothas’; ‘Away with tyranny’ (101).

It is no wonder that soon a wild-looking mob has gathered and is threatening to break down the gate in the name of justice. This was a tendency in the turbulent times of struggle and unrest in the ‘old’ South Africa. Protests carried out by South Africans in their fight for justice often started off peacefully, like the one in the story. But there are historical examples of protests that spun out of control.

Arguably, escalation of protests was a desired strategy at times. It showed the brutality of the regime, increased defiance or sympathy. It would not come as a surprise that the youngsters in the story romanticized these protests, only imagining the fun in toyi-toying, singing, chanting and sloganeering, not giving a second thought to the horrors that could result. This is probably why the elderly adults shook their heads as they passed the girl. Even her mother once in a while peeps through the window to watch her daughter’s protesting antics. Fortunately, the young
rioters in the story disperse when they hear that ‘Nankamahippo’, the riot police, are coming before the worst is realized.

The story takes a slightly whimsical look at the past to reveal the violence and mayhem caused by improperly controlled and poorly organized protests, (though ‘control’ and ‘order’ were equally dependent on police response). What seems like comedy in the story could actually be ridicule of the practice of mass action by the writer. It comically depicts how the frivolous protest by a young girl against her parents for not allowing her to go to a matric ball spirals out of control, showing how South Africans invested a lot of hope in protests. It is possible that Mathiane is attempting to subvert the concept of mass action; firstly, by suggesting that it is necessarily violent, secondly, by suggesting that its participants are frivolous and trivial. Nevertheless, the story also draws on South Africa’s struggle history, showing how protest amongst South Africans was almost instinct, that South Africans are revealed as people who know their rights, even at a very young age. It is worth noting that the girl’s protest does not result in damage to property or any person. This humorous story reminds one of the unsavory sides of protests that occurred during the struggle. Nonetheless, the story is wrapped up neatly and actually has a happy ending. Perhaps there is hope for the future South Africa to have protests that start and end peacefully and possibly hope that after apartheid people know their rights and what they fought for.

One expects that what people fought and struggled against came from a common desire to express hatred of apartheid, almost as if it was a common ‘black’ anti-apartheid feeling. There are exceptions and a woman called Divine describes her childhood during apartheid, then takes it to the present day in Smuts’s story ‘The Divine One’. She begins by saying: “Now that apartheid is over and the New South Africa is here to stay, I, Divine, can look from the present back over the past and have a good laugh” (168).

She grew up in a family of ‘three boys and five girls’ (168). Their family did not live in abject poverty like other families, but they could have done with better housing and opportunities. She says that ‘the house was very crowded’ (168); all the girls shared one room and the boys shared another. This, however, is not what gives significance to this story. After all, the issue of poverty in the ‘old’ South Africa was a common phenomenon especially amongst (those identified as)
blacks. It was not only a South African phenomenon, but a case in point in many former African colonies. This story reminds one of Happy Sindane’s story – of a black person trying to pass as white - mentioned earlier in the introduction. They are similar in that Divine also grew up in a family of mixed racial identity. She says:

Ma was very fair with straight hair. She could pass for white.
Daddy was very dark with kroes hair. He looked like a native.
Children in the neighborhood used to call us Black & White whisky. (169)

Divine knew life under the oppressive apartheid regime and she knew from her childhood experiences that she, like Happy, wanted to integrate into the white world. Divine wanted to be white.

Psychological research by Erik Erikson shows that awareness of race and the significance of racial difference often begins in early childhood. Divine’s interaction with the other children from different racial and ethnic backgrounds in their neighborhood, in a society that treated race as a means of distinguishing groups and individuals, probably forced her to develop a sense of racial identities early in her life. The psychologists say that in adolescence, the awareness of race and its implications for individual identity become more salient. For many young men and women of color, racial identity development is affected by some factors that influence individual identity development in general (cited in Noguera, 2003: 2). In the case of Divine, these are her hopes, dreams and desires for socio-political transformation and individual gain.

In her pursuit of her white identity, Divine decided to break all ties with her family because in order to pass as white she did not need her ‘Boesman’ (171) brothers identifying her as a child of mixed race. Her sisters and her felt embarrassed and irritated one Christmas when their mother invited them for a family lunch where ‘[they] had to be nice to [those] funny women they married and all the children they had’ (172). Without links to her family she ‘could move as a white person’ (176). So when Divine married Terry, she ‘changed her job and started working as a white person, with a white husband, living in a white area’ (176). This was so with her sisters Mary and Allison as well. Divine exhibits the same attitude of materialism as Phindi in
Sepamla’s story and as mentioned before, it is typical of the ‘have nots’ like Divine to want material comforts.

There is no doubt that in choosing to identify with her whiteness over her blackness, Divine and her sisters managed to live like white people, because then whiteness came with privileges such as better housing and better business opportunities, and still does even after apartheid. The story straddles both the apartheid and the post-apartheid eras.

Sometimes we found ourselves staying next to prominent Nats and we had evenings at their places and even voted for them. Post ninety-four we stayed next to prominent ANC officials and wined and dined with them and voted for them in the local elections. It was divine. (179)

From the way Divine describes it - the switch from one party to the next – her morality leaves a lot to be desired. It seems as though nothing much changed with the coming of the new dispensation, yet the transition of political power was actually supposed to be a turning point for the majority of South Africans. It seems as if it was a non-event for Divine because she was not part of the majority but someone trying to construct her own identity and prosper. Her hopes were pinned on individual concerns, instead of the agenda of the majority who wanted to be free from the claustrophobic nature of apartheid. The majority of South Africans, on the other hand, are exhilarated by the turn of events, probably because they have their hopes pinned on a common desire that independence would liberate and create one identity for the people of South Africa. Their joy can be paralleled to the ecstatic pleasure in dances of the Mabhoko tribe in Masilela’s story. Divine, on the other hand, says, ‘apartheid meant nothing to me’ (181), a very disconcerting denial considering that very few black South Africans can say this. Divine proves herself to be a confused girl with an identity crisis, who is trying to make ends meet. As a result nothing much changed for her: Terry and she kept buying and selling houses, ‘lots of people’ (179) were still staying in the townships and those who were rich before were still rich and were getting richer, for example Terry’s rich brother.

It comes as no surprise that Divine is not roused into consciousness immediately now that apartheid has ended; as Memmi would say, “the colonized lives for a long time before we see that
really new man” (67). Even with independence, Divine still wanted to be white. She even went as far as finding a real white man who actually accepts who she is more than Divine herself does. She says:

He’s fascinated by his blonde African woman, as he calls me …
He loves my flat nose and my high cheek bones. He’s divine. He always wanted an African woman, he says. Had no idea that African women could be fair and blonde and have African features as well, like me. He adores me. My natural features have finally paid off. (181)

Divine failed to appreciate her identity as a light-skinned African woman because she grew up stifled by the apartheid regime; thus she never took time to accept her essential identity as a colored African. The same can be said about Happy Sindane. Nevertheless, Divine was given an opportunity to enjoy her Africanness, not by the coming into power of the black government, but by the adoration of her husband. She has an exotic appeal for her white husband who is not really interested in African people, considering that Divine is not too black for him. However, for the majority of the South Africans the demise of apartheid brought about freedom of association. People could associate freely not only with others from different races, but with themselves, negotiating and re-negotiating their identities in the New South Africa.

At the end of the story, Divine’s ‘new’ consciousness with regards to her identity is slowly awakening. She is considering claiming her African heritage by correcting her family name from the Scottish sounding ‘Mackenna’ (181) to the original Sotho/Tswana sounding ‘Makene’ (181). She even begins to ‘wonder why [they] used to want to be so white or like fair coloreds’ (181). Fortunately for Divine, she managed to find her true self to a point where she could say: ‘Ah, it’s good now to look like me…I can be myself, Divine’ (181). Even though Divine ends up having a renewed sense of her identity, one can not shake off the feeling that she has a long way to go to get to the point of fully appreciating her identity because she says: ‘But I like what’s going on now. It’s time for opportunity, if you got the know-how, like me’ (181). This sounds very much like opportunism directed at gaining material wealth from the government programmes established after apartheid to give black people opportunities. The story seems to end on a hopeful note, but disillusionment is very much evident: is this all the ‘new’ South Africa has resulted in?
After apartheid the government launched a great many programmes to try and redress the inequalities of apartheid, by giving the previously disadvantaged groups opportunities previously not available to them, for example, freedom of expression, material things, employment opportunities and education. The following stories - ‘Housekeeping’, ‘Ike and Phindi’, ‘A New Dispensation’ and ‘A Question of Identity’ - address these issues, respectively.

Oosthuizen’s ‘Housekeeping’ explores the issue of searching for one’s sexual identity. Her main character Una seems to be suffering from a crisis of sexual identity and is freed to explore alternative sexual preferences with her daughter’s teacher and girl-friend, Asher. It deals with the issue of a very intimate identity, one that could not have been easily expressed under the sexually repressive laws of apartheid and within an ‘ordinary’ family context. It centers on the ordinary lives of Una’s family. It follows up on the idea I expressed at the end of the analysis of ‘The Divine One’, that after apartheid people were now free to even associate with themselves. Oosthuizen captures the predicament that Una and her family find themselves in because of their personal sexual preferences.

The first statement of the story, describing the organization of the buildings that make up Una and Paul’s home, is a pointer to the kind of relationship that husband and wife have as well as the claustrophobic nature of Una’s life. Una says:

I have fashioned this house so it fits my life as a snug as a glove. Paul knows this. He has turned the garage into his study. Because the house is on such a small plot, it’s close by, but not quite attached. (114)

Her relationship with her husband is ‘not quite attached’ either. ‘The farm’, where Una grew up, ‘was in a lonely, cold part of the eastern Free State …’ (116). It was not at all supportive for a girl growing up trying to discover her sexuality. She says, ‘I was discovering the erotic pleasure of my own sexuality’ (117). Was she masturbating? Probably so, and perhaps that is why ‘[her] father viewed [her] with compassion as if [she] were in the grip of a serious illness’ (117). So he decided to send her to university, and there, like an explorer, she explores and discovers her sexual character (and potency).
When she brought Bob home to meet her father, her father fell for him ‘hook, line and sinker’ and immediately encouraged his daughter to ‘[m]arry him’ (117). He must have been relieved that his daughter’s ‘illness’ had found a cure. One might expect Una’s father not to get along with Bob because of the history of conflict between the English and Afrikaner. However, the father’s concern for her ‘predicament’ far surpassed their different ethnic identities. It was sufficient that Bob was a man and he was with Una. Therefore, when Una introduced Bob to her father ‘they immediately got on in spite of Bob’s Englishness’ (117). The way the historic barriers of race are smoothly transcended here shows hope that it might be easier than most South Africans think or a dodgy alliance born of desire to make things proceed the way they think they should.

According to Una, it was because of flattery and uncertainty that she married Bob and not because she felt that they were in love. This probably explains why her marriage to Bob did not last. The other reason could be that Una was still going through a crisis of sexual identity, what with having grown up isolated, amongst mountains and sheep. Nevertheless, she married again, to Paul, and they had a son, Hans. From her previous marriage with Bob she had Greta. In as much as Una classified her house as separate from Paul’s garage she also grouped her family according to gender: ‘Hans and Paul, Greta and Una…these are the bonds that keep us firm’ (117).

Una is worried that ‘we have no rituals any more for daughters. After which we can say, “Go my daughter, you are a woman. The freedom is yours, take it”’ (121). They do not practice initiation ceremonies such as the Xhosa and other African peoples, in which young girls are ushered into the world of womanhood in preparation for marriage. Implicitly, white communities lack many traditions connecting them to their roots, in contrast to African communities as in Masilela’s story; thus identity constructions seem less hopeful for them in the new South Africa.

Nevertheless, Una yearns for her daughter to have a heterosexual life, but does not want to force her to choose. She would rather have her find her own sexual identity. As for Hans, she understands her son’s predicament, and instead of yelling at him for looking ridiculous in a dress, she sympathizes with him and offers to help him with the make-up he has put on. She says: ‘You’ve put on too much. We’ll have to get some of it off first’ (124). She deals with her son’s
transvestite tendencies with the compassion of a mother and the empathy of a person who is herself going through a sexual identity crisis. Her sob is partly surprise as well as acceptance of what her son will probably turn out to be - gay or transvestite. As of this day she does not force her son to go out on excursions with Paul. Una’s sexual preference does not make her less of a mother; she is able to comfort her children in time of need. Una could be representative of those who support and Paul those who do not. But one needs to bear in mind that Paul is passive about the predicament he finds himself in. He does not divorce Una or do anything so dramatic, he simply moves out of their bedroom into their daughter’s room. This could be a hopeful sign to show that he is willing to work things out or possibly even an indicator too that with time gays and lesbians in South Africa will become accepted: some people will support, others oppose, and yet others will not seem to care. Una’s story reveals possibilities for freedoms coursing beneath the country’s troubled passage to democracy. It offers visions of hope and space to reconstruct new identities more of which are recorded in Mark Gevisser and Edwin Cameron’s book, *Defiant Desire: Gay and Lesbian Lives in South Africa* (1995), which showed that lesbian and gay identities were already challenging the people to build a new society that respects and cherishes all of its citizens during the political transition.

The story of Ike and Phindi (by Sepamla) tells of a couple being torn apart by a wife’s struggle to identify with a certain class in society and a husband’s failure to get over his family’s identification with poverty. It also engages with the harsh, though ordinary, realities of married life between Ike and Phindi. It thus provides an example of writing about the ordinary as Ndebele and Sachs proposed. Their marriage hangs precariously on the verge of divorce because of their different backgrounds. Phindi is disappointed with her life ten years after she has been married to Ike. One day, standing over her coal stove in the kitchen, she felt lonely – Ike was not yet home – and she felt like a failure because they were still living in the locations and not in the suburbs. When she started thinking, ‘there was no mistaking the dark mood of Phindi … She would remain sulky till bedtime’ (54).

She dreamed that they would have built a house on a plot near Magalagase and be living large like her family, which is ‘one of those sinfully rich black’ (53) families. ‘Trouble with her was that she wanted everything she had known in a twelve roomed house to be in four-room. She
complained of slow progress’ (54). Phindi comes from an aspirant middle-class family, where modern conveniences like washing machines and television sets are regarded as badges of pride, proof that one has achieved a sufficiently high social standing. Ike, on the other hand, grew up poor. People in Wattville location insinuated that Ike ‘married Nyawuza’s money … The most mischievous never stopped to say how Ike was as thin as the ‘I’ in his name …’ (53).

The story shows how conventional romantic stereotypes of love – launched here by a splash wedding between Ike and Phindi – are quickly checked by class identities that drive a deep wedge between bride and groom. Conflict between husband and wife can be extended to a broader type of obstacle of realizing hopes for unity that transcends barriers in the ‘new’ South Africa. Their mismatched expectations turn their marriage sour, and Ike begins to feel less of a man because of Phindi’s nagging. At first Ike ignores Phindi, but later he seeks refuge in drinking “the waters of immortality”. Ike begins drinking and coming home late and the Saturday midday parcels of meat and groceries become a thing of the past. Their once calm home turns into a house of violence when Ike begins to use Phindi as a punching bag to let out his frustrations at failing to provide for his wife. He feels his manhood threatened, so he yells: ‘Am I a cock or a hen?’ (55), and he lands a blow that grazes the side of Phindi’s head, which sends her fleeing for her home.

Ike show signs of a man who feels insecure about his position in the household; therefore, he relies on roles to distinguish between ‘the man’ and ‘the woman’ of the house. A sure traditional way of imposing these roles is to beat the woman senseless. Okonkwo in Things Fall Apart (1992) did it, and this kind of domination has been in practice since long before that. When the white man came, he also used this technique to belittle a man in front of people so as to show who is boss. Baas Manyepo in Bones (1988) did it to his farm laborers and even gave them jobs that were traditionally known to be for women; his cook was a man called ‘Marume’, which ironically means ‘a man’. It is no wonder that gender issues are a preoccupation of newly independent countries. After having their masculinity usurped by being placed in the position of the ‘weaker sex’, they felt a reaffirmation of these roles was necessary. This is probably why Ike beats Phindi and also why in Miriam Tlali’s story ‘Letitia’s Decision’ (in At the Rendezvous of victory and Other Stories) Letitia is also beaten up by her husband. Probably, this indicates that
there is little hope towards transcending these gender roles, therefore, forcing Ike and Phindi to just muddle on as best they can.

What follows next is a series of fights that always send Phindi back to her parents’ home where she agrees to return to Ike because each time he promises to have turned-over a new leaf. But more importantly for Phindi, he would have bought one such modern convenience, such as a TV, a washing machine or a present like the brooch, to impress her. And each time these gifts did not fail to have the intended impact on Phindi. Phindi exposes the mentality of materialism that gripped a great many in the new South Africa. It shows the upwardly mobile aspirations of the previously disempowered group, to have those possessions which would identify them with high class living.

Ike’s brooding alone in the house finally made him realize that he wanted his wife home with him regardless of what his drinking buddies told him. He goes on a final mission to win his wife over with the help of a relative. As could be predicted, Phindi agrees to go back home with Ike after receiving a gift. However, notwithstanding Phindi’s love for material things, there truly is a bond stronger than TVs and washing machines that has kept Ike and Phindi married for ten years, and this bond is called love. Contrary to the location gossip, Ike married Phindi because he loved her and in spite of Phindi’s weakness for ‘all that glitters and hums’, she loves Ike because she has stayed with him for ten years even without the TV or washing machine. They manage to resolve their differences of background when they finally open up and confess to each other. Their little conversation about their backgrounds ‘was like a cleansing hand’ (61) and now, “Ike and Phindi live fairly happily together. They are still in Wattville. They fight sometimes but mostly they are happy to be together after all the tribulations of married life” (61).

Considering that Sepamla was a successful protest writer during apartheid, one might be tempted to view this story as a departure from the militant tone of his earlier works. But it does contain a certain socio-political awareness, whereby Ike and Phindi’s conflicts can be extended to the class identities bedeviling the ‘new’ South Africa. This is the very thing that Ndebele and Sachs were calling for; a rediscovery of the ordinary, a simple story about the endurance of love conquering all odds. Granted, it also raises the important issue of gender that was (and still is) prevalent in
the early days of the new South Africa, but it beautifully captures the ordinary problems that a married couple goes through, problems concerning money, future prospects, dealing with in-laws, nosy neighbors and a gossiping community. It shows that human relations count for more than material things. As Ike says, ‘Love doesn’t die’ (59). Amidst the disillusionment of the post-apartheid era, Sepamla’s story is an optimistic story that makes one keep hoping, encompassing disillusionment with hope.

Braude in ‘A New Dispensation’ explores the gender relations between people in work situations and in the larger context of social interaction brought about by shifts in power. It is disconcerting to know that in the ‘prestigious suburb of Killarney’ (86), there were more women than male residents, yet they failed to support the plight of the female workers who worked for them in their apartments. How then can the voice of the downtrodden woman be heard above apartheid, racism, unemployment, poverty and crime? Working class women, though not all, have been marginalized in a society that is preoccupied with solving other problems which are prioritized above the problems of women. It is disturbing to realize that those ‘whose widows husbands…had left them with a solid income’ (86) were not moved by the plight of their fellow women who were in their employment.

The contrasts which abound between the lifestyles of the female residents and their workers serve to show differences in social class. Though they are all recognized as women, their identities become different because their concerns are poles apart. While the widows fill ‘their time with shopping and having their hair done, playing bridge and doing voluntary charitable work’ (86) and virtually doing nothing else, Caroline, one of the chars, is presented as the veritable ‘beast or burden’, who sweats in labor: to give birth and earn a living cleaning floors.

Of the many widows who live at Heavenly Heights, a place ‘heavenly’ only for a select few, it is only Zipporah Feigel who responds with action to the plight of the chars. She appoints herself as the voice for the voiceless. One might be persuaded to think that Zipporah was only helping Caroline to make her own life easier, simply because she did not want to be ‘encumbered with that job’ (88) of cleaning. However, Zipporah is described as an ‘affluent owner of a flat in a prestigious building’ (95), so she could have avoided the hullabaloo between tenants and workers
by employing Caroline in a private capacity, just as Dr James had Violet. She did not have to support Caroline, considering there were other options available to the tenants to ensure that their homes remained clean. But it was more than just a fight for her favorite worker; it was for a whole marginalized community of domestic workers. She truly shows a spirit of sisterhood and togetherness with her marginalized female domestic worker. This is quite remarkable considering the racial divide that separates them. The situation made her uneasy:

Zipporah slept fitfully, waking in the morning with pains all over her body, as though she had been beaten. What to do? What responsibility was it of hers? But how could she possibly let Caroline go? She felt the urge to fight stir in her. (89)

She says: ‘… I’m a woman and want to protect the women who work here’ (95). She is compassionate about Caroline’s predicament because she is aware that if Caroline loses her job, she is not qualified for anything else and will have to face the problem of taking care and providing for her children without a job. Zipporah truly shows an exceptional humane vision of unity in the ‘new’ South Africa, transcending barriers that seem very much in place in some of the other stories, like Bransby’s ‘A Reflection of Self’.

Not coincidentally, the caretaker who gives notice to Caroline is male. Neither is it by chance that Dr James, who instigated the char’s dismissal in the first place, is also male. Furthermore, the chairman who manages the building is also a man, and so is the ‘nondescript third’ (89) in the Board of Trustees. These men serve to show that women are not only exploited for their labor, because more broadly they represent the patriarchal system which represses and subjugates women. It is alarming to realize that in a building where the majority of tenants are women those elected onto the Board of Trustees are all men. This reflects a typical patriarchal society. Women have suffered under apartheid, racism and patriarchy, even under other powerful women, to such an extent that they become the quintessential ‘beasts of burden’. A more cruel side of patriarchy is seen in Sepamla’s ‘Ike and Phindi’ and an even more evil side in Nyamubaya’s story ‘That Special Place’ (Chapter Three). Nonetheless, these domestic workers are the marginalized community of the hopeless and voiceless women, embodied by Caroline and the other chars. It is therefore necessary for them to have a voice through Zipporah, in order to be heard above the din made by all the other ills bedeviling society.
What Zipporah did on behalf of Caroline was no mean task; it was brave of her to stand up for Caroline, yet she was also a woman. Fortunately for Zipporah, she was not a worker; hence she had an upper hand when it came to dealing with the Trustees. Her being a widow probably symbolizes that she was much less subject to patriarchy, and being a Jew made her a formidable opponent familiar with religious persecution, which probably fostered the fighting spirit that made her strong and determined. There is no doubt that she becomes Caroline’s heroine. Zipporah’s impact on Caroline’s life makes Caroline aspire to do more for herself. She says: ‘I want to get different work. I don’t want to spend the rest of my life cleaning floors. I am going back to school, to get my matric’ (98).

To improve the lives of the marginalized each individual in society must begin to make an exemplary change, like Zipporah, so that the whole community becomes the voice for the marginalized, be they orphans, street-kids, immigrants, widows, domestic workers or any other minority group. Those in positions of power are expected to provide a platform for the marginalized voiceless, but the reverse is actually what is represented in Braude’s story. According to the ‘provisions of the Sectional Title under which the building was run … the Trustees held the positions of servants, not master’ (89), but the ‘self appointed’ (89) chairman and his board operated contrary to these provisions. For Zipporah, in order to be the voice for the voiceless it was a matter of taking sides using the principle of ‘justice, and compassion for the underdog’ (90). In the light of this principle, it was not difficult to choose between Caroline, who had children to support, and a rich and powerful chairman, who had a rogue-elephant disposition’ (90). People expect those in positions of power to champion the plights of the downtrodden. But their failure to do so, with the exception of Zipporah, casts a horrible gloom on the ‘new’ South Africa; one questions how this can be happening in the ‘new’ dispensation of the ‘New South Africa’.

The writer seems to discount the racial difference between Zipporah and Caroline, which is only subtly implied. This was probably deliberate so as to try and present them as just women. Nevertheless, one assumes that Caroline was black and Zipporah was white. A pictorial view of the people who populated the Union and the CCMA precinct would reveal that most were black, excluding a handful of distinctly ‘professional looking’ others who served the majority. Probably,
the race issue was glossed over because ‘The New Dispensation’ would have been the one
brought about by the political transition in which the issue of race was being buried in the past in
the hopes of a better future not governed by race in a bid to create one South African identity
across all races: a rainbow nation. However, Zipporah’s reaction of not wanting to be seen as
‘one of them’ at CCMA, shows that racial relations were still very salient in the ‘new
dispensation’.

At first glance, the story seems to be about the plight of an individual who is about to lose her
job, but a closer look reveals the plight of an entire marginalized community of poorly paid
workers including domestic workers and security guards. All the workers decide to form a Union
of workers at Heavenly Heights. This union brings hope to the workers because the ‘Union …
[fought] for the rights of the domestic worker ‘(94). Ultimately, it is the plight of female workers
that is at stake here, because the male security guards opt out of the fight.

Despite all that Zipporah tried to do, it all came to naught because the workers themselves were
divided. When the male workers were paid off by Dr James, it focuses the fight on women and
they were not enough to sustain the spirit of the fight, they needed the other workers behind
them; as Caroline said, ‘Yes, in unity is strength’ (94). The issues surrounding the workers’ plight
were serious:

… employment against dismissal; jobs against penury;
selfishness against social justice; the Trustees against the Union.
The cleaners were simply pawns in a much bigger game, one
motivated by money and power. The Chairman and his Trustees
had both, and were determined to use them to their own
advantage. (96)

They surely did. Bongile, the Union representative, and the male workers were paid off. This is
quite disturbing in the ‘new’ South Africa. Zipporah says,

Bribery! ... The Chairman bribed them! Split the forces! Divide
and rule! An old but very effective trick. A couple of hundred
rands in the pockets and you can do what you want with people.
(97-98)
Inevitably, the women were paid off and lost their jobs. Only Caroline stayed on, but working privately for Zipporah. The voice given to the workers at Heavenly Heights, with the help of Zipporah, the CCMA and the Union, brought about a ‘new dispensation’ which created conflict between employers and employees, more so because the employees were speaking out and up about their rights to better wages and better working conditions. Although the story ends with the dismissal of the workers, at least Caroline remains. She not only remains with her job but with a ‘voice’:

One day, as Caroline was on her knees, washing the kitchen floor, she suddenly said, ‘I want to get different work. I don’t want to spend the rest of my life cleaning floors. I am going back to school, to get my matric’. (98)

The once docile and timid Caroline speaks out for herself to her employer. If one could borrow and then apply Spivak’s question “Can the subaltern speak?” (out of context) to suit this analysis it would be posed as: ‘Can the subaltern [female domestic worker] speak?’), the answer would be yes. At the end of the story, there is hope that the female domestic worker would be able to fight for her rights (once she knows them) after she has also re-invested herself with the fighting spirit of protest mentioned earlier in Mathiane’s story, reflected here by Zipporah. Otherwise, she will remain down-trodden and an under-dog. Despite the good intentions of government initiatives, the post-apartheid government is still overwhelmed by the history which it was bequeathed by that system. One aspect of this is the atrocities perpetuated by the members of the apartheid government against their victims. Thus, this story holds out potential for hope, especially on an individual basis, but more broadly, power structures and mindsets that could give rise to disillusionment remain very much in place.

Ndlela’s story, ‘A Question of Identity’ is a story about a young man who receives the opportunity to leave home, South Africa, to pursue his studies in America. His hopes of interacting with other blacks who suffered similar atrocities to those back home are shattered when they turn against him and make him question his own identity as well as theirs. (America serves as a reminder of the western stranglehold that still grips a great many African countries, as shown earlier in Chapter One.) Nevertheless, Ken is steadfast in his identity as a South African. He is frequently challenged to reaffirm his identity by being confronted with the racial stereotypes about Africa and Africans presented by Professor Makapela and other so-called
‘black brothers and sisters’ (212). He is constantly, consciously and unconsciously, fighting to endorse his identity amongst a people who persistently snub and scorn him. He tells his friend Sazi over the phone that:

There is no sense of community here. You are rejected and spurned by your fellow black brothers and sisters. This is a very weird and tough place to be. I don’t think I have the guts and staying power to endure this culture, brother. I find it too complex and confusing. I itch and long for my roots already. (212)

Whilst Ken thinks he lacks the ‘staying power’ (212), he is actually more prepared for the culture shock than he gives himself credit for. He consciously fights against any interference with his African identity. This is evidenced by his failure to become accustomed to the cold weather, which he refers to as ‘a baptismal of ice’ (212) and his homesickness. He consciously listens to ‘the late Bob Marley’s “Buffalo Soldier” and keep[s] rewinding it until [he] doze[s] off to sleep’ (213), probably in a bid to reinforce his identity in his sub-consciousness. Mr Marley sings: “If you know your history/then you would know where you are coming from/then you wouldn’t have to ask me/who the ‘eck do I think I am …” (213).

Unwittingly, he most likely needs Marley’s conscious-awakening reggae tunes to prepare himself for his encounter with illustrious ‘Professor Mathew Makapela Ph.D. Harvard University’ and his equally proud wife, ‘Professor Thembi Makapela Ph.D. Yale University’ (215) who invite him to dine at their house. It is during the dinner that Ken consciously comes to defend his identity several times when it is ridiculed by Professor Makapela.

Throughout the dinner the Makapelas take turns to highlight their ignorance of African culture, language and identities. Neo and Thabisa’s Xhosa names are a mockery of their South African heritage considering that they do not seem to be even slightly aware of it. They are neither aware of their history nor of where they come from. One is immediately reminded of Nyasha Sigauke in Tsitsi Dangarembga’s *Nervous Conditions* (1988) who forgets her mother tongue after spending some years in England.
As for the professor and his wife, surely their attitude of disdain towards South Africa is not based on ignorance, but actually a question of choice of identity. The professor rejects his South African identity because of the ‘forthright account of anarchy that now continues to plague the country’ (218), so he says. He goes on to lampoon the Xhosa language and culture by referring to them as ‘narrow tribalistic tendencies’ (216). He prefers to speak ‘a language that has international currency’ (216), such as English. Not only will he speak the language, but he accepts everything that comes along with it, including the American education system and how and what they teach about Africa. Evidently, he has also decided to take American beer instead of traditional beers not because they are ‘primitive and unhealthy’ (216), but as a conspicuous display of Americanism. Unsurprisingly, whatever knowledge the professor from Harvard has about the black struggle in South Africa is most likely skewed to suit a particular audience, which of course is not South African.

Professor Makapela’s insistence on being called “Professor” is the result of this being the only identity he has. He rejects his South African identity. He says: ‘I’m pissed off by the situation in South Africa. I used to be proud of being South African. Not any more …’ (218). It so happens that he is not American, even with the green card, therefore he is forced to identify himself with his title and accomplishments.

The book that Professor Makapela wrote about ‘the macabre violence and the political situation in South Africa since the attainment of liberation’ (218) is probably a manifestation of the reason why Ndebele and Sachs were concerned about the kind of literature produced after the demise of apartheid. It was probably such literature these two and other South African scholars feared would render the country a spectacle, solely political and disillusioned about the future without giving a thought to the ordinary aspects of life such as love, marriage, birth and friendship. Makapela’s book does seem to raise some of the major concerns which have been bedeviling South Africa since independence, such as crime and corruption, but it appears to be a book which offers no glimmerings of hope. The negative images of post-apartheid South Africa are used to serve the political and economic interests of neocolonial powers, and perhaps the professor’s book was published by an American university or by one of the big American publishing conglomerates. Granted, post-apartheid South Africa is not a haven, but at least it is not under
apartheid and one is obliged to acknowledge the efforts (from both inside and outside) that foster a sense of hopefulness for the future of South Africa.

Ken, however, politely rejects all the notions presented to him by the professor as a misrepresentation of his identity, and thus in the process he reaffirms his identity as a South African. Even though he does not drink beer, he does not think drinking ‘mqombothi and imbamba’ (216) is primitive. Rather, it is his Christianity which makes him take no alcohol. Ken, like a great many Africans, cannot avoid external influences on his identity because they are embedded in the past, the past of colonialism, which brought Christianity to the continent. It is impossible for one not to re-negotiate one’s identity after having encountered external influences. However, it is Ken’s Christian background which is rooted in his South Africanness that shows he is very much aware of his indispensable African identity, as some postcolonial theorists such as Spivak (1990) and hooks (1989) would say. He is able to choose not to drink traditional beer, not because it is traditional or otherwise, but because he has managed to re-negotiate his identity to suit the culture he is now living in: a culture in which one can choose to be Xhosa and be Christian at the same time.

After having ‘wasted [his] evening’ (219), it is no wonder that Ken “find[s] himself invoking the words of the late Malcolm-X: ‘You are not an American. You are an African who happens to be in America’” (219). This reference to Malcolm X serves as reminder to Ken of who he is and where he came from. Arguably too, the story carries a warning that there are plenty of Professor Makapelases out there and many who aspire to be them. Who knows what might become of Ken if he is offered a job at the American university? The story ends with a call from Sazi and a scriptural message from Mbongwe, the preacher from Mdantsane, reminding Ken of his identity: that he is a black South African Christian.

As already suggested, hope in South Africa after apartheid showed signs of dissipating as disillusionment set in. This arose from the failure of government initiatives such as: the disappointments brought about by the TRC (portrayed in Dangor’s ‘Bitter Fruit’); corruption of government officials (sham in Essop’s ‘The Silk Scarf’) and the lingering problem of addressing the national question of identity (addressed in Mokae’s “Milk and Honey Galore, Honey!”).
In the introduction to *Writing South Africa*, Derek Attridge and Rosemary Jolly note that South Africa is still in the process of attempting to come to terms with the past in order to build a new future for itself (1998: 2). It was (and still is) the hope of many South Africans to see the fruition of De Klerk’s ‘New South Africa’ and Archbishop Tutu’s ‘Rainbow Nation’. A great deal has already been done (or at least tried) by the TRC to try and build this future. The complications brought about by the TRC are explored by Dangor in his story ‘Bitter Fruit’. Unlike the collective struggle against apartheid, the individual personal struggles to forge a new identity, to find a place in a society, to redefine oneself - have not always been met with success. Against the background of the TRC, Dangor in his story ‘Bitter Fruit’ focuses on the life of a couple whose past was defined by the individual evils of the apartheid system. Silas and Lydia’s lives are changed forever by an event seventeen years earlier.

Dieltiens, an independent consultant with the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation, observes that during the TRC process, perpetrators of political violence had to fully disclose details of their past crimes in order to qualify for amnesty. The truth, it was hoped, would help the process of healing individual victims and the nation (2005: 5). This is what Silas also hoped the TRC would give to Lydia and himself when he tells Lydia, ‘[w]e have to do something about this’ (31), thinking that they should take their story before the TRC. Instead Lydia says:

> You think Archbishop Tutu has ever been fucked up his arse against his will? ... he’ll never understand what it’s like to be raped, to be mocked as you’re being raped, that piece of useless flesh you call a cock transformed into a hot knife. (31)

For Lydia and many other South Africans like her, it was a pointless waste of time to go before the TRC. Simply put, justice was going to be overlooked because the perpetrators would have publicly told the truth and Silas and Lydia would go back to living their lives, only now with the knowledge that the whole of South Africa knows their story.

Silas and Lydia know that an ordinary life is beyond their reach, despite their being married, having a child and going off to work every day. They have a horrible past looming large in their present. Not only that, but they are not just South Africans adapting to the new political regime,
they are colored South Africans as well, making them too black for the old South Africa and too white for the new. These two are trying to grapple with present reality in order to safeguard a hopeful future, but nonetheless, this is a daunting task.

Each one is going through a personal struggle. Lydia turns her emotional pain into a physical one in the arms of her husband through ‘rough sex’, almost a mimicry of the rape she suffered from Du Bois. She takes his hand and jams it up between her legs then in an unfeeling bitter tone encourages him:

‘Go on, put your hand in, your whole fist, feel the delicate membrane, those child’s lips that a woman’s poes has, that is sensitivity!’ She took his finger and forced it into her vagina, winced as his finger nail touched something soft. (32)

All this she does dancing on top of broken glasses, bare-footed. This display of violence is very disconcerting. Silas, on the other hand, seeks solace in alcohol, like Ike, only Silas does not beat up his wife. He just drinks ‘until he eyes [swim] and his face [flushes] warmly’ (24). Silas has internalized his anger and frustration at the past, during which they were forced to ‘tauza, squatting on their haunches … and do frog-jump[s] so that anything they had concealed in their anuses would drop’ (31). He kept his anger inside so much that he created a chemical reaction in his stomach that is very acidic, which makes him ‘fart sourly, out loud’ (25), a very indicative comment of what he thinks of the ‘new’ South Africa.

What makes the story so powerful, so exquisitely traumatic, is that Dangor unwraps the life of Silas and Lydia, and opens the reader’s eyes to the anger, frustration, passion and pain of a family whose lives are so misaligned with each other. Dangor crafts their stunted relationship with such precision that one cannot help but notice that the TRC did not help this family nor many other families in the ‘new’ South Africa. Reconciliation is only possible after the past has been exposed with all its ugliness. The family aspires to ordinariness, but knows it is unattainable because reconciliation is not part of their home.

At times, at a superficial level, one wonders if non-South Africans would understand some of the language used in this story. Language turns a universal masterpiece into a South African
masterpiece, and at the same time raises questions as to whether other readers will really grasp the irony which bubbles out in the frequent South Africanisms. And the irony goes way beyond the slang of the South African Colored townships, for the story deals with seeking personal liberation from entrapment in past trauma when all about you are celebrating liberation.

‘Bitter Fruit’ is a difficult story that confounds the good news, the jubilation and celebration that have come to be expected with the first decade of freedom in South Africa. It is so intensely personal and unashamedly opinionated that it forces a reappraisal of liberation. Dangor unites political and personal concerns within the context of South Africa’s process of transformation to ordinariness. Despite what Ndebele believes is possible, it is an ordinariness that may never be achieved. The society that resulted from apartheid is struggling to become ordinary, and ‘Bitter fruit’ is a testimony to how difficult that process is. Many South Africans, like Silas and Lydia, are left with ‘bitter fruit’.

Whilst some are grappling with bitter fruit, others are savoring the taste of a sweet fruit which happened to fall into their laps, by chance or not. Essop’s story ‘The Silk Scarf’ reinforces the underlying theme of materialism, which is the root cause of the problems in Ike and Phindi’s marriage and which emerges at the end of Gordimer’s story. In Essop’s tale, this issue is reinforced in a serious vein because it is being perpetuated by those people who were entrusted with power by the people. The goal of democracy has been achieved and a black government, for the first time representative of all the people in the country, is in power and all is well. Or is it? Essop’s story is a reminder that having a legitimate government is no guarantee that all individuals in that government will always be noble and selfless. He shows how the self-indulgence of one member of the new political elite reawakens old fears in a group of people to whom discrimination is a very recent and unpleasant memory.

Mrs Nebo, ‘the wife of an important official of the African Front … designated as the Foreign Affairs Minister in the new government’ (71), and her friend Margaret go on a shopping expedition at the expense of the government. They are chauffeur-driven in a Mercedes Benz escorted by another one with two bodyguards. ‘She had money, her bank account was spiraling as funds from foreign governments poured into the coffers of her husband’s political party’ (73).
They ‘bought shoes, then some jewelry, then swimming costumes’ (71). Mrs Nebo is very threatening towards Mr Sakur, the owner of the shop who has the silk scarf she wants, but for which she does not have enough cash on her to pay. The two women give vent to a tirade of remarks about the wealth and stature of Mrs Nebo so that she can purchase the scarf using a cheque, which Mr Sakur refuses outright in spite of who Mrs Nebo is.

Mrs Nebo is adamant that she will not leave without the scarf, because she feels her integrity has been challenged; on the other hand, Mr Sakur is not going to budge from his shop owner’s principles. The exchange between Mrs Nebo and Mr Sakur brings out the salient issues of race still present in the new South Africa. Mrs Nebo tells Mr Sakur and the other Plaza shopkeepers, who are all Indian:

> We won’t have people like you when the new government takes over … People like him should not be permitted to have a shop here. He doesn’t know anything about. You must do something about him. (75)

The other shopkeepers find themselves in a dilemma where they have to decide either to side with their colleague or to appease the disenchanted customer. They end up buying the scarf for Mrs Nebo so as not to sour their relations with the new government and to avoid jeopardizing their business arrangements in the plaza. Mrs Nebo’s behavior at the plaza shows that it is likely that the government of the ‘new’ South Africa is going to abuse its power in certain respects. The bodyguards that loom large in the background signify some ominous threat that the government might abuse the state apparatus of the army and police.

The story is rather disillusioning. It argues that the ‘new’ in the ‘New South Africa’ is but a place-holder representing nothing. There is nothing new about ‘the new democratic South Africa’ (76) that Mrs Nebo talks about at the end of the story. According to Gus Silber, a (South African) freelance journalist who is a rather disillusioned ‘new’ South African, there is nothing new about the phrase ‘new South Africa’. He says that the phrase has been heard many times long ago. It was heard in 1984 when the Westminster constitutional system was abolished in favor of a new tricameral system that extended Parliamentary representation to some other races that were not too black. Before that, the phrase was heard in 1961, when the Union of South Africa had
withdrawn from the Commonwealth in protest of British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan’s “Winds of Change” speech in Cape Town. Before that, the phrase was heard in 1948 when the National Party rose to power and began building a New South Africa based on a foundation of democracy, prosperity, justice and equal rights for all whites (1991: 4-5). Now the phrase ‘New South Africa’ (for Mrs Nebo and other blacks) means that roles have been reversed and the blacks are now in power. It is disconcerting that the concept of the ‘new’ South Africa is being abused by Mrs Nebo and Margaret, as it was by others before them.

With the demise of apartheid, old parameters are no longer valid and the whites have lost their political power and some of their economic power. However, the end of apartheid was (actually) not an end to all problems; it was the beginning of many problems encountered by a newly liberated state, and identity is the main one in the history of South Africa. According to De Kock, this seemingly simple matter of ‘who we are and how we define ourselves’ (2002: 4) has been challenging the nation, society and individuals of this country for a long time. The inauguration of the country as the ‘New South Africa’ by De Klerk and as the ‘Rainbow Nation’ by Archbishop Tutu as symbols of triumph over apartheid and forms of discrimination are probably well intentioned, but far too simplistic, as has been shown in Dangor’s ‘Bitter Fruit’, Gordimer’s ‘At the Rendezvous’ and Essop’s ‘The Silk Scarf’. After apartheid, South Africans were especially challenged by the issue of identity.

Mokae’s story ‘Milk and Honey Galore, Honey!’ focuses on arguments of a post-apartheid South African identity. On the one hand there are those presented by Themba Mlotshwa, a ‘South African’; on the other, there are those presented by the ‘Nigerian Chief’, Adegboye Onigbinde, and the other immigrants. This enlightening conversation-cum-argument happens in the restaurant where Themba works. The restaurant was metaphorically called ‘OAU’ (Organization of African Unity) because its ‘clientele were the aliens’ (22), and it is ‘a kaleidoscope of traditional dress…language…and dishes’ (22). Mr Ebrahim Patel, the restaurant owner, ‘cater[ed] for diverse culinary tastes [of] innumerable African immigrants from Kenya, Zaire, Malawi, Zimbabwe, Mozambique and other parts of the continent in Hillbrow’ (22).
'Themba … could not disguise his contempt for the men seated around the table he was about to serve’ (21). This is because he is convinced that their presence in his country will have a negative impact upon the well-being of the ordinary South Africans. Themba thinks that continued immigration into South Africa bodes ill for the future of many South Africans because ‘They [the immigrants] were “stealing” jobs from his people’ (24). Infuriated, he goes on to argue: ‘I’m serious. Strue’s God: if all you illegal immigrants went back to your countries those of my people who’re now out of work would get jobs’ (21). Themba offers a good example of xenophobia in practice. He is fearful and contemptuous of the immigrant population present in South Africa.

‘Themba Mlotsthwa’s misgivings notwithstanding’ (22), Chief Onigbinde is of a different view. He speaks of the ‘shared’ culture between his country and South Africa when he says:

My brother, my countrymen and I will be more than happy to go back home as soon as you people have returned our culture … You black South Africans are very fond of wearing dashikis and other West African garments when you attend functions calling for ‘traditional dress’. That is our traditional dress, not yours. When we leave, we leave with them. (22)

However, the culture is not exactly shared, because the chief speaks of it as ‘our’ culture, speaking of the Nigerian culture. The general notion of collective Africanness, of hybridity, as Bhabha theorizes, is actually difficult to put into practice and live with, as is shown by the phony African identity paraded by the immigrants. The chief is convinced that he has every right to be in South Africa. He even goes as far as to purchase a fake South African identity card because according to him, ‘We are all Africans. This is our continent’ (21). According to Anderson, ‘any other formation of group identity, invariably uses a distant, immemorial, mythic past as a point of reference that confirms its unique existence, its primordial status’ (cited in Moslund, 2005: 10). The chief uses a strong sense of being part of a ‘collective African continent’ so as to forge an identity that unites everyone as African, but as Anderson mentions, that particular point of reference is not common to all.

Doctors Looksmart Banda from Malawi buttresses the chief’s view by arguing that ‘black South Africans…go to be examined by witch doctors or “the floor X-ray”: the bones thrown on the
ground’ (23). Margerine Chavanduka ‘joined the fray’ (23) by saying: “Zimbabweans would not mind leaving either. But black South Africans would have to “return” the help Mugabe’s government gave to the liberation movements during “the struggle”” (23).

This is echoed by the Mozambican Pedro Baloi. In totality, all their facts and opinions argue that the immigrants can not just ‘up and leave’ South Africa merely because they were not born South Africans. Their common experiences with South Africans and the integration of their cultures have made them one and the same people, though they are a people fraught with tensions. This provides an illustration of postcolonial hybridity, while problematizing it at the same time. Due to the mixture of cultures resulting in dilutions and diffusions, there is no longer an identity which is purely South African. Black South Africans wear West African apparel as part of their traditional attire. They consult Malawian traditional healers for ailments, magic potions and to have their future told. Not only that, but they have made official languages from, for example, Sesotho from Lesotho, IsiNdebele from Zimbabwe, SiSwati from Swaziland, and Setswana from Botswana. However, this does not mean the South African identity is available to whoever wants it by virtue of their being African, and herein lies the phoniness of the immigrants of ‘one Africa’.

If one is to endow Mr Mokae with prophetic qualities, then one could suggest that the discussion in the OAU restaurant was a microcosm of the African Union Summit 2007 that took place in Ghana. The discussion raises concerns that are similar to some of the debates at the summit. For example, the Chief’s and other immigrants’ insistence on a single identity because of commonalities can be paralleled to Muammar Gaddafi’s and other supporters’ proposal to form a federal state on the continent. The Police represent those who were worried that tough decisions had to be made before such ambitions could be fulfilled; hence the problem of illegal immigrants had to be resolved first. Probably Themba represents those who were uneasy (xenophobic) with the situation of accepting foreigners. It reminds one of Mongane Wally Serote’s poem ‘City Johannesburg’ and Gordimer’s story ‘At the Rendezvous of Victory, both of which seem to have also been prophetic of future events.

However, their Afrocentric approach to identity falls short because when Themba is arrested it does not explain the other diners’ rather hasty ‘exit out of the OAU’ (25). This just goes to show
that one’s essential identity is always important, as Spivak (1990) and hooks (1989) argue. Tsepo, alias Themba, is first and foremost MoSotho. His original identity is important because it defines who he is. His assimilation of other cultures is not meant to erase his identity but to allow him to refine his identity. Neither Themba nor the chief can just decide to be South African by either coming to live in South Africa or by getting a fake identity card. Being a South African is first and foremost being born a South African, like Zanemvula Mabhoko in Masilela’s story. But as the immigrants in the story have revealed, one is still open to redefinitions of what being a South African means concerning belonging to a broader group on the African continent. This is an on-going process and once the whole continent of Africa manages to do it, then the hopes of the African Union Summit 2007 held in Ghana will be realized: to make a United States of Africa.

South Africa, writes Richard Bartlett, editor of *The African Review of Books*, has slid gently out of the media limelight over the past ten years. He goes on to comment that apartheid ensured the country was always in the news. Then the transition from an Afrikaner-dominated parliament to a parliament of the people kept the world enthralled for a good few years. Now South Africa’s tribulations are not substantially political and in the limelight. In fact, they have become ordinary (Bartlett, 2002: 1). It is the struggle to learn to become ordinary that is at the heart of many of the stories in this selection. The writers do heed the call of Sachs and Ndebele to dwell more on the ordinary lives of the people and not the spectacular. But because of South Africa’s background in its struggle for liberation, issues of race, class and gender will always be an inseparable part of people’s lives, hence some stories have the political in the peripheries and even at the forefront.

By bringing together new and established writers, the above anthologies capture the rich diversity of post-apartheid South African writing. It is from this diversity that I managed to select the above stories. The contributors comprise a wide spectrum of South Africans - black, white, colored and men and women who choose the short story as a means of expressing a diverse South Africa of rural and urban life, white suburbia, black townships, childhood love, hate, reconciliation and identity; hope and disillusionment. The writers focus on the grim as well as the humorous; and their stories make up the tapestry of a country as it was after independence before the turn of the twenty-first century. From the beginning of the analysis of these stories, one can
see a fluctuation from hope to disillusionment as people encountered different situations. But towards the end of many of the stories there is a general pull towards disillusionment that seems to have gripped much of South African society. This mood perhaps anticipates the prevalent tone of Zimbabwean stories which follow below.
CHAPTER THREE

HOPE AND DISILLUSIONMENT: ZIMBABWEAN SHORT STORIES AT THE TURN OF THE 21ST CENTURY

Zimbabwean short story writers, past and present, exhibit a variety of styles. Common amongst most writers’ works is the use of certain formal features and thematic concerns. Muchemwa identifies the following as the formal features that pervade Zimbabwean literature: the fictionalization of history and historicisation of fiction, the use of biographical and autobiographical modes, transposed and transmuted formal features of orature and the use of modernist and post-modernist techniques. The thematic concerns include the effect of colonialism and racism on the national psyche and individual psyches, constructions and interrogations of identity, traumas of history and education and growing up (2001: 6).

In his Introduction to Zimbabwean Literature Zhuwarara notes that generally Zimbabwean fiction is responsive to and reflective of the historical processes affecting society as whole. He goes on to say that there is a parallel movement which points to the existence of a strong relationship between history and fiction - hence the necessity of this study to include a socio-historical approach in which the historical and political background of contemporary Zimbabwe and its literature is interrogated. This tie in itself is not unique to Zimbabwe. It has existed in the history and literature of other societies, especially those in Africa. In the Zimbabwean case, the historical experience sheds considerable light on the tone, form and thematic preoccupations of the fiction of that time (2001: 10).

No More Plastic Balls and Writing Still, Muchemwa argues, includes writers who enter the post-colonial phase with an impact. Writers like Chikwava, Chirere, Nyereyemhuka and Chihota unflatteringly and at times aggressively portray contemporary reality without seeking solutions. (Muchemwa, 2001: 99-100). It is the variety offered by the writers examined here that promises an interesting development.
No More Plastic Balls and Writing Still are short story anthologies, bringing together many writers. No More Plastic Balls is edited by Chihota and Muponde and comprises thirty-four short stories by five writers, who contribute at least five stories each. The editors explain that:

We wanted each writer to have enough space, some room to display his wares, to develop his presence, to sing to his heart’s delight without the possible risk of being diluted, smothered or lost among other voices. (6)

Possibly all thirty-four stories may have a similar vision, which would ultimately be limiting. But as the editors point out, the stories feed on and develop from each other, suggesting a generational coincidence (6).

Muchemwa comments that the title of the anthology appears to mean that the writers featured in the anthology are old enough not to stand in the shadow of their predecessors. They are no longer content with subordinate roles, childishly kicking around plastic balls. They would rather now have the real thing. The stories, therefore, more or less illustrate theirs and Zimbabwe’s complex coming-of-age (2001: 102). The writers unsparingly expose the unhealthy state of society; for instance, Nyereyemhuka in ‘A Breach of Trust’ imagines the family as a self-devouring entity. Memory Chirere trains his unflinching gaze on how society in the rural areas has made the family a treacherous place to live, using Tadamuhwa the goat as his witness. Chihota’s ‘Shipwreck’ gives a tragic and bleak vision of Zimbabwe, whilst Muponde’s ‘At the Window’ is about prospecting for a redeeming vision in a society ruled by a death wish (Muponde and Chihota, 2000: 6-21). Nhamo Mhiripiri’s story ‘The Shrub in our Little Garden’ is a story of triumph.

While No More Plastic Balls presents a fairly representative sample of short stories, the writers are all male. Writing Still (published by Weaver Press) is a more varied book. Instead of just five writers, it brings together twenty-four. Secondly, male and female writers are thrown together in the anthology. Though the editor of Writing Still was concerned about gender balance, the varieties go further to include both white and black writers. Lastly, all these writers only contribute a story each, instead of half a dozen or more. Staunton, the editor of the collection, says:
The initial idea for this anthology was to provide a representative sample of the range and quality of writing in Zimbabwe at the turn of the century, and an impressionistic reflection of the years since independence in 1980. (2003: xv)

The focus and scope of the anthology, she says, nevertheless reflects a somewhat broader perspective than was first envisaged. For example, some of the short stories still talk about the conflicts out of which Zimbabwe arose, such as Huggins’ ‘The Revolutionary: A Brief Encounter’. His story presents the gentler side of the colonizer, an idea which can only be considered in the post-independence era now that colonialism has ended. The perspective offered in Nyamubaya’s story is of the harsher and more disturbing historical aspects of the war of liberation as opposed to the romantic view that has most often been presented. Her story shows the bitter memories of the camps during the war. These stories depict the colonial times, with varied reflections of the past because they were written after the particular period without the tensions of that time. History shapes the present and past events have a bearing on the present-day Zimbabwe.

Wilson’s ‘The Twelve Chitenges’ engages with the lessons to be drawn from living within a culture other than one’s own and its constant demand for self-criticism and self-awareness (cited in Staunton, 2003: xvi). Other stories are written in the first person, which lends them an autobiographical realism and enables them to confront some difficult issues honestly – like a family member with a disability (Chiedza Musengezi’s ‘Mukoma Amos’), or memories of a child growing up during a ‘civil war’ (Gugu Ndlovu’s ‘Torn Posters’). Other examples include Chikwava’s very racy writing about styles of living in ‘the Avenues’ of Harare in ‘Seventh Street Alchemy’. There is also Kanengoni’s ‘The Ugly Reflection in the Mirror’, which pits white land owner against newly landed ‘war veterans’.

Ian Smith and the Unilateral Declaration of Independence have gone, the liberation struggle was fought and won, and the year of our flag independence has also come and gone. A great deal has happened since then, and life today in Zimbabwe is much changed. New writers on the scene have a great deal to say about the changes that our society has been going through. What have the writers been writing about before the turn of the twenty-first century, in the light of hope and disillusionment? It is clear from this selection of short stories that these writers, like those in No
More Plastic Balls, share a vision more attuned to disillusionment than hope. Yet these same stories contain seeds of hope amidst the disillusionment. I read these stories chronologically to see the journey through Rhodesia to Zimbabwe via revolution. To do so is to examine the historical and political background of the country, but also to map the journey that Zimbabweans have travelled: their triumphs and joys, trials and setbacks.

Huggins’ ‘The Revolutionary: A Brief Encounter’ recounts the story of a black man in Rhodesia who has just been brought into the criminal investigation department offices for questioning, after having been found in possession of weapons and therefore accused of being a terrorist. Even though he is waiting to be charged, in the eyes of his captors, the British white settlers, he would likely be found guilty. There is no hope that he will be released, yet he does hope that the revolution will continue without him. During the interrogation-cum-conversation with Greg Stanyon, the young detective, the revolutionary stands his ground, defiantly proclaiming himself to be a nationalist when he says, “I have been a member of the nationalist cause since its inception. I am a nationalist. I believe in the nationalist cause. I am an activist” (95).

This writer depicts a nameless revolutionary embarking on a hopeful journey to liberate his compatriots from British bondage. It recounts a fictional historical event, just before the second Chimurenga war began (probably early in 1966), which was supposed to show the white man the beginnings of a political transition under way. The guns the protagonist has with him signal the stirrings of the liberation struggle. The narrator says: ‘It was the first time there had been such an arrest for possession of arms of war. Inevitably, it sent a strong signal about a new phase in the nationalist struggle’ (100). Having been asked what the guns were for, the protagonist responds:

They were, of course, to be used for the revolution … To begin the revolution. To make an attack on an installation. To demonstrate our coming out. To send a signal of the coming struggle. To make the people aware. To send a shiver of fright through the whites. To make them think again. To make them seek a peaceful solution. (98)

For the protagonist, the revolution was ‘only the dawn’ (95); it marked the emergence of the people’s consciousness to fight for their freedom. They sought freedom from oppression and repression, from having their leaders detained, operatives imprisoned, homes raided, parties and
meetings banned. The protagonist tells his inquisitor, “We are impatient for our freedom” (100). In as much as it is terrifying for the guerillas in the bush to go to war, freedom was their pinnacle of hope. The hope for freedom brought the people of Zimbabwe together. It united ZANU and ZAPU nationalists to create ‘The People’s Revolution’ (95) by mobilizing their military wings, ZANLA and ZIPRA, to fight for a common cause, the freedom of a nation, a freedom they had been denied by the white British settlers.

The revolutionary is travelling hopefully to his destination, and so are the other nationalists he is working with. It is a destination which he acknowledges he might not reach personally when he says: “I will go to prison. It does not matter about me. I am only one. But the revolution will not stop. The revolution is certain” (95). Despite his demise he remains optimistic about the outcome of the revolution:

> The people will win in the end. Many will die. Many will be imprisoned. But in the end the people will win. There will be freedom from the yoke of colonialism. There will be one man one vote. There will be independence for the black man in his own country. They will take land back from the white man. And they will control their destiny. (95)

The passage above, more than any other, sums up the hopes and dreams of the people. It manages to capture the feelings that the Zimbabwean people had about fighting for independence, the philosophy behind their unshakeable unity: ‘They all belong to the same principle of the nationalist cause … the principles of truth and justice, democracy and freedom …’ (96). Notwithstanding the protagonist’s claims, the liberation struggle was actually less united, as seen below in Nyamubaya’s ‘That Special Place’.

Surprisingly, a reader’s expectation that the protagonist is going to suffer some form of torture at the hands of his captors is not realized. Anyone familiar with the black-white relations during the colonial era would have expected otherwise. However, Stanyon treats the revolutionary and the black people with unusual compassion (for that time). During the interrogation cum conversation, as Kamurai Mudzingwa, a reviewer with the Business Tribune, writes, the encounter shows the involuntary respect felt by a callow but decent young Englishman for an older Zimbabwean man caught transporting guns. Intending to interrogate the prisoner, he finds himself conversing with
an articulate and committed leader of impressive dignity – even when stripped of the clothes and power (2003: 1). Huggins’ story depicts the revolutionary sensitively and respectfully (Klother, 2006: 1). Even when the story ends on a rather distressing note, with Stanyon in the post-independent Zimbabwe, and the revolutionary nowhere to be found, a sliver of hope occurs when Stanyon comes across a road with a name like the revolutionary’s. This thread of hope continues the revolutionary’s optimism in his brief encounter with Stanyon.

Different from this sentimental hopefulness is Nyamubaya’s ‘That Special Place’. This disturbing story ironically negates the romanticized war of liberation as a ‘hellish place’; not at all a ‘special place’. It tells of a young woman called Ticha, who leaves her final year of high school to cross the border of Rhodesia into Mozambique, hoping to join the liberation struggle and probably become a hero for her people. However, she is not welcomed as she expected. Her education, especially in a woman, makes her a threat to the camp commander, which means that as she becomes a guerilla she also becomes a victim (Bartlett, 2003: 1).

The camp leaders ‘hated anybody who had gone to school, and felt comfortable with illiterate comrades’ (227). In the camp, they beat up people until their buttocks resemble ‘mince meat’ (218). People are made to confess to crimes they have not committed. For example, the narrator says:

\[
\text{Che said he had been beaten enough, and could not take it anymore.}
\text{‘My parents never once slapped me or pinched me. So to join the war and find my own comrades beating me for no good reason is more than I can take!’ Che fell silent. (225)}
\]

This is the special life of the camp. In this life we see the roots of latter-day disillusionment and skepticism - more specifically, brutality against one’s own people for some “lighter” political cause. Actually, it drives Che to madness. The narrator tells us that: “The last time I met Che on the streets of Harare I nearly cried. He recognized me, but nothing he said made sense, and I realized that he was mentally ill. I am sure it arose at that special place” (228).

This is a kind of life that dehumanizes its own and forgets them on the dung-heap of history. The narrator describes the lack of freedom in the camp. She says:
There were always people hanging around the toilet, even in the darkness, sometimes for reasons other than relieving themselves. Free discussion was not tolerated in public, and one of the few places that provided some privacy was the toilet. (218)

Perhaps this paranoia was the real seed-field of unfair present-day legislation like the Public Order and Security Act (POSA) and the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA), legislation which many regard as extreme and disempowering. If, again, citizens in present-day Zimbabwe feel that they are exploited, there are instances of worse toil in ‘That Special Place’. The toilet is, apart from being the only zone for partially free discussion, also the only ‘mildly safe haven from work or training if you wanted a break’ (218). The modern-day food shortages in the country also seem anticipated in the camp:

Food was scarce, good food didn’t exist. Sadza was a delicacy, especially accompanied by real beans, not the bush beans we used to call ndodzi. Our main meal was maize grain boiled in salt, which made us thirsty, or just ndodzi in salt, or a mixture of ndodzi and mangai, boiled maize grains. (223)

There, perhaps, grew a pathological link between the ills of the war years and the post-independence maladies that have reduced the ordinary Zimbabwean to an impoverished civilian struggling against a feeling of non-existence, as shown in Chikwava and Muponde’s stories below.

Even though paranoia seems to be a present-day malady, ‘Paranoia was rampant, even then’ (223); it seems it really began long back, during that often romanticized war. The picture of Nyathi that the narrator paints is of an ape rather than a sensitive human being:

He had a loud mouth, and never once do I remember him saying anything constructive or interesting. He used torturous language, and made vulgar jokes about the inmates. Vicious and cruel, he had...nothing in terms of brain, he thrived on sadism and intimidation. Interrogation had to be accompanied by a slash on the buttocks with a whip or a slap on the face ... nobody ... could challenge him. (219 - 220)
It is this same Nyathi who later defects to the enemy and causes untold bloodshed, in an act that can be paralleled by contemporary brother-upon-brother conflicts in Africa - in Rwanda, Uganda, Burundi, Ethiopia – Eritrea, the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Sudan and in other places. Nyathi could just as well be Moise Tshombe who delivered the Congo over to the imperialists, or Jonas Savimbi of Angola who committed atrocities on his own people in the name of ‘blood-diamonds’ which he sold to the United States, or the same Morrison Nyathi who, on the morning of August 9 1976, led the Rhodesians to massacre the freedom fighters at Nyadzonia in Mozambique.

Again, Nyathi, egotistic and inclined to extreme sadism and savagery, rapes the defenseless narrator as punishment for her education. Rape, no doubt, is a dastardly and unforgivable crime. It destroys the victim. The narrator describes how she was violated:

That … beast Nyathi broke his way into my vagina and escaped with my virginity, though after fifteen minutes’ fierce struggle I managed to spit out a piece of his flesh from his right thigh. Nyathi had a big black fat penis whose erection got harder with resistance; little did I know that either … I cried as I felt blood run down my legs. (227 - 8)

This is not only a physical rape. It is also a rape of the narrator’s mind, poisoning her spirit. Thirdly, it symbolizes the rape of Africa by Europeans and their local accomplices. Lastly, when the masses were cheated of the victory that was rightfully theirs in 1980, they could be said to have been raped and robbed, a serial assault sequel to colonialism. The narrator, however, is a woman of courage who refuses to remain poisoned by the facts. Instead, such experiences teach her valuable lessons about life – its past, its present, and its future. She now understands the source and nature of oppression. Perhaps she rightly follows the contours described in Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, which parallels the isiXhosa and chiShona concept of humanness (see Preface):

But while both humanization and dehumanization are real alternatives, only the first is man’s vocation. This vocation is constantly negated, yet it is affirmed by that very negation. It is thwarted by injustice, exploitation: it is affirmed by the yearning of the oppressed for freedom and justice, and by their struggle to recover their lost humanity. (1996: 20)
Ticha is truly a heroine. She is not an oppressor or ‘sub-oppressor’ like Nyathi, who goes about dressed in the garb of a freedom fighter. Neither is she like Che who surrenders to despair. She finds hope, maybe from ‘the African sun’ and ‘its mother warmth’ (217), for resisting despair. She laughs at Nyathi in the interrogation room, as if to confirm her hardiness. She also bites off a chunk of Nyathi’s flesh, getting back some of her own. Finally, it is the narrator who explains that while it was hell in the camp, the people had ways to ward off despair: “We sang and danced out our problems to avoid despair. There were of course times when one might take time to compose music, or sing with real joy; but mostly music was an outlet for our pain” (224).

The title of the story is ironical in the sense that the narrator went through hell during her stay at the camp. But in another sense, Tembwe Training Camp is indeed special because it was a turning point in her life; her experiences there comprised a major life-tutorial that she could not forget. Moreover, the title perhaps reflects her capacity to come to terms with her experience and to move beyond her bitterness. This new fortitude is illustrated in how the narrator calmly recounts her experiences. Traumatic as these experiences are, she sounds healed and can live with the memory. She says that her rape by Nyathi was harrowing, but time healed the scars: “I was fifteen, and I cried as I felt blood run down my legs on my way to the barracks in moonlight. For years my body reacted to the memory, and it was years before I felt whole again” (228).

She deserves the sympathy of the readers, but she is far from a pitiful figure. Instead she is a strong woman who can stand on her own and hope for the restoration of wholeness for other women who were in similar situations.

In popular conception, the war of liberation is a triumphant epic. The war effort is conceived of as a gallant effort by one huge family of committed, freedom-loving cadres, just as the revolutionary in Huggins’ story believed. There was great patriotism and love for one another. The camps were supposed to be egalitarian microcosms of what the future nation was to be like. Nyamubaya deconstructs some of the ideologies about the war. Dispassionately, she shows how the struggle involved unparalleled suffering that was intensified by the contradictions inherent in the nature of the struggle itself. There are some incontestable facts about the war. Indeed, it was a heroic effort, waged by patriotic men and women, the ‘matigari wa njiruungi’. Furthermore, there was sacrifice and brotherhood (and sisterhood) in the war. But in ‘That Special Place’,
Nyamubaya is not overly concerned with the incontestable facts. She sets out, instead, to expose the unsavory side of the war, the side that perhaps cursed post-independence Zimbabwe with barrenness. Betrayal, disillusionment, brutality, misrule, exploitation, hypocrisy, nepotism, corruption - and many other ruling class vices - are incubated in the camps.

Bartlett comments that the story is disturbing because it sheds light, intimate light, on how a revolution was hijacked and how the people’s hopes for a people’s revolution turned into bitter disillusionment. It also reveals how personal desires and aspirations were allowed to turn the revolution into little more than a changing of guard and how small minds destroyed grand ideas (2003: 3). Notwithstanding Bartlett’s view, Nyamubaya, a former freedom fighter who left school in 1975 to join the ZANLA (xiii), disconcertingly chose to put the massacre at Nyadzonia at the periphery in her story.

The special place was indeed very special. ‘The light’, says the narrator, ‘arrived like a sharp nail striking my left eye’ (217). Through the agency of light in the story, the little known things are finally exposed. It is therefore very significant that the narrator opens her story with reference to light. Nyamubaya looks at the war that many do not really understand for what it really was. The training camp where she went to prepare for military combat becomes the special place, ‘that special place: the place that many people in this world will never know or understand’ (228).

Chiedza Musengezi’s story ‘Mukoma Amos’ is set at a time when ZANU PF’s 1980 - 1985 election manifesto established free and compulsory primary and secondary education for all Zimbabwean children regardless of race, sex or class, and in the case of Amos, regardless of disability. The story is told from the point of view of a child who lives in a family with a crippled relative. Sophia recounts the victimization of her cousin Amos by other village children, she says:

The headman’s daughters … hurt mukoma … They do it from time to time, stopping by on their way from school to humiliate and prod at him with their song … ‘Nyoka yaDriver; Nyoka yaDriver/Ona muhwezva weNyoka yaDriver’. (170)

This is done out of ignorance about Amos’ disability, which the villagers attribute to his mother’s supposed infidelity and prostitution. The story circulates:
It is said that it is on account of his mother’s character, a woman of flaming passions and an insatiable love of sex. The older ‘respectable women in the village would nod their heads together disapprovingly. ‘And God has punished her. Look at that poor child’. (171)

Many rumors follow Amos’ mother, who has been nicknamed ‘Murazvu’, meaning ‘the flame’, though in this case says the narrator ‘the nickname suggested different fires’ (171). Set in the rural areas, where superstition is rampant, the attitude of the villagers typifies the tendency of rural folk superstitiously to explain things they do not otherwise understand. One other drunk and boisterous man accused Murazvu of ‘willfully crippling her son’ (171), according to this man:

The real reason why Amos is crippled … was that for the time Murazvu breast-fed him, she did not abstain from having sex with her husband. She was impatient for baby Amos to turn two, when she could wean him from the breast. (171)

However, the truth of the matter, as the narrator discovers, is that Amos ‘was ill and the hospital could not help…He should have had an injection to prevent the illness much earlier’ (172), but it was too late. Polio was the worst cause of infant mortality in the rural areas in Zimbabwe after independence as there were too few clinics to cater for the villagers. This, of course, was a result of the colonial structures being unavailable to the black majority.

Amos’ mangled body is depicted in a symbolic manner representing the nation of Zimbabwe after its ‘birth’ on independence. Typical of any country coming out of war, Zimbabwe had been physically ravaged by the destruction caused by landmines, grenades and guns. The land itself had been maimed, by bombs and fighting, the scars that were left ran deep into the earth, leaving a form of grotesque artistry that can be appreciated by no one. After the war, some of the people who survived resembled Amos, their bodies having been bludgeoned by weapons of war, such as the ones being smuggled by the revolutionary in Huggins’ story. At worst, people were left dead like those freedom fighters massacred by the defector Nyathi and his allies at Tembwe Training Camp in Nyamubaya’s ‘That Special Place’, whilst the majority were the survivors who were left maimed to look like Amos.
Even though Amos is ‘dead or useless from the waist down’ (169), he has the power in his hands to ‘drag along the entire lower half of his body’ (169), his hands are not only strong, they are also skillful. ‘He makes toys with bits of old wire and the fruit of the sausage tree: a span of oxen pulling a plough, a lorry like the one his father drives’ (176). Amos represents a country that will soldier on despite the scars left behind by colonialism. Colonialism offered little education that was provided to able-bodied black children in order to create a pool of labor. Therefore, people like Amos were left to continue to wither and die and be ‘swallowed by history’s gorgons’.

However, after independence, out of the need to dismantle colonial structures and fulfill the hopes of those many cadres that left school to fight in the war, Mugabe’s government implemented an Education for All policy, which included the likes of Amos. Thus, Amos could go to Jairos Jiri School of the Disabled to fulfill his dreams of learning English and how to write. For the young narrator, Amos’ going away to school hints at the hopes that he might come back walking.

The discriminated-against and disabled man in the story of Musengezi is loved and helped, so that one can see hope on the horizon. It is set in post-independence Zimbabwe and is a story about familial love and loyalty versus prejudice. This is shown through the love and support that Sophia gives to her cousin Amos, in the face of cruelty from the rest of the village.

The hopes of the Zimbabweans after independence did not last for long. The peace and tranquillity brought about by independence was soon to be destabilized by the civil war that rocked the foundations that many brothers and sisters, comrades and cadres, fought for during the liberation struggle. As Gugu Ndlovu’s story shows, this war could not have come at a more inconvenient time than when people were still in the process of negotiating and renegotiating their identity after having overthrown the white minority.

Gugu Ndlovu’s narrator in ‘Torn Posters’ perceives the Matebeleland war very differently from the historical perception recorded by historians such as Nugent. Nugent’s presentation is an official historical discourse compared to Ndlovu’s emotional narrative. Notwithstanding the official history recounted by many historians, it is nevertheless important not to discount the ordinary people’s view of their history. The masses’ understanding of their history illuminates
what has happened and what they feel. The story reveals the burden of the Matebeleland war on the family and on a people newly ‘independent’.

As in Musengezi’s story, Ndlovu offers a child’s-eye view of things. The youthful narrator in ‘Torn Posters’ speaks frankly about the emotions experienced by a teenager growing up in Matebeleland in the violent 1980s. Posters torn down by her ‘small but fierce guerilla squad’ (179) are the ruling party pre-election propaganda put up during the run-up to the 1984 elections. They do so uttering ‘earsplitting war cries … to encounter the enemy’ (179), because, argues Annie Gagiano, ‘they are the children whose families have been the victims of the deliberately orchestrated Matebeleland terror campaign conducted against Ndebele villagers and blamed on “dissidents”’ (2003: 1). With each poster they destroy, the youths feel they are ‘killing HIM and his fat greedy ministers’ (179). This is just one of several not very flattering references to President Mugabe in the collection Writing Still.

According to official historical records, the Fifth Brigade was sent by the Government to control a band of dissidents which was bent on destroying peace. This group of soldiers was later referred to as ‘gukurahundi’ which means the rain that washes away the chaff before spring rains. However, apparently to the narrator’s father, Georgie, and uncle, Dan:

> these weren’t dissidents, but soldiers employed by Him to disguise themselves as dissidents and kill the people of Matebeleland, [it was an], ‘army consisting of approximately 20,000 soldiers … given orders to kill a minimum of 100 Matebele people each’. (180)

The report by the CCJP recorded that the Fifth Brigade army was given orders by its commanding general to go and wipe out the existing ethnic group in Matebeleland. Thus Georgie comments:

> ‘It’s Him … He’s killing us … this is a chess game. I can watch his moves … he’s trying to make us angry at our people’s expense, and he is doing a bloody damn good job of it; but as long as I’m alive he won’t get his checkmate, maybe he’ll get pieces, yes, but never checkmate’. (180 - 181)
The narrator’s father is one of those unjustly imprisoned and persecuted. The family unit is left broken when the father is taken away in an early morning raid. The narrator’s family is but one amongst many families left broken by the Gukurahundi, ‘The exact figure of how many were killed [arrested] is unknown’ (180). Thandi says: ‘Gugu said they put Daddy in jail for constipating against the government’ (184). The word ‘constipating’ could be a slip that should have meant ‘conspiring’; nevertheless, ironically it means that Georgie and the supporters of the opposition were obstructing the government and therefore had to be purged.

For the narrator’s mother, the colonial era and the post-colonial era are just one and the same thing:

Honesty! Can you believe that six years later the sheets and blankets [in the train] still have NRR (National Rhodesian Railways) imprinted on them? It’s as if this government of vultures, holding court in the Victorian robes (with the white wigs), are nostalgic for the colonial era, only this time, they are in the driver’s seat, inflicting the pain. (184)

Lazarus, among other postcolonial theorists, refers to the era of nation-state as the era of ‘reverse legitimization of colonialism which is doomed to repeat the epistemic violence of the colonialism it rejected’ (2004: 6), thus this does not bode well for present-day Zimbabwe. Such political transitions encourage postcolonial studies to regard nationalism as ‘inherently dominatory’ (7). Lazarus offers a kind of caution against any ‘nationalist’ analysis, but my ‘anthology’ is grouped by these new states reinforcing the dominant paradigm of nationalism, legitimizing the national structures first established by colonialism. Mindful of these inherent risks of nationalism, I have, nevertheless, used these nationalist categories because they reflect actual literary production and consumption in South Africa and Zimbabwe today.

When at last the family is allowed to visit him, the father is aged and emaciated, but his words inspire the narrator not to succumb to despair, ‘there would be no checkmate while I was alive’ (189). The story ends with the hopeful reunion of a family, though inside the prison gates of Chikurubi Maximum Prison. The checkmate was finally realized in 1987 when the two leaders made new attempts to resolve the nation’s divisions by merging the parties as ZANU-PF, making Zimbabwe effectively a one-party state. At the same time the constitution was changed to give
Mugabe the role of executive president. Nkomo subsequently served as vice president until his death.

In the introduction to the anthology *No More Plastic Balls*, Chihota and Muponde write that Chirere’s story ‘Tadamuhwa’ describes a gallery of men and women torn apart by family conflicts and betrayals, men and women afflicted by barrenness and other embarrassing diseases (8). Zengeni’s incontinence, for instance, is a metaphor of the spectacle of effeminate men desperately seeking to subdue barren women. The bitterness and danger of an impotent power manifests itself in Jerina, Zengeni’s wife whose eyes are terrifying to look at when she gets angry. In a fit of rage her eyes turned red, the kind that ‘one associates with people who go deaf when they get angry. You hit them but they just advance towards you. You try to run away from them but they follow, never seeming to get tired until they catch up with you’ (52). Mairosi’s goat Tadamuhwa’s irresponsible and insightful-goaty wanderings from hut to hut and home to home reveal, accidentally, cinematic cameos of disorder, distress, social conflict and decay in this society that can no longer reproduce itself creatively.

Chirere’s style of writing resembles a traditional Zimbabwean dance called ‘Jerusalem’. In this dance, dancers take turns to take the centre stage and show off their moves to each other. In this case, the dancers are the characters and their compounds the different stages where they perform their dances. The first in the arena is Jesca. Her story describes a woman who eloped with her boyfriend, Richard, in order to start a home of their own. However, hopes to start their own house are stifled, as Jesca finds herself at Nyombwe with a father-in-law who does not speak to her. The absence of Richard, coupled with the presence of Jesca and the drought, make Mairos’s home a difficult place to live. The distress of living at that home makes both Mairos and Jesca envelop themselves in their despair by talking to themselves. It seems their only means of creating a conversation is through cursing at and chasing away the goat.

The next pair of dancers on the stage are Zengeni and his wife Jerina. This pair dance around Zengeni’s embarrassing disease of incontinence and Jerina’s affliction of barrenness. It is none other than Tadamuhwa who is seen drinking water from the bowl on the ground that gets Zengeni calling after his wife. Urine is the terrible dis-ease that plagues Zengeni ‘despite his promise not
to do it again …’ (51). It is an embarrassing disease for Zengeni because he is a grown man and bed-wetting is supposed to be the plight of children without bladder-control. In the eyes of his wife, Zengeni has been emasculated by that very thing that is supposed to make him a man, but she still answers, “She’we” (51), meaning ‘My Lord’, to his summons.

Next in the dance routine are Mundindi the butcher, Moses his worker and Rejina: wife to Funny and girlfriend to both Mundindi and Moses. Rejina is presented as an insatiable wench who does not seem to mind whom she sleeps with just so long as he is a man. Mundindi knows that ‘if the cat is away the mice play’ and since Funny is not home for a whole week, he tells Moses to ‘run and tell her that I will meet her tonight. Teacher isn’t home this week …’ (53). Moses goes gladly but not so as to pass the butcher’s message instead it is to tell Rejina ‘to report at his [Moses’] shack behind the butchery’ (53). Already anticipating the meeting, ‘she wink[s] an eye at Moses’ (53).

Chirere makes the goat a roaming reporter visiting a number of homesteads in order to give the reader glimpses of life in the rural areas. Mundindi the butcher covetously eyes the goat, to chop him up for sale; and the goat has other harmless, humorous encounters with Jesca, Jerina and Rejina. It is through the troublesome goat that Chirere explores life in the rural areas. Notwithstanding how packed the story is with distress and conflict, it shows that Zimbabweans have always had a life outside the webs of politics, illustrating Sachs and Ndebele’s emphasis on the human element and recovery of ordinary. Their dances - ‘Jerusalem’, ‘Muchongoyo’ and ‘Mbakumba’ - kept their spirits up. Chirere’s style lightens the gloom as the goat and its antics bring some comic relief wandering from compound to compound.

After independence in Zimbabwe there was a migration of people from country to the cities, such as Harare and Bulawayo, in search of greener pastures, only to be met with disappointment and disillusionment in the glorious places they had painted for themselves. This theme haunts the pages of many literary works such as Musaemura Zimunya’s collection of poems *Country Dawns and City Lights* (1984). Probably, Jesca’s husband, Richard, left Nyombwe village in search of a better life in the cities for him and his wife. Certainly, this is the depiction of Terrence in ‘A Breach of Trust’ by Nyereyemhuka.
Worried and frustrated, Terrence, the protagonist in Nyereyemhuka’s story, is gravitating towards ruin in the city. A great many people in the rural areas left the misery and depression in the villages to search for jobs and better lives, but there is nothing to suggest hopefulness in his life. His single-roomed flat provides an image of despair: “Stains of coffee on the floor, scraps of sadza in the sink, an unmade bed. All these denoted the general disorder of his mental state” (71).

His predatory instincts - wishing his girlfriend (the bitch!) was there so he could sleep with her - are eroding his inner self and deplete any glimmer of optimism in the lovers’ relationship. He resorts to a prostitute, with disastrous consequences. Thoughts about his mother are the last straw. He begins to wish he had been stillborn at birth, regarding his mother as a shameless extorter: “How he hated her when she came in rags like that, infesting the whole place with lice and fleas and bugs, an odour Tendai would spray away with perfume and insecticide in the happier days” (74).

Perhaps Terrence is turning into a schizophrenic. His constant reference to ‘cords’, which are subsequently ‘breached’, lends credence to this observation. The ‘discordant cords of trust … irked him’ (73); he was learning to despise his mother. His mother would talk about drought, of the harvest of mice, or of recent deaths in the village, ‘not realizing that the cord had been cut’ (74). After throwing out his cousin-prostitute, he returns to his room ‘fighting off the cords of despair’ (77). In the last sentences of the story, Terrence felt ‘his cords of sanity strain, threatening to snap any time’. The hard times, characterized by financial and even moral bankruptcy, have caught up with Terrence and he is losing hold on himself. ‘A Breach of Trust’ is a disturbing story of the moral and social uselessness of Terrence’s life.

Such a place does not allow for Terrence’s character to develop; perhaps Nyereyemhuka tells stories to expose the ills bedeviling urban society. The editors of the collection comment that the story on the whole ‘subvert[s] celebrated conventions, while holding up no heroes or heroines to society’ (10). They argue that: “If Nyereyemhuka does not suggest alternatives to the predicament he presents, he … rub[s] into society the irritation and discomfort it needs to start looking for a way out” (11).
This alone makes Nyereyemhuka’s story worthwhile. However, it is also true, as Andrew Bennett points out in *An Introduction to Literature*, that:

*A work of literature is not a nut to be cracked open so that a kernel meaning can be extracted and devoured and the rest thrown away; the whole - a performance in words - is something to be experienced and enjoyed.* (2004: 15)

Therefore, Nyereyemhuka’s story is more than sublimated aesthetics. It is also more than his expression of disgust at life. Here, as elsewhere, Nyereyemhuka ‘seeks the human side of people, and finds it undermined by … cruelty, selfishness, out-right greed and self-importance’ (9). His story leaves the reader with more than just a tangle of pathologies; they are cleverly written to shock the reader into a response and invite him or her, perhaps, to come up with a solution.

Terrence’s life in Nyereyemhuka’s story is plagued by a spiritual and moral drought. The actual physical drought is the one which plagues the people in the rural areas in Chirere’s ‘Tadamuhwa’ and it is the same drought that happened in 1991 that resulted in Zimbabwe embarking on the structural adjustment programme with the World Bank meant to lift the country’s economic burden. This period is depicted in Chihota’s story ‘Shipwreck’.

Beleaguered in stormy waters, a vessel receives messages to help it steer clear of danger. The captain-president of the ship is sweating at the controls trying to guide the ship past the ESAP heights and the rocks below. The ship of Chihota’s ‘Shipwreck’ symbolizes a nation in trouble. The trouble is, it seems, political and economic in its origins. The captain is the equivalent to some of those men and women who are elected by the masses to guide the nation towards stability and prosperity. It is with an uncomfortable sense of disaster that one observes that the captain of the vessel is not in total control of the situation. The ‘urgent messages’ from above, coming from the Northern and Western horizons, decide the direction that the ship shall take.

The title, ‘Shipwreck’, forecasts doom. The ‘sharp rocks below’ are a permanent reminder that the lives of the ship’s passengers are in constant peril. Yet nowhere do we see or hear the citizens of the nation contribute or participate in the ‘steering’ process. If anything, they are invisible. This is the first unreality of this story. The people who are supposed to matter are voiceless. The
second is the influence of the insistent voice from above. More than anything else, this voice holds sway over the ship’s fortunes. Amazingly, the captain, who should be a charismatic, responsible and powerful individual, seems to tactlessly and powerlessly go along with the ‘urgent messages’. The first message is that the captain should ‘jettison all unnecessary weight …’ (144), but the unnecessary weight includes the ship’s compass. How then can a ship sail without a compass? A compass is an instrument for finding direction. The order to throw away the compass makes the whole idea of navigation a farce. In place of the compass, the Northern and Western voices will offer their guidance. ‘You don’t have to chart your own course’ (144), they quip.

They advise: ‘All you have to do is follow our ships. We know the direction to the 21st Century’ (144). To this order, the president and his cabinet respond with ‘harsh voices’ that are said to have ‘zipped and zapped and swished and swashed’ (144). This reminds one, perhaps, of the parliaments in A Man of the People, Anthills of the Savannah (1987) and The Beautiful Ones are Not Yet Born where the parliamentarians are involved in irrelevant, trifling debates. A significant aspect is that there already exist ‘high wall[s] of resolution which had been erected’ (144). So the captain-president’s consultations with his cabinet are only ceremonial. They never reach or make any real decisions. As the Northern voices say, ‘You do not have to chart your own course’. In due course, ‘the compass, the radar, the altimeter, the freedometer and the joystick were all prised out of their fastenings and thrown overboard’ (144). This is the end; it appears, of the ship’s independence. New masters now call the shots. ‘That’s better!’ (144), crackle the Northern and Western voice.

‘Shipwreck’ is an allegory about the tragedy of so-called Third World nations as they seek to move forward in a world they are powerless to control. The story is an extended metaphor of the ruinous core-periphery relationship. African countries, for example, have very little say in the decisions that govern their existence. A veneer of self-governance and equality exists, which in reality masks the monstrous inequality existing in world affairs. In his book, Stiglitz explodes this myth of autonomy and equality in world economics and politics, and exposes globalization as a capitalist utopia, since the universalization chanted by millennial capitalism’s apologists is finally unactualizable on the terrain of capitalism itself (7).
The ship’s journey seems to represent African countries’ uncertain love-affair with Western and Northern capitalism. We see that the ship is ordered about using the language of capitalism, that is, the arrogant, money-driven language. Their destiny lies in following the dictates of international capitalism, and they find themselves hamstrung and crippled. The shipwrecked society’s dependency on outside messages tells the story of its bondage. In his book, Stiglitz illustrates the deepening contradictions in world development characterized by the Northern and Western governments’ deliberate perpetuation of ‘Third World’ misery. Development is a myth and arguments for it are outlandish, utopian and technophilic, says Leonard Bloom (1992: 154). Caught in the ‘chains of indebtedness’ described in Ali Mazrui’s *Cultural Forces in World Politics* (1990: 53), the ‘Shipwreck’ societies of Chihota’s story face a catch-22 predicament that will last for a long time to come. As neo-colonial outposts and client governments, their usefulness to Western and Northern society is measured in terms of their ‘exploitability’.

Considering the dilemma of “Shipwreck”, the solution is even more difficult to suggest. This may explain the fatalism in the story. Emmanuel Chiwome in “Indigenous Knowledge and Technology in African and Diaspora Communities” points out that Africans must begin to champion their own knowledge systems and encourage their communities to utilize strategies designed by themselves for their own use (cited in Spencer: 47). Rodney also posits the idea that a formerly colonized nation has no hope of developing until it breaks effectively with the vicious circle of dependency and exploitation which characterizes imperialism (35), a point that Memmi supports. Clearly, research and experience have shown that ‘shipwreck’ societies cannot fully develop on the basis of borrowed intellectual, technological and financial resources. No amount of generosity of donors, or the use of foreign models and ideas and external initiatives will end the “shipwreck” society’s dilemma. The bossing will not stop, nor will the paternalism and the patronization either. Mazrui says that the genius of western imperialism - western imperialism itself being the ‘fusion between racist ideology and triumphant technology’ - is in its tentacles of communication which are far-flung into the Third World countries, unless the shipwrecked societies radically break off this communication and begin a rebirth. All semblances to equality, fairness, justice and freedom will vanish (Mazrui and Tidy, 1984: 40).
Already, these are beginning to disappear. From 1975 to 1985 Zambia accepted International Monetary Fund (IMF) support, facing steadily falling copper prices. When in 1985 the Fund insisted on Zambia adopting a full austerity programme, including an end to price controls and lifting of subsidies on food and petrol, prices of basic commodities doubled and there were bloody riots and deaths in the Copperbelt in 1987. Kaunda reacted in May 1987 by restoring government food subsidies and abandoning the IMF plan and limiting Zambia’s debt servicing to 10% of foreign exchange earnings. The IMF retaliated, and in September 1987 Zambia was declared ineligible for further financial assistance. Kaunda thereafter tried to launch an indigenous recovery programme, failed and went back to IMF. The Ghanaian ship under Captain Rawlings also went through the same process, as well as Captain Mobutu Sese-Seko’s Zaire (now The Democratic Republic of Congo) and Captain Nyerere’s Tanzania. All these ‘captains’ failed to break off from the spell of the Western-Northern voice, and their societies were in a state of near collapse.

‘Shipwreck’ dramatizes present-day national collapse. The Northern-Western instructions are at base racist and exploitative. The African leaders, however, purporting to steer, are themselves steered. Indeed, they seem to connive with the caucus of exploiters. The new global order increasingly marginalizes the world’s poor, leaving them very little room in which to live. The story is conspicuous for its silence on the masses’ capacity to transform the status quo. The masses are effectively discounted as a factor in the capitalist chess game. They are there to be jettisoned - as the story suggests - and used as they are the raw material of exploitation in an increasingly bi-polar and insecure world. Chihota and Muponde in their stories ‘Seventh Street Alchemy’ and ‘At the Window’, respectively, tell of the fate of the voiceless, ‘shipwrecked’ people who are glossed over in Chihota’s story.

Chikwava in his story ‘Seventh Street Alchemy’ extends this issue of the voiceless raised by Chihota. The characters in his story struggle against poverty in the Avenues of Harare. The main character in the story is called Fiso. She is ‘a fifty-two-year old quasi prostitute with thirty-seven teeth and a pair of six inch heeled perspex platform shoes’. She managed to slip through the cracks of bureaucracy and now is trying to establish her identity, not in any idealistic or existential sense, like the many characters in the stories from South Africa searching for their
identities, but in a literal, bureaucratic sense. She needs to get a birth certificate so that her daughter can get a passport. But she can only do so if she can provide her parents’ birth certificates, and without an identity document she cannot get the passport. She cannot establish her identity without succumbing to the greedier side of bureaucracy. But there is irony in the tale. To charge her for creating such a disturbance in trying to acquire an identity they must first establish her identity, and that is when the officials realize they cannot charge her because she does not officially exist. Her plight very much recalls Athol Fugard’s play ‘Sizwe Bansi is Dead’ in *Statements* (1974).

Through the corrupt policemen and petty-minded civil servants the story is trying to explore how the state operates sometimes; how it turns corrupt instead of serving the people, which is its purpose. The state ends up really making peoples’ lives difficult. Through Fiso, Chikwava shows how Zimbabwean reality is being controlled by the state. The defiant individual is perhaps the single most alarming and self-sustained threat to a liberation project that has metamorphosed into an elite African club, who have realized that the ‘revolution’, nicely wrapped in anti-imperialist rhetoric, can earn them the political capital they need to safeguard their wealth and status. She has been squeezed out in search of an identity document because of the increasing hardships that come with living in the Avenues. The story is much more than just a story of the circular machination of bureaucracy in the hands of petty minded officials; it is also about a woman surviving on the streets of Harare, on the intersection of Seventh Street and Samora Machel Avenue.

One may not be way off the mark if one were to consider Chikwava’s story is a form of mental banditry: for here is a writer who jolts the minds of the readers into awareness. In this light one can observe that Chikwava has Marecheran echoes not only in his choice of hairstyle but in his racy writing, about life in the Avenues. Apart from writing, Chikwava is also a blues/Afro-jazz guitarist, singer, songwriter and a keen follower of the visual arts scene, and has spent a great deal of time collaborating with some of Harare’s upcoming jazz musicians on experimental shows trying to fuse action painting and live music: hence the struggling jazz pianist in the story, Stix. This character brings a fictional-autobiographical perspective to the story. Through this character Chikwava delineates the life of people who are struggling to scrape a living at the
margins of society. There is also Sue, a street vendor, who shares a bed with her mother. She has no sympathy for the state propaganda, and she listens to the radio because she is more concerned about where to get her next ration of sugar and cooking oil. The narrator observes that: ‘In spite of poverty’s glorious march into every house-hold, the will to be dignified by underpants and socks remains intact’ (17). The other characters include ‘a civil servant soaked to the bone in matrimonial distress’, an unfaithful husband, some rogue mosquitoes and a pair of fornicating flies.

The streets, flats, offices, clubs, prisons and mortuaries of Chikwava’s Harare mirror characters’ activities, and they all contribute to the surreal alchemy of life towards the twenty-first century in Zimbabwe. ‘Defining one’s relationship with the world’, solemnly states the story’s narrator, ‘demands daily renegotiating one’s existence. So far reaching are the consequences of neglecting exigencies imposed by this, that those unwilling or unable to participate eventually find themselves trapped in the parallel universe’ (18). ‘Seventh Street Alchemy’ relates the grotesque and tragic mishaps occurring in the parallel universe of the disempowered with a Marechera-like combination of wit, sympathy and outrage. He wryly points out the discrepancy between the official mythology and Zimbabwe’s material realities. In Chikwava’s Zimbabwe, those trapped in the officially unacknowledged universe are reduced to exploitable human material, their lives rendered equivalent to the lives of mosquitoes or flies – the most striking example being the street kid who gets run over. Elsewhere, Chikwava has pointed out that the grotesque gap between that which is officially allowed to exist and that which is consigned to invisibility is reminiscent of the colonial era in Zimbabwe. This echoes Said’s observation that colonialism is never-ending. Kanengoni in his story ‘The Ugly Reflection in the Mirror’ seems to confirm that the acquisition of land marks the grand finale of external forms of colonialism in Zimbabwe (see below).

Muponde’s ‘At the Window’, also portrays the lives of Chihota’s voiceless people’. The narrator (Rogers) is a retrenchee who is beginning to feel humiliated and embarrassed by his poverty. Maurice, one of the narrator’s acquaintances, commits suicide to escape a miserable life and his face begins to appear at the window of the narrator’s room. The face spellbinds him, even as he recognizes the ruin that it presages. Daily, he gravitates towards the face, and for a time is
actually afraid that it will shatter the window pane and come for him. It, however, does not do so. The odds are that, faced with the fact of his meaningless, bankrupt life, Rogers might be tempted to consider terminating his own life too.

The story begins, and ends, at the window. At the window Rogers first sees the apparition, and it is where he is powerlessly magnetized by the specter’s surreal antics. It is not explicitly clear whether Maurice’s ‘poker face’ is really there at the window. Indeed, it might only be the narrator’s hallucination, induced by a collapsed life. He watches his own life comminute, dissolve, refract and reform along with the face at the window. One verifiable fact is the narrator’s nightmarish existence. Perhaps, the image at the window is a kind of doppelganger, the narrator’s reflection in the glass. He is staring, not really at Maurice’s face, but at his own gravitation towards ruin. He tells us that the vision at the window:

Was a wheel turning fast? I became the wheel, and his whirring poker face merged with my own confusion. The face would dissolve into mere sound and then reform, zoomed in and out by some strange mechanism, smashing against the window … (224)

The window, just as it is the image representing the revelation of new things or new truths, is in this case a vision holding a man in thrall and calling him to destruction. It is significant, however, that the smashing occurring at the window has, at the moment, ‘no audible impact’. The narrator has a chance to avoid total collapse.

The trauma of poverty is never more shocking than in the narrator’s statement that the ‘retrenches package saw me through the first two months’ (225). Is this all that the worker is rewarded with, after years of slavish work? From relatively well-paying jobs, the narrator and his fellow retrenches are reduced to tramps, hunting for non-existing jobs and facing eviction by their acid-tongued landlords and landladies. This is the deteriorating post Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) environment envisaged in Chihota’s ‘Shipwreck’. ESAP was insensitive to the plight of millions, destroying the people’s security, leaving them unemployed, naked and disempowered. The resultant wretchedness caused people like Maurice to become consumed by despair and eventually to take their own lives. The exploitative nature of global capitalism is at the core of the domino-effect of mass poverty. The people’s lives are mortgaged
to profit, and when crises arise in the system, it is the people, perennially exposed, who suffer most. The nakedness and the exposure, incidentally, are two of the most powerfully exploited images in the story. Rogers began to feel, in his words, ‘the sharp pinch of tramping about for a new job. I had no luck’. This is the rejected life of the poor worker who is a mere cog in the crushing wheel of capitalism.

Capitalism’s crises explode on the poor’s very doorsteps. In Roger’s case the feeling of barrenness is more torturing because he has lost a job which had provided him with an ephemeral, illusory security. For him and his fellow retrenchees, their lives are tragic. Their education had only prepared them for unproductive, comfortable types of work like office paperwork, because it is an education that alienates and estranges the person from his environment. It produces a worker who is not equipped for multiple roles and who is least prepared to make the most rational use of material and social resources. In short, education for underdevelopment creates clones and idiots. The narrator tells us that Maurice:

Was one of us, flung into the world by an education that did not prepare one for the amphibian options of social life? One got stuck in one environment and chances are that one died there. In Maurice’s and my case, one got musty behind heaps of paper in some office. (231)

His fate is likely the fate of the unemployed millions.

One common feature of the lives of the characters in ‘At the Window’ is that, simply, they are all ‘trying to make ends meet’, which is only another way of saying that everyone is struggling against life’s threatening circumstances of poverty. Arthur, for example, is a graduate teaching assistant at the University and is frustrated and bitter. His dream of better days is blown away like chaff before him, and he is yet to be anything in life. He rants at the ‘callous’ professors, alleging that they habitually exploit him and his like:

They don’t respect difference and initiative up there. You are always young and a latecomer to serious thought. You must be malleable enough on their ideological anvil, and don’t protest when they hammer you too flat and crack your seams. The old PhDs know it all or they will terminate your contract if you express differences. You are reduced to a lodger, and look at me! I have been a teaching assistant for the past five
years … They abuse you, make you research their own projects, make you mark heaps and heaps of assignments, but they get professorships at the end and you look worse for wear. You hold on to your crumbling sanity … (228)

It seems as if everyone is struggling. Barbara, Roger’s girlfriend is also ‘trying to make ends meet’, and actually gives this reason for her decision to terminate their relationship. She says that she has to make up for lost time, find someone serious who would marry her, and start a productive life. Rogers himself, when he hurries with his qualifications to the government offices that had advertised in the local papers that they have staff shortages, is told flat out that there was no work. ‘The fat belly’, he says, ‘who came down from the seventh floor said that they were looking for expatriates’ (226). No wonder the ends were not meeting.

The agony of the deprived life of the times is compounded by the humiliation of being a lodger. The landlady gives one a daily dose of hell. For example, she heckles the lodger:

When do you pay the rent; bring the toilet paper and disinfectant; you broke the window; pay; what were you laughing so loud for the day before yesterday and who was that girl you brought in a night ago; are you looking for work at all or you’re just browsing for short skirts; you will have to pay for the window … (226)

This is the typical terrorism that landlords and landladies mete out to the poor lodgers who have nowhere to go and have to perfect the art of sycophancy and excuses. One annoyed lodger in Mhiripiri’s “Lodgers” ends up putting a fist into the mouth of his landlord. The lodger is the loser, the typical ‘have-not’. Roger, still out of work, has to give his landlady rent on ‘bent knees’, bobbing his head from side to side with gratitude that she has spared him an eviction for hauling himself ‘in the house with muddy feet last week’ or for ‘bringing in too many visitors’ or for washing too many things. The squalor, not surprisingly, intensifies, and Maurice’s visits at the window become too frequent. Like Ronald in ‘Broken Strings’, Roger has only one consolation left in his life. He can still boast of an ‘exhaustingly exciting afternoon’ with Barbara. Of course, as happens in the earlier story, even this consolation is lost when Barbara decides that she has had enough.
The beer hall is where the retrenchees can drink away their sorrows. When things get unbearable, any dude could go to Style and prime himself with booze. Style is the (in)famous beer hall in Kuwadzana where one ‘got cleaned out in style’. Because of Style:

Many house owners couldn’t finish building their houses here and the loans they had got for their houses drowned in beer and women as they reeled under the numbing punches of the juke-box beats. Three to four years ago if you looked at Kuwadzana you thought that it was the aftermath of an invisible aerial bombing: pit-sand and concrete stones and bricks everywhere, houses struggling at the foundation, some half-built and doorless, roofless. This too was STYLE: Some kind of life. (277)

At the beer hall one meets the likes of Arthur and Maurice and hears the progress (or the lack of progress) they are making in life. The story is the same everywhere: despair is calling. Roger speaks of ‘possible world-weariness and collapse’.

At Style, Maurice tells his friends that, ‘it’s easy to be naked, comrades, so easy to be bared before the nasty world’ (228). Poverty has degraded the people and stripped them of all dignity. Maurice tells the disconnected story of a man who would not die, even at his funeral, and compares himself to this man who was like a leprous war prisoner who stuck out his tongue at the most seasoned torturer. As their ‘postcolonial’ lives perpetuate the oppression of colonial times, so too does this “continuous war” (230) resemble the actual struggle for independence. Maurice, in light of this tale, reflects that: “Indeed his life was a war. War is not only gunsmoke. To flare nostrils and breathe god’s air is a continuous war which has become the condition of living. This too is the tyranny of life” (230).

Sadly, Maurice is not the man who would not die, because he does die. Perhaps he did stick out his tongue at life’s torture by taking his own life. The only biography he leaves is the piece of sculpture that is only a long, dislocated neck at the end of which is attached a small cap-like head with huge popping eyes. Maurice, it seems, has been ‘concussed to morbid depression by the pile drive from the juggernaut that was rolled down from the hills of the sun-god’ (230 - 1). His story came out in the papers, ‘tacked in some obscure corner, a few inches of a story about the suicide of a nameless tramp’ (232). Maurice becomes nameless as well as voiceless and quite useless. In
Chikwava’s story, Fiso is in a worse situation because she is a woman, a prostitute on top of that, and she faces similar problems of poverty. But like the shrub in Mhiripiri’s story (see below), Roger is resilient; he resists succumbing to the whirling image in the mirror and taking his own life.

Roger, in the wake of all the turbulence around him, is left at the window to struggle to free himself from the stupefying spell of Maurice’s fate. At first the nightmare recreating itself at his window magnetizes him. ‘There was something attractive about his exit’ (232) says Roger. Yet, after analyzing the apparition from close range, he discovers that:

> The skin was lifting from its nose and cheeks. The eyes were lifeless, like stone. And I knew I had to tear myself free from its stupefying power. The first step was to free myself from the window where my life had been bird-limed to inertia and horror. (232)

Roger realizes what he had nearly fallen into: the trap of despair. Quickly, he backs off. The apparition tries to re-cast its spell on him: “When it felt my withdrawal from its orbit it buzzed and banged at the window. But I had set my eyes on living. When it persisted I took a pot and hurled it at its face” (232 - 3).

The narrator finds the strength and courage to tear himself free from the web that Maurice (despair) was spinning around him. He has ‘set his eyes on living’. He may be saying to Maurice too bad for you, old fellow, that you ever chose death over life. Nothing is more precious than life. I am going to live mine. This, then, is the dramatic epiphany that occurs at the very end. He says, in the spirit of a newfound endurance, that he wants to learn to trust his own feet:

> My own ends were too wide apart to meet easily. But I had to go beyond the symbolism of my sun, explode it, and recreate it in meaningful social action. I realized it was not enough to acknowledge the fertility of the symbol while it remained distant. (233).

The story has a positive ending. The character who had been overwhelmed by odds now fancies that he has a chance. This is a real opportunity to strike out against his dehumanizers, to drive out all the bitterness and despair from his life, and to start anew. Just like the resistant little shrub in
Mhiripiri’s story, he refuses to be destroyed, refuses to remain the invisible Other and he resolves to radically transform his circumstances. He tells us (perhaps over-confidently) that: ‘I stayed, but seldom at the window. There were more windows opening elsewhere’. The story is sardonically funny, sad, but absorbing and perhaps masterfully woven into an original skein.

Mhiripiri’s ‘The Shrub in Our Little Garden’ reads almost like an oral story similar to Masilela’s story in Chapter Two. It is a story about resistance and allegorically depicts many Zimbabweans at the turn of the twenty-first century. The family of the narrator, which has just moved in at a new place, clears the small plot behind the house for a garden. A certain shrub is cleared along with the weeds but it sprouts anew again, even as the narrator is egged by his mother to uproot the ‘ugly’ shrub. The singular shrub is described as ugly, with many blunt thorns, a stem and branches of a dull purple color and an ‘acrid smell of protest’. This description suggests the shrub’s hidden indomitability. It literally protests with its bad smell, just as a stinking bug or a skunk would. For two years the narrator is locked in a frustrating battle with the shrub, and he has to give up and allow the shrub to grow as it pleases. Like the voiceless people in Chihota’s story it was to be thrown away.

Refusing to be domesticated, the shrub sends the message that it has a right to life, just as the rose they tried to grow in place of the shrub. In society, people who oppress others too often forget that the oppressed have a right to life and dignity and ought to be left alone. The person who makes the other his or her doormat fails to imagine himself or herself in the same position. The shrub refuses to be violated, making the too-often-forgotten but simple fact that no one, however small, likes to be downtrodden. One must live and let live, as the cliché goes. The shrub, therefore, is a symbol of life, of the love of life and the preparedness to preserve and fight for it.

The family wants to remove the shrub and grow a rose in its place. This is a familiar kind of arrogance, when you find people preferring one thing to another using very subjective and myopic justifications. In the story, it is not the shrub that is the problem as such, but the family. The family’s ways of judging a thing’s value seem artificial. Their plan fails to work when the intended victim fights back by growing all over again and by literally strangling the imposed rose, which could be an extension of neocolonialism. The narrator says that ‘I hated the shrub –
my chest filled up with dark angry passion against it’ (150). It seems, however, that he is angrier at himself and at his mother for failing to kill the shrub. Their failure tends to reflect the hopeless situation of their lives and not of the shrub, because it is surviving, though struggling against all odds. It is very like someone who breaks a mirror because it shows his face in all its ugliness. His anger also emanates from his realization that the shrub must now be left alone, a fact which, unfortunately, his mother is still unable to comprehend. For the narrator, it has earned its right to live. Conversely, the rose has not earned this right. Trying to kill the triumphant shrub’s ‘maze of roots … was like seeking a starting point of a dark labyrinth when one was already lost in its muddled tunnels’ (150).

The shrub is not merely a static symbol of life. Like water, which is a symbol of life because it gives life, the shrub also gives and restores life. The herbsman who visits the family after his dream in which he saw the medicinal shrub confirms the shrub’s life giving qualities. It has a usefulness that the rose does not have. It can help cure the minds of those who seek to destroy it. The little-appreciated shrub is capable of saving the lame and schizoid psyches of the narrator and his family.

The motif of the little-appreciated, life-giving shrub, offers a comprehensive vision falling into place, though not explicitly. All the characters like Fiso and Rogers who have struggled against poverty are the heroes who give the other oppressed hope (except for the likes of those who buckled under the stress such as Maurice). They are resurrected in the vision of the humble shrub that finally refused to be violated, even after countless occasions of being put down. In the quest for human dignity, freedom and a more complete humanization, the people defied their odds of survival in a cruel city. Their examples are everlasting. This is the high point of ‘The Shrub in Our Little Garden’.

The last two stories are also the high point of this analysis because they tend to lean towards depicting Zimbabwe’s socio-scope towards the turn of the twenty-first century. Kanengoni’s ‘The Ugly Reflection in the Mirror’, pits a white landowner of British settler origin against one of the newly landed Zimbabwean ex-combatants or ‘war veterans’. In this case, the white man is the elder, but the conversation is also about ownership, land and power, now in the post-colonial
context. It is a meeting of equals, but the price is high. Without sentimentalizing the old white man or airbrushing his lingering colonial mannerisms away, Kanengoni in this brief sketch shows an increased acknowledgement of both colonial injustice and of the need to work out some mutually accommodating structure of land use in Zimbabwe, among the farmer settlers and the new occupants.

The story does not hide the tension that still exists across the racial divide. The narrator exposes how the whites still have the lingerings of racial superiority over blacks:

I have spoken to white commercial farmers several times before but there has always been this profound problem: right from the outset the farmers always assumed a domineering attitude. You saw it in the elevated look in their eyes; you saw it in the arrogant twitch at the corner of their lips; you saw it in the way they wanted to control the discussion, reducing you to a mere listener. (105)

At some point the narrator thinks he is seeing things which are not there. But Mr Fleming’s slip-of-the-tongue-comment, about his surprise at the field being clean, is an indication of his condescending attitude towards his neighbor. He tries to correct himself with ‘pardon what I mean…’ (107), but the narrator has already picked up on the insult. He already knew that Mr Fleming “… was being brutally honest. The only blacks they really knew were their farm laborers, their cooks and their nannies. All of the others had to fit into those stereotypes. That was why he was surprised …” (107) that the field of beans was kept so clean under the management of a black man.

This confirms that the narrator’s idea about the white farmers’ domineering attitude is more real than imagined. However, Mr Fleming carries the guilt of his forefathers: ‘That is the past that now haunts us’ (107), he says: his failure to look at the narrator in the eye, his trembling finger and his panic in requesting the narrator to ‘say something. Anything’ (106). He also blames the British and Tony Blair for disowning the past and not having resolved the land issue with Zimbabwe’s government in time. The narrator also mentions that ‘We were afraid the issue might explode in our faces’ (106). The irony is that the explosion had already occurred and all around
them was the evidence of the fast-track Land Reform Resettlement Programme - Phase II of 1999.4

In another sense, the explosion happened right in front of the narrator as he thought: ‘My God, how like my late father he looks’ (108). This realization that comes a long way after colonialism has ended is the condition that Memmi speaks of: the hopes of realizing a new man soon after the end of colonialism are deluded (68). It will take a long time for the colonized to realize his true worth after years of being colonized. It took the narrator years of interaction with white people for him to realize that they walk, limp and even stoop just like black people.

The awkward conversation between Mr Fleming and the narrator is a result of the historic colonial relations between blacks and whites, which were not amicable but show some hope for improvement. Colonial relations between blacks and whites were marked by what Nicholas Thomas refers to as an ‘ingrained racism’, imbedded in the actions, institutions and in the nature of the colonizer (1994: 1). (See Victor in Bransby’s ‘A Reflection of Self’.)

The meeting of the former colonizer and former colonized brings back some painful memories for the narrator; one is reminded of Silas’s meeting with Du Bois in Dangor’s ‘Bitter Fruit’ in the previous chapter. The narrator recalls being dispossessed of their homeland, in Chivhu, to make way for British white settlers and how the forced eviction caused him to lose his black puppy, Machena. Mr Fleming’s memories can be juxtaposed with those of the narrator, as his seem filled more with nostalgia for the days when the region was still called by its colonial name ‘Crown Land’ (106), but as the narrator correctly points out, ‘the old man was still living in the past’ (106).

Kanengoni’s story constitutes an important source of critical consciousness in the post-colonial perspective that land is sustenance and much more as well, and the ability of the black man to work on it fruitfully after years of deprivation refutes the colonial mentality that blacks cannot. The speeding away of Fleming’s car from the field marks the end of the white man’s dominance on the land. The rain symbolizes both the cleansing of the land and the people’s past hurts and sorrows. Kanengoni seems to be arguing that Zimbabweans have succeeded in dismantling the
roots of colonialism through the land acquisition programme. There is no doubt that Kanengoni is championing the current ruling party’s numerous programmes implemented to give control of all economic resources - mines, banks and businesses - to the black majority, something which should have been done a very long time ago in order to completely eradicate the structures of colonialism. However, one cannot ignore the impact of such resolutions on the ordinary lives of the majority of the people.

In as much as Wilson’s ‘The Twelve Chitenges’ concludes one collection of new stories from Zimbabwe it also concludes my analysis of selected short stories from Zimbabwe at the turn of the twenty-first century. It brings to an end this analysis of the present-day Zimbabwe situation, fulfilling this chapter’s purpose: to journey through Rhodesia to Zimbabwe via the revolution by analyzing the selected stories. It depicts what has come to be known today as the ‘Zimbabwe Crisis’ by both insiders and outsiders.

It has become common knowledge that Zimbabwe is experiencing a downward plunge for the worse: economically, politically and socially. Economic analysts like Patrick Bond and Masimba Manyanya (2003), have documented evidence of ‘Zimbabwe’s plunge’ in a book with the same title. The narrators’ friends who stay in Zambia are aware that the economic situation in Zimbabwe will not allow a family to have a meal like ‘lamb with almond and cream … served with chilled white South African wine’ (245). Though they joke that one can no longer afford the basic commodities of life in Zimbabwe, they seriously press their friend to settle in Zambia where things are better. The patriotic Zimbabwean in the narrator says:

Look, here you’re just ex-pats. You don’t belong. In Zim I’m a Zimbabwean. And just because the country is going through a rough time doesn’t mean we should all pack up and leave. You have to weather these things through. (245 - 246)

The narrator’s patriotism stems from the stern belief that he belongs in Zimbabwe. But this does not come easily, as black Zimbabwean passengers in the bus have to first overcome their primary response to the color of his skin in order to accept him as one of them. It is not only the other passengers, but the narrator himself who has to make an effort. Like Mr Fleming in ‘The Ugly Reflection in the Mirror’, the narrator has the lingering sense of racial superiority that plagues
most former white colonizers. He gets into the bus when it is ‘already full and the front seat that he had had his eye on [is] taken. Automatically he felt a flash of annoyance … then remembered who he was …’ (243). Essentially, the narrator remembered that he is a white man of British settler origin, no longer in a British colony but an independent country of which he is a citizen. Therefore, the next black person is his equal and has as much right as he does to anything; hence he ‘humbly made his way towards an empty seat at the back’ (243).

The critic, Isaac Julien, maintains that a unitary blackness is a fiction and that it should be opened up to coalition across race, gender and class (cited in Dent, 1992: 225). Similarly, a unitary whiteness is a fiction and thus both blackness and whiteness are to be de-essentialised and replaced by fluidity in order to accommodate the new identity.

At first the narrator finds it difficult to relate to everyone else in the bus because he is the only white. He is (very) ‘self-conscious’ of this to such an extent that his lingering colonial mannerisms tend to show themselves now and again, for instance, when the black woman wearing red comes up to chat with him. His immediate focus on her sexuality is typical of the myth that associated black African people with sexual prowess. However, once he mentions that ‘I’m Zimbabwean’ (244), he no longer remains an outsider, but one Zimbabwean amongst many others about to cross the border going back home.

Having jumped one identity hurdle and established himself as a Zimbabwean he has one more: to identify himself with the ‘cross-borders’ on the bus. In this instance he actually does not want to associate himself with them because he views their kind of business as criminal, like drug smuggling. But in order to relax on the trip he involuntarily accepts the task of taking the woman-in-red’s six pairs of shoes over the border for her. Immediately after that:

He sat back, no longer the only whitey on the bus, but a Zimbabwean! It was great to be able to do something for one’s fellow citizens … he smiled at everyone and when two guys behind him broke into uproarious laughter at some joke in Shona, or was it Nyanja? he laughed too, as if he understood it. (245)
He felt so relaxed he gave away fifty Kwacha to a foreign exchange dealer. ‘He looked forward to getting home, pulling them [twelve chitenges] out in a riot of color and spreading them around the living room’ (246). However, once at the border his generosity vanishes when he sees the Zimbabwe customs exercise note. He turns to the woman and says, ‘Look at that … I’m sorry but I can’t take your shoes’. Whatever camaraderie they had developed on the bus disintegrated. ‘No longer at one with his fellow passengers he resolutely ignored the angry muttering behind him’ (247).

Unfortunately or fortunately for him, he is allied, by the immigration officer, with the rest of the ‘cross-borders’ because of his twelve chitenges. He is accused of hoarding in order to re-sell commercially because he had twelve items of the same thing instead of the required allowance of six that was duty free for each individual. He pays the fine with everyone sniggering behind him. Once again feeling the outsider he goes and sits on his own waiting for the bus after being searched.

That same woman who earlier made him self-conscious about being white and not being a ‘cross-border’ now makes the narrator and everyone else present question their allegiance in terms of party politics. She walked to where he was seated, having forgotten the incident with immigration:

... she burst out ... ‘This bloody government! Why do we have to wait like this? Look at all this petrol!’ she waved at the tankers. ‘Just look! ... Can you believe it? ... We should be in Harare by now. Hell man, I’m sick of being messed around! ... she ... walked deliberately out into the middle of the road and shouted, ‘Eee weh! ... Eee weh! ... Chinja! Maitiro Chinja’. (251)

She chants the opposition party, Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), slogan while demonstrating the party’s open-handed sign to show her defiance against the ruling party. This comes with the disappointment at the government for failing to provide people with basic commodities and fuel, replacing them with numerous laws that make the people feel bound. The woman’s daring actions brings everyone on the bus together, ‘whitey’ included. Oliver Mutukudzi’s song, ‘Todii’ meaning ‘what shall we do’, unites the people even more as they sing
together, seeming to sing about the plight of their country. The narrator at the end says: ‘singing out their pain and suffering, their joy and love, uniting them all as they sped through the dark towards Harare’ (252).

The story demonstrates, with convincing vividness and cutting irony the very tentative joining of racially distinct forces united in indignation against the irritations caused by bad ruler-ship and a people’s disenchantment at a deteriorating economy. The story also comes at the end of this analysis because it has the seed of hope that is currently being nurtured in the hearts of some the Zimbabweans in and outside the country, the hope that seems to be inherent in the peoples’ resilience and unity. Notwithstanding that hope, there is the idea of these people being united through supporting MDC ‘speeding through the dark toward Harare’ (252), which is a bit disconcerting. The image of darkness tips the story back towards disillusionment, and perhaps the reader is being tricked about where the true hope of this country can be found.

The selection of stories from Zimbabwe does not attempt to provide an equal number of stories about hope and stories about disillusionment. That in itself would have been a seriously difficult task to achieve. As one can see from the analysis above, it is within a single story that the reader finds hope amidst the disillusionment and also from stringing along two or more stories together to see hope fulfilled in one, only to have disillusionment rear its ugly head in the next and some limited hope being resuscitated again in the following. This intermingling of hope and disillusionment results from the socio-historical approach journeying from Rhodesia to Zimbabwe via the liberation struggle. The story about Zimbabwe cannot be easily split into hope and disillusionment; it is a mixture of both. Even though at some instances one overwhelms the other, the presence of the other is significantly seen as one sees the sliver of the silver lining on the cloud. The selected stories are not necessarily indicative of the general situation in Zimbabwe, but nonetheless are worth noting for indicating that not all Zimbabwean writers have lost hope. The impression one gets from this presentation of stories is that there is a great need to find hope in troubled times and Zimbabweans are depicted as moving hopefully towards the twenty-first century. The concluding comparative analysis will pursue this possibility.
CHAPTER FOUR

CONCLUDING AND COMPARATIVE DISCUSSION

The short story is a very convenient window on what the writers have been writing about since the official end of apartheid and colonialism. Es’kia Mphahlele says: “The short story is used as a short cut to prose meaning and one gets some things off one’s chest in quick time” (cited in Hirson, 1994: 2). Because of their brevity and specific focus, these short stories from many voices allow for a glimpse of different aspects of contemporary reality. The selection of South African and Zimbabwean stories shows diversity in what writers are writing about, as Hirson comments: “side by side these stories … have the effect of a mosaic, giving … some sense of the very different realities which go to make up” (3) South Africa and Zimbabwe. This chapter will compare the writers from South Africa and Zimbabwe so as to search for similarities and differences. My aim is finally to arrive at reading the issues of hope and disillusionment brought out in the selected stories.

In spite of the similarities I mentioned earlier at the beginning of the study, one can now see that both South African and Zimbabwean writing is unique to its own society. The peculiarities in the choice of themes, settings and tone all point to the very distinct features which contribute to the literature of each country, showing that South African and Zimbabwean writing cannot be put under one umbrella.

Judging by the analysis of stories from South Africa, the theme of identity dominates all the other themes raised by the different writers, in such stories as: ‘The Divine One’, ‘A Reflection of Self’, ‘Housekeeping’, ‘A Question of Identity’, and ‘Milk and Honey Galore, Honey!’ . These particular stories say intensely what the others say more implicitly. For example, Masilela’s story examines the essential identity that allows one to belong to a certain group by circumstance of birth. ‘At the Rendezvous of Victory’ and ‘The Silk Scarf’ look at the issue of identity in the light of political changes. In both stories one can see the characters crossing over to the other side, betraying the nationalist cause. In Gordimer’s story, the Prime Minister who once fought for the same cause as General Giant reneges on his promise to safeguard the heritage of the blood that was shed by many brothers and sisters during the struggle when he decides to be puppeteered by
his foreign advisors: a good example of Fanon’s ‘pitfalls of nationalist consciousness’. Mrs Nebo, in ‘The Silk Scarf’, manages to switch sides in a very disconcerting way. Just liberated from oppression, she has become the oppressor. The story also raises the issue of racial tensions still arising from different ethnic identities in post-apartheid South Africa.

In ‘Bitter Fruit’ the issue of identity crops up again in Silas and Lydia’s lives. They are ‘new’ South Africans who are too white for the ‘new’ and too black for the ‘old’. They find themselves in a Catch-22 situation concerning how they should fit into the new dispensation. Mathiane’s ‘The Matric Ball’ concerns itself with mass action which brought the majority of the South Africans together identifying as one in the struggle against apartheid. In ‘A New Dispensation’, Zipporah identifies with Caroline as women in spite of their different racial and class backgrounds. Some women theorists, especially the Second Wave Feminists, would argue that identity across the barriers of race and class is impossible. However, Zipporah manages to create a sisterhood with Caroline; this probably explains why the writer seems to ignore mentioning directly that these women are from different races. Sepamla’s ‘Ike and Phindi’ also grapples with the issue of identity, but on a class level, where Phindi redefines her identity by aspiring to high-class living as compared to her husband’s lower class.

Identity issues are complicated, as has been shown in the analysis of these stories. Post-apartheid South Africa is disillusioned that the national question of identity cannot be resolved immediately after independence, because one cannot ignore the impact that apartheid had on people’s lives. It is not a limitation that South African stories centre on this one theme. It is actually inevitable that they would do so because people in a newly liberated country tend to ask themselves the topical question: who are we now that we are no longer in bondage? Or, rather, are new, more insidious forms of bondage now arising? Moreover, the identity issue was a crucial, essential concern to South Africans because of the oppressive and exploitative laws of apartheid that destroyed their sense of identity. One can imagine the many Happys and Divines in the ‘new’ South Africa.

The issue of identity will always be negotiated and renegotiated, as shown in Wilson’s story ‘The Twelve Chitenges’ (Chapter Three). This is probably why the number of stories that deal with the issue of identity from Zimbabwe are fewer. If one were to take note, one would find that only
Wilson’s story addresses this issue extensively. Nyereyemhuka’s ‘A Breach of Trust’ also exposes some issues of identity when Terrence sleeps with his prostitute-niece, the child of his (only) estranged sister. On the other hand, Chikwav’a’s way of addressing the issue of identity in ‘Seventh Street Alchemy’ is more bureaucratic than personal than say, Divine’s (in ‘The Divine One’) or Victor’s (in ‘A Reflection of Self’) in the South African stories.

After apartheid in South Africa, the marked attention to the theme of identity can be perceived as an attempt to balance once separate entities into a more flexible harmonization of cultures. As Patricia Duffy notes in her article “To Paris and Back: Seeking a Balance”, ‘it is left to the individual to decide how to weave together the differences in cultures, so that, in the context of the twenty-first century, those involved in this delicate process of cultural give-and-take will all finally be able to claim to belong somewhere … call themselves something’ (2008: 28) and therefore, identify somewhere. Considering how few years South Africa has journeyed since its Election Day, it comes as no surprise that the writers are seen addressing the issue of identity because that was the most pertinent question that still needs attention. There are, however, other issues raised together with that of identity, such as gender relations, materialism, pitfalls of nationalist consciousness, and the TRC results.

TRC issues are a peculiar theme raised in South Africa as a result of its socio-historical background. Apartheid history still remains contested, as shown in ‘Bitter Fruit’. At a narrower, more immediate level, a minority of victims did uncover suppressed truths about the past, but the TRC was unable to complete the process at a more individual level for many; therefore, some people felt let down and no closer to the truth than before they publicly told of their suffering (Dieltiens: 5). Thus one finds Silas and Lydia still struggling with their past, trying to create the semblance of a normal life.

Gender relations are foregrounded in the post-apartheid era as well (and in post-independence Zimbabwe). The new dispensation empowered women by opening new opportunities, especially in the areas of employment and education. But it only becomes more apparent after independence when women are actually given the platform through different affirmative action programmes adopted by the governments after having acknowledged that women suffered nearly as twice as
much as men, with colonialism and patriarchy working in cohort. Employment opportunities are probably what propel Divine to become more successful than her husband. It comes as a surprise to see the black female domestic workers suffering in ‘A New Dispensation’. It is, however, not surprising to see this sour the relations between men and women, as women began to aspire for more. Women like Phindi probably became a threat to men like Ike, who in turn subdue their wives by beating them up. Women did not begin to aspire to more privileges only after independence (see Ticha in Nyamubaya’s ‘That Special Place’, Chapter Three).

The issue of materialism preoccupies newly independent states, in which the formerly oppressed people seem to be on a rampage to grab as much as they can. These are people who have been living in want as second-class citizens. But with independence, they now find themselves able to have those things once denied to them, for example, some more constructive (Caroline); some less savory (Mrs Nebo). Another theme dwelt on by South African writers is Fanon’s ‘pitfalls of nationalist consciousness’. Some new elites brought to power by independence, and often educated and trained by the colonialist powers, were unrepresentative of the people and even acted as unwitting or even willing agents (compradors) for the former colonial rulers (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 1998: 163). Rather than dismantling colonial structures of social injustice and oppression, they merely preserved them for opportunistic ends, as Mrs Nebo does in a bid to get ‘the silk scarf’ and like the Prime Minister who is puppeteered by his Western allies. Hence, post-independence years in many ex-colonies of Africa are characterized by indices of underdevelopment, economic dependency, huge local and foreign debts, ethno-religious violence, mass unemployment, poverty, illiteracy, electoral fraud and corruption, inadequate or dysfunctional infrastructures and so on. This inequality is graphically depicted in many Zimbabwean stories.

Zimbabwean writers, on the other hand, raise different concerns from the South Africans because they are investigating what was happening in society over more than a decade after liberation and in a different socio-historical landscape. A stroll in the book shops after the year 2000 revealed an abundance of new works, especially short story collections, on the book shelves; any curious reader would wonder what was being written. Not that there was a time lag between independence and the turn of the twenty-first century where no writing was being done. The
observation that a great deal of publishing was taking place, not so much a phenomenal tally, but publishing nonetheless, motivated me to search out what the writers had been writing about. It so happens that the stories from Zimbabwe deal with more varied themes than the South African ones because the country has traveled more years from independence, and therefore, their works are representative of that long movement and also, perhaps, they felt freer to experiment with various fictional techniques.

The selection of stories from Zimbabwe does not have an overarching theme such as identity as is evident in South African stories, probably because of the longer time. Close to twenty years after independence, Zimbabwean writers are seen casting their nets wide in order to grapple with the numerous issues that have arisen in their country, namely: liberation struggle, education, civil war, conflict and betrayal, immorality, neocolonialism, poverty, resistance, land and identity. From the diversity of writers emerges this range of themes, some of which are similar to ones raised by writers from South Africa, for instance, neocolonialism (which translates into ‘the pitfalls of nationalist consciousness’), raised in Chihota’s story ‘Shipwreck’. This story confirms Said’s observation that colonialism did not come to an end with the official announcement that it was over; Chihota illustrates how it takes on new forms. Much of Africa is still in the stranglehold of western imperialism, probably more so South Africa and Zimbabwe because they were amongst the last countries to attain independence. Although the actual land invasions are implied in Kanengoni’s ‘The Ugly Reflection in the Mirror’, the story portrays the acquisition of land in Zimbabwe through the Land Reform and Resettlement Programme. This is no doubt there is a major step towards dismantling colonialism in Zimbabwe, even though there is the hope that the structures of colonialism are being deconstructed. The other forces which begin to loom large threatening the people’s hopes of becoming a united nation are raised in Wilson’s ‘The Twelve Chitenges’. Concerned with dictatorship by the ruling party of Zimbabwe, his story deals with the salient issue of conflict between the two major political parties in the country, ZANU-PF and MDC.

Some of the Zimbabwean writers (like the South Africans) reach for the past in search of what people chose to forget in a bid to celebrate the future and also to depict the impact of the past on the present. Nyamubaya’s ‘That Special Place’ revisits the much romanticized war of liberation
in order to reveal that it is not all who adhered to the concept of ‘a people’s power’ [mentioned by Rudebeck (cited in Galli: 36)] which gave hope to the people and that the disillusionment of people did not just up and appear after independence. Disillusionment with independence had its roots in the past, where some persons in power are seen already betraying the hopes of the majority. Musengezi’s ‘Torn Posters’ journeys back to the war that a great many Zimbabweans would want to pretend never happened, because it came close to destroying all hope in the newly liberated Zimbabwe. In the case of those directly affected, there is no doubt that their hopes were surely destroyed, leaving affected Zimbabwean families like the narrator’s in ‘Torn Posters’, searching for hope in the fractures of their family.

The choice in settings also contributes to peculiarities of writing in South Africa and in Zimbabwe. Granted the majority of the stories from both countries are all set in Southern Africa, but the settings are distinctly either South African or Zimbabwean. The South African settings are all typically urban, save for three stories: ‘The Day the Rain Clouds Returned’ is rural; ‘At the Rendezvous of Victory’ is both rural and urban; and ‘A Question of Identity’ is set in America. According to Ndebele, the city appears to have taken tyrannical hold on the imagination of the average African writer’ (cited in Koyana, 2004: 83), and South African writers in this selection are no exception. However, there is also an idealization of the rural setting, indicative of the distance from it.

Ndebele’s statement is also true of Zimbabwean writers, but four are exceptional because they are set in the rural areas. ‘That Special Place’ depicts the lives of the people in the rural areas during the liberation struggle. ‘Mukoma Amos’ and ‘Tadamuhwa’ expose life after independence, focusing on how people related to one another in their villages. To emphasize the simplicity of life in the rural areas (as compared to that of the cities), the first story has a child-narrator and the second has an irritating he-goat. These two are manipulated by the writers to reveal the ‘plainness’ of rural life. A closer look (in the analysis of stories) at the lives of these people does, however, reveal the difficulties rural people face, such as conflict and betrayal. ‘The Ugly Reflection in the Mirror’ is also set in the rural areas of the newly resettled farms, where in Zimbabwe today one finds some city dwellers moving in the search of prosperity and hope.
Most of the stories from South Africa are set in urban areas, which show the rural urban migration that intensified soon after independence, with so many people pinning their hopes on the big cities like Cape Town and Johannesburg. This is not only a South African phenomenon; it also happened in Zimbabwe and is depicted in earlier works like Zimunya’s *Country Dawns and City Lights*. Rural Zimbabweans are captured in the simplicity of living in the rural areas where life is almost predictable and slow-paced, though not boring. But living in the rural areas was not always simple (as depicted in Nyamubaya’s story), because the ravages of the war were felt more in the rural than urban areas.

Life in the rural areas contrasts with harsh, more unpredictable realities of urban living, depicted in stories like ‘Seventh Street Alchemy’ and ‘A Breach of Trust’. Nyereyemhuka’s story addresses how the cities destroy an individual’s identity. Terrence cuts off his ties with the rural areas and decides to identify with the city, which rejects him. As a result he ends up sleeping with his only niece, leaving him a very disturbed man. The hustle and bustle of the city spares no one and nothing. There is poverty, hunger, unemployment, corruption and even death: moral and physical, in the cities (evident in some of the themes tackled by the writers). Hope seems to lie predominantly in the rural areas in Kanengoni’s story, where one sees a black man prospering with his field of beans on land he can call his own. Even Chirere’s story, amidst the notorious goat’s antics and the problems it causes travelling from house to house, there are opportunities for a greater hope in the rural area than in the cities.

In almost every newly liberated African country, there was a time when many flocked to the urban areas because they hoped to find ‘an Eldorado’. However, the cities dashed a great many Zimbabweans’ hopes when they reached the cities and found them lonely and dangerous. Even in South Africa in the writing produced during the pre-independence era, disillusionment with city life featured in a number of works. But in spite of this, the South Africans depicted in the short stories have their hopes set on the cities as they are perceived to offer more than the rural areas. Possibly, the hopes of Zimbabweans are placed in the rural areas whilst those of the South Africans are directed to the cities because of the different economies of these countries. As mentioned in Chapter One, the Zimbabwean economy is agriculture based; therefore, the issue of
land will feature more in literature. This is not to say land is not an issue in South Africa, but it is not the major pillar of the economy or literary imagination as in Zimbabwe.

The earlier discussions of colonialism, in the introduction, and the historical and political backgrounds of South Africa and Zimbabwe (Chapter One), show that a great many people from these countries know about the disillusionment of history: an issue some touch on. However, some of these stories reveal that the bitterness of history does not necessarily lead to disillusionment. These stories also disclose that the transition period was stirred by hope of attaining political power. After independence, black leadership faced the sticky task of realizing the grandly hopeful promises made to the people, given the grimly difficult history of colonialism still present in the countries: the question of identity, neocolonialism, inequality, gender relations, racism, poverty, and self-aggrandizement.

My first chapter argues that in an African context, in the newly liberated colonies the state and power were decidedly put at the centre of the task of bringing hope to the people; this was very much the case in both South Africa and Zimbabwe because of the horrors of apartheid and colonialism. Huggins’s story ‘The Revolutionary: A Brief Encounter’ and Gordimer’s story ‘At the Rendezvous of Victory’ are some of the stories that reveal this. However, the hope that the state would achieve the realization of the people’s dreams soon dimmed and then left people disenchanted. There are other stories which indicate the betrayal of the people’s hopes by the newly independent states; for instance, Essop’s ‘The Silk Scarf’ and Musengezi’s ‘Torn Posters’ illustrate Fanon’s pitfalls of nationalist consciousness. All those people who still hoped in the state are shown to have been disappointed: for example, Fiso in Chikwava’s ‘Seventh Street Alchemy’; the multitude of people in Muponde’s story; and the marginalized domestic workers in Braude’s ‘A New Dispensation’. Nyamubaya’s ‘That Special Place’ shows that disillusionment did not just begin after independence; it is shown even during the much romanticized war.

There was probably more hopeful literature during the political transitions due to the liberation struggle. However, no doubt these were tinged with a great deal of fear of the unknown, to the extent that the endings of these works appeared to lose hope for tomorrow, as Elleke Boehmer
would put it (cited in Attridge and Jolly: 45). After independence, as the stories show, it becomes easier for the writers to leave more space for hope, not necessarily dependent on the state any more. Therefore, there was a lot of joy and jubilation amongst the people of each country when they had won independence for themselves, but then again, hope soon diminished, leaving the people feeling betrayed. Nevertheless, glimmerings of hope from people’s encounters with ordinary life, through birth, marriage and friendship, are shown (in the selection of stories in this study) to resuscitate hope once more. It goes to show human resilience and adaptability.

People draw their will to survive from whatever comes to hand. Divine found hope in realizing a sense of self-worth from marriage to her husband; Ike retrieved hope in saving his marriage by means of the love he knew existed between him and Phindi; Ken resuscitated his hope through reading the Bible verses he received from the people at his church; Una gave hope to her children, Greta and Hans (who display homosexual tendencies) that they can be accepted as they are; consequently she also received hope from her daughter’s accepting her own lesbian tendencies. Even though the TRC did not provide much hope in Silas and Lydia’s lives, they found hope in each other as husband and wife. When the relevant government offices were hopeless in addressing the plight of the marginalized domestic workers, Zipporah gave hope to Caroline, woman to woman.

As mentioned earlier, hope gradually comes to the fore in the Zimbabwean stories, and a keen observer cannot help but notice it. For instance, Roger in Muponde’s ‘At the Window’ found hope within himself to fight for his life and not commit suicide like his friend Maurice. It was Sophia’s love for her cousin, Amos, which kept him hopeful that he would go to school and learn to read and write. For the people of Nyombwe in Chirere’s story it is their humanness that becomes their first vocation, even though it was forced by their encounters with the goat as it wandered from house to house. The reuniting of the narrator’s family in ‘Torn Posters’ under the discouraging circumstances of the prison shows that there is hope yet for the family unit in post-independence Zimbabwe. Nyamubaya’s ‘That Special Place’ shows that there is still hope for healing from the trauma of the liberation war; and the people of Zimbabwe hopefully will all have an equal share of their economy through the Land Reform Redistribution Programme, as
Kanengoni’s story suggests. (This currently remains a highly contested issue inside and outside Zimbabwe.)

The other major difference between these two countries is also shown in the appearance of the issues of hope and disillusionment as the chronological sequencing unfolds. From both analyses there is interplay of hope and disillusionment within one story and even between two different stories. It forms a pattern in the chronological sequencing, which is not uniform, by weaving hope and disillusionment together. However, there is something noticeable about each of these series of narratives created by the analysis of stories that tell of a larger story about South Africa and Zimbabwe. In spite of the interweaving of hope and disillusionment, one can see the steady tilting towards hopelessness in the South African analysis and a gradual movement towards the dawn of hope in the Zimbabwean stories. Four of the last stories from South Africa have disillusionment dominating. The euphoria of independence amongst the people is fading, leaving the people stuck with ‘bitter fruit’ of the ‘new South Africa’. The last four stories in the analysis of Zimbabwe point out the direction that contemporary reality in Zimbabwe is going, and that is hopeful. In spite of the numbers that seem hopeless the people are journeying towards the twenty-first century hopefully, even though they may almost be hurtling in the dark towards an unforeseen future (see ‘The Twelve Chitenges’). The situations of hope and disillusionment are constantly changing as they move from one to the next and back again. Granted, it is always tricky to generalize about a society from these highly individual, personal stories. But my study tends to suggest that at the turn of the twenty-first century in South Africa, disillusionment is beginning to displace the heady expectation many felt at the 1994 election. And perhaps even more unlikely, given the current crisis, Zimbabwean stories from recent years show people hopefully waiting for the new millennium, a dawning of new and unpredictable possibilities.

However, the stories challenge the validity of the assumption made by Brian Kagoro, chairperson of the Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition (both Zimbabwean and South African), that once disillusionment occurs people become ‘prisoners of hope’ (2005: 1). People are not trapped in disillusionment. People in these short stories are depicted as having hope amidst the disillusionment. After liberation from colonial rule the personal and the political are intermingled. As has been shown in the selection of stories from South Africa and Zimbabwe,
people had other hopes and disillusionments pertaining to their ordinary lives. If they did not re-invent themselves, like Divine in ‘The Divine One’ or like Ticha in ‘That Special Place’, they let themselves be assimilated within the new establishment, like the whiteman in ‘The Twelve Chitenges’ and the Indian shop owners in ‘The Silk Scarf’. Those who slipped through the cracks of the new establishment, like the immigrants in ‘Milk and Honey Galore, Honey!’ and Fiso in ‘Seventh Street Alchemy’ are in a constant battle to survive and belong. In the end they distrust the new dispensation and are constantly skeptical, so that they do not whole-heartedly embrace it: others include Zipporah in ‘A New Dispensation’; Silas and Lydia in ‘Bitter Fruit’, the narrator in ‘Torn Posters’ and Terrence in ‘A Breach of Trust’. Some feel the need to re-focus on the immediate circumstances in their lives that provide hope through love, marriage (for example Ike and Phindi) and friendship (for example Sophia and Amos), but some fail. Nevertheless, people will always imagine and experience hope because, according to the American Heritage Dictionary, on a day-to-day level hope is connected to desiring certain goals, believing that these are attainable and acting in ways that further these goals. For the majority of the people who suffer from the present order of things in South Africa and Zimbabwe, hope stands for a better life. However, the hopes of the people are constantly overwhelmed and are seen collapsing in the face of adversity, but will inevitably be resuscitated.

In the history of African literature, hope and disillusionment are frequently viewed along with independence and war, as noted by Chapman (302). One can take into account the transition periods from colonial rule through the liberation struggle, to the independence celebration and lastly the post-colonial era as they are depicted by a number of non-fiction works (see Chapter One). A close examination of the periods will show how each period brought about either hope or disillusionment. For instance, there is no doubt that colonialism brought about disillusionment to the majority of Africans because of oppression and exploitation, whilst the protracted liberation struggles fostered hope in the people that freedom was around the corner. It so happens that post-apartheid South Africa and post-independent Zimbabwe inherited “an accumulation of historical currents” (Marais: 5) evident in today’s literary works. It was easier for the writers in the colonial era to imagine the future hopefully because they were writing within an ideology that was being spread everywhere else in Africa, such as Mozambique and Angola: the conviction that independence was imminent. It was easier for them to write within a trajectory of hope because
the demise of apartheid and colonialism in these countries was inevitable as it had been in all the other countries across the continent. However, writing in the post-apartheid and independence eras for both South African and Zimbabwean writers meant the hopes of the people were to be invested in other arenas which are not connected to power and the state, for example, in the ordinary lives of the people – in such as marriage, friendship, family and self.

This thesis does not pretend to be an exhaustive study in investigating writing in South Africa and Zimbabwe in the post-independence era. Neither does it seek to limit the investigation of what writers have been writing about to short stories. The focus has been on short stories because they are a convenient means of surveying many years in the shortest possible time, as many literary critics argue - for example, Andrew Bennet in his *An Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory* (2004). Nor should one put South African and Zimbabwean short story writing under one umbrella. These two writing traditions are very distinct with particularities and nuances that set them apart from other kinds of writing, regardless of similarities.

The historical and political backgrounds of these countries highlight distinctions in the writings after independence in South Africa and Zimbabwe. A great deal about the historical and political backgrounds of these countries has already been said in Chapter One; let me conclude here with a few final remarks about the socio-historical backgrounds. The atrocities and laws of apartheid and colonialism influence what writers choose to write about. The trauma of apartheid left an indelible fracture on the nation, which is why writers are still grappling with the issue of identity ten years on. Zimbabweans, on the other hand, have suffered from very different kinds of struggle - war, civil strife, and now crippling poverty - which is why these themes are addressed in several stories.

Cultural differences also have an impact on the literary scene. For instance, Chirere’s style reminds one of Hove’s style in his novel *Bones*, which is similar to common Zimbabwean dances such as Jerusalem, Mbakumba and Muchongoyo. Both writers draw on indigenous languages in their English style. It is almost impossible to read and understand the stories if one is not familiar with the diversity of languages used, for instance, in South Africa. The reader might miss certain nuances implied incidentally, for example, the title of Mokae’s story ‘Milk and Honey Galore,
Honey’ seems to deliberately echo ‘Fanagolo/Fanigolo’, sometimes pronounced by white South Africans as ‘funny-galore’, which is the artificial creole of Nguni languages and Afrikaans developed for communication among migrants and shift bosses on the gold mines. This lends itself exceptionally well to the theme of migrancy in the story. Different sorts of English language, therefore, play a role in distinguishing writings from different countries.

At this point, let me reflect on a few sins of commission and omission on my part. It so happens that there are some people like Alyssa MacDonald, an avid reader of short stories, who argue against compiling short stories. She calls it “bundling short stories” (2007: 3). According to her and others of like mind, it dilutes them and makes them lose their potency. She maintains that a short story works best published in a magazine or newspaper, where it can stand alone in contrast to the writing around it otherwise it is easy for one to get lost in the crowd. There is no doubt that this is true and is probably the best way to approach a short story. But it just so happens that short stories are easier to study collectively; and in the long run, this is beneficial to both the reader and the publisher.

I believe the short stories in the selected collections complement one another. One writer seems to pick up where another leaves off. This can be seen from the stories in the same collection and even across the South African and Zimbabwean borders in stories like Wilson’s ‘The Twelve Chitenges’, which seems like an extension of Bransby’s ‘A Reflection of Self’. One can easily imagine that the white man in the bus to Harare is Victor, some years later, still battling with the lingering feeling of white supremacy within him. While the character of the revolutionary in Huggins’s story seems to be expanded upon in Gordimer’s story ‘At the Rendezvous of Victory’ through the character of General Giant, judging from the treatment that General Giant gets after the war, one can also imagine that same treatment extended to the revolutionary, if he had survived the war.

The stories from No More Plastic Balls, probably because of their ‘generational coincident’ (2000: 6) mentioned by the editors, feed on and develop from each other. Staunton’s Writing Still complements No More Plastic Balls because it still handles the same themes as the former and even depicts other writing by the very same authors featured in her collection, namely: Chihota.
and Chirere. As for the stories from *Identities*, they examine the same concern - identity - from different arenas, genders, races and classes. The theme can be heard in all stories: very loudly in some stories, quietly in others. The stories from Oliphant’s collection, *At the Rendezvous of Victory*, also echo themes raised in *Identities*; they are in agreement with each other.

It was a deliberate move to select collections of stories from different writers, both black and white and also anthologies from both countries. This was done so as to give a representative sample of the diversity of writers and writing in these countries. It started off as a noble gesture, but it seems white writing from Zimbabwe was not adequately represented; certainly my selection under-represents white Zimbabwean writers. Of the twelve writers selected, ten are black and two are white. One possible reason for this omission is that anthologies themselves are generally not a reflection of writer demographics. However, this can be seen as an opportunity to argue for anthologies that show a representative diversity of the demography of specific countries. Additionally, more short stories particularly from white Zimbabwean writers could reveal how they portray the country at the turn of the turn of twenty-first century. On the other hand the South African selection seems more balanced, probably because amongst the writers there are also Coloured and Indian writers, in contrast with the Zimbabwean collections. But one might still need to question who the majority is in South Africa. Selecting a diversity of writers also allows one to grasp the diversity of the society being depicted.

This thesis is an exploration of writing in South Africa and Zimbabwe before the new millennium, investigating how writers depict contemporary society, highlighting the issues of hope and disillusionment. South Africa and Zimbabwe corroborate James Baldwin’s aphorism that ‘people are trapped in history, and history is trapped in them’ (cited in Marais: 201). Both South African and Zimbabwean writers have reverted to the past to recapture past hopes and disillusionments, and also to forecast people’s expectations for the future, including their impending disillusionments. Some have also set a trajectory into the future, trying to focus on the fulfillment of these dreams. They have also managed to disentangle people’s hopes and disillusionments from being necessarily associated with the state and power. But nonetheless, state power does tend to shape the nature of people’s lives, and consequently, their hopes and disillusionments.
The selected short stories from South Africa and Zimbabwe show what writers (at their desks) imagine; if only a little about the future, then at least about the present and the past. As Ndebele has stated: “The past is constantly on the doors of our perception, refusing to be forgotten, because it is deeply imbedded in the present. To neglect it, at this most crucial of moments in our history is to postpone the future” (158). Some writers, such as Oosthuizen, Braude, Wilson and Muponde, have shown that they can only sit down and write with the thought that there is hope in the future; otherwise they will not be able to write at all. But for my purposes, this analysis of short stories was more concerned with investigating how contemporary stories capture some of the post-independence realities in South Africa and Zimbabwe. They seem to do so exceedingly well.
1. See Tadjo, Veronique. 2005. “Identity in South Africa”. *BBC News*. [http://news.bbc.co.uk](http://news.bbc.co.uk) Accessed 13 August 2007. She wrote an article about a black boy called Happy Sindane, who claimed to be a white boy who had been abducted when he was a toddler by a black woman. Tadjo says:

When I saw Happy’s portrait for the first time, it immediately struck me that he was a child of mixed blood parentage and not plain white. It was something obvious, it looked so obvious I asked myself why nobody seemed to notice it. Even though his hair looked straight and he was light skinned, I could not help but see his African features. Confronted by this general blindness ... How was it possible that a nation whose life had been dominated by race for so long under the apartheid system could not see that the boy was not white? (2)

2. This is a question Spivak herself has revisited. It is a question that can be reworked in the light of subsequent insights and socio-political developments.


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