Reading Repression and Resistance in Zimbabwean Literature

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For several decades now, news stories from Zimbabwe have depicted a country bouncing from one crisis to the next, while descending ever further into poverty and the violent repression of its citizens. Despite the momentary optimism that the 2017 coup engendered in some circles, the removal of Robert Mugabe from the presidency has not meant the end of oppressive state control. In this volatile context, Zimbabwean authors have played a key role in speaking truth to power, yet they have also suffered the consequences. In the most recent and internationally known example, the novelist Tsitsi Dangarembga was arrested in July 2020 while taking part in a peaceful protest against corruption in the ruling Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) party. She was accused of inciting public violence. As this incident shows, repressive measures have continued and they still directly target both the country's literary production and writers residing in the country. In this special issue, we examine the consequences of repression for the country's literary scene and use literature as a lens to explore challenges to repression. Zimbabwean authors and artists have used the creative arts to voice their criticism of the state, and they have found their work scrutinized, not for its aesthetic value but for possibly subversive messages, and have found themselves targeted and silenced.

We do not want to romanticise the role of literature and the creative arts in a context of repression. For one thing, there is nothing beautiful or indeed inherently laudable about writing with one's life on the line. For another, as demonstrated by several of the articles in this collection, books written under and about repression have their own blind spots and may be implicated in the maintenance of power or in the repetition of racial stereotypes. Rather than idealising literature, we want to suggest that it offers a valuable entry-point for understanding the complex cultural terrain produced by the interplay of repression and resistance. Literature and adjacent genres of cultural mediation are at once influenced by political and material circumstances, implicated in ideological projects, and engaged in changing the world and how we view it. Complementing work on repression in Zimbabwe emerging from history, law and social science, this collection suggests that attention to literature widens our understanding of the nature of repression as well as of the manifold ways of culturally processing and responding to repression.

Repression in Zimbabwe: brief historical overview

We take 'repression' to mean the manifold ways in which human freedom is forcefully limited by the state. In Zimbabwe, these repressive measures have included state violence, censorship, constraints on political protest, preventable economic deprivation and a sustained atmosphere of emotional terror. This history of repression goes back a long way. Before the country's independence, the black majority was de facto and de jure disenfranchised under white minority

rule: education, employment and land were distributed along racial lines, political protest was violently put down and nationalist leaders were imprisoned.[1] During the liberation war, the Rhodesian government terrorised the civilian population through forced removals into 'protected villages', the napalm bombing of refugee camps, and the poisoning of food and livestock.[2] Among the various nationalist organisations, too, dissenting voices were silenced, a forewarning of a jealous post-independence understanding of 'unity' to mean toeing the party line.[3] The armed wings of the nationalist movements ZAPU (the Zimbabwe African People's Union) and ZANU fought each other as well as the minority regime, sowing the seeds for later divisions and suspicions of the political opposition. In the aftermath of independence, the ruling party ZANU-PF's intolerance at its worst translated into the Gukurahundi massacres, in which thousands were tortured and killed over a period of years.[4]

The violent intolerance of political opposition also characterized the state response to growing protests around the millennium. The economic situation was dire and corruption and repression were on the rise. The Economic Structural Adjustment Programme of the 1990s, pushed by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, had wreaked havoc; there were calls for constitutional reform; and a new opposition party, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), supported by disillusioned labour unions, was rapidly gaining in popularity.[5] Seeking a scapegoat for the country's ills and addressing a real demand for land redistribution in one stroke, the ruling ZANU-PF blamed white farmers and their supposed neo-colonial ambitions, and launched a 'Fast-Track Land Reform' programme. Depicted as the successor to the first and second wars of independence, and dubbed the 'Third Chimurenga', it involved the violent

[1] B. Raftopoulos and A. Mlambo (eds), *Becoming Zimbabwe: A History from the Pre-Colonial Period to 2008* (Harare, Weaver Press, 2009), chapters 2-4; J. Alexander, 'Political Prisoners' Memoirs in Zimbabwe: Narratives of Self and Nation', *Cultural and Social History* 5, 4 (2008), pp. 395-409; G. H. Karekwaivanane, *The Struggle over State Power in Zimbabwe: Law and Politics since 1950* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2017); L. White, *Unpopular Sovereignty: Rhodesian Independence and African Decolonization* (Chicago, Chicago University Press, 2015); M. Munochiveyi, *Prisoners of Rhodesia: Inmates and Detainees in the Struggle for Zimbabwean Liberation, 1960-1980* (New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

[2] J. Mtisi, M. Nyakudya, and T. Barnes, 'War in Rhodesia, 1965-1980', in B. Raftopoulos and A. Mlambo (eds), *Becoming Zimbabwe: A History from the Pre-Colonial Period to 2008* (Harare, Weaver Press, 2009), pp. 149–50.

[3] B. Raftopoulos and A. Mlambo, 'Introduction: The Hard Road to Becoming National', in B. Raftopoulos and A. Mlambo (eds), *Becoming Zimbabwe: A History from the Pre-Colonial Period to 2008* (Harare, Weaver Press, 2009), pp. xxvi–xxvii.

[4] CCJP/LRF, *Breaking the Silence, Building True Peace: A Report on the Disturbances in Matabeleland and the Midlands, 1980 to 1988* (Harare, Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace in Zimbabwe and Legal Resources Foundation, 1997); J. Alexander, J. McGregor and T. Ranger, *Violence and Memory: One Hundred Years in the 'Dark Forests' of Matabeleland* (Oxford, James Currey, 2000).

[5] L. Sachikonye and B. Raftopoulos, *Building from the Rubble: The Labour Movement in Zimbabwe Since 2000* (Harare, Weaver Press, 2018); P. Carmody and S. Taylor, 'Industry and the Urban Sector in Zimbabwe's Political Economy', *African Studies Quarterly* 7, 2 (2003), p. 54; B. Raftopoulos, 'The State in Crisis: Authoritarian Nationalism, Selective Citizenship and Distortions of Democracy in Zimbabwe', in A. Hammar, B. Raftopoulos, and S. Jensen (eds), *Zimbabwe's Unfinished Business: Rethinking Land, State and Nation in the Context of Crisis* (Harare, Weaver Press, 2003), pp. 217–41.

eviction of white farmers and many of their farm workers in favour of hundreds of thousands of black smallholders as well as medium and some large-scale black farmers.[6]

With the 'crisis' of the new millennium, the state's stranglehold on expression intensified. In 2002, laws were passed which provided tools for the restriction and prosecution of critical voices, including the Public Order and Security Act (POSA) and the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA).[7] Repeating or even superseding the precedent of the Rhodesian state, public media were - and are - used as propaganda tools and independent journalists persecuted.[8] This affected the arts scene, too.[9] When Owen Maseko put on an art exhibition at the National Gallery of Bulawayo in 2010 depicting the Gukurahundi, it was shut down immediately by the authorities and the artist was arrested.[10] While the essays in this collection focus on post-independence Zimbabwe, several also note the many ways in which contemporary repression reflects that of the preceding Rhodesian regime. Indeed, as the late Chenjerai Hove noted in a devastating critique of censorship in Zimbabwe in 2011, some of the present day restrictions of artistic expression were enabled by a 1973 law, 'a burdensome relic from the colonial era where entertainment was viewed in terms of the colour of one's skin.'[11]

While the campaign against white farmers was extensively covered in Western media, much less attention was paid to the enduring repression of a much wider constituency. In 2005, unplanned housing and the informal sector were targeted through Operation Murambatsvina ('Restore Order'), leading to an estimated 700,000 people losing their homes or jobs or both.[12] Every election brought a spate of repression targeting the opposition. Most dramatically, when the MDC candidate Morgan Tsvangirai looked poised to win the 2008 election, opposition supporters were targeted, arrested, tortured and killed, leading eventually to Tsvangirai's

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[6] J. Alexander, *The Unsettled Land: State-Making and the Politics of Land in Zimbabwe 1893-2003* (Oxford, James Currey, 2006); A. Hammar, B. Raftopoulos, and S. Jensen (eds), *Zimbabwe's Unfinished Business: Rethinking Land, State and Nation in the Context of Crisis* (Harare, Weaver Press, 2003); S. J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni and W. Willems, 'Making Sense of Cultural Nationalism and the Politics of Commemoration under the Third Chimurenga in Zimbabwe', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 35, 4 (2009); B-M. Tendi, *Making History in Mugabe's Zimbabwe: Politics, Intellectuals, and the Media* (Bern, Peter Lang, 2010).

[7] S. Ravengai, 'Performing the Subversive: Censorship and Theatre Making in Zimbabwe', *Studies in Theatre and Performance*, 35, 3 (2015), p. 241.

[8] W. Chuma, 'Liberating or Limiting the Public Sphere? Media Policy and the Zimbabwe Transition, 1980-2004', in B. Raftopoulos and T. Savage (eds), *Zimbabwe: Injustice and Political Reconciliation* (African Minds, 2004), pp. 133–36.

[9] D. Thram, 'Zvakwana! Enough! Unofficial Censorship of Music in Zimbabwe', in *Popular Music Censorship in Africa*, ed. Martin Cloonan (London, Routledge, 2016), p. 71; P. Zenenga, 'Censorship, Surveillance, and Protest Theater in Zimbabwe', *Theater*, 38, 3 (2008), pp. 67–83.

[10] P. Maedza, '"Gukurahundi - a Moment of Madness": Memory Rhetorics and Remembering in the Postcolony', *African Identities*, 17, 3–4 (2019), pp. 183–84.

[11] C. Hove, *Homeless Sweet Home: A Memoir of Miami* (Lebanon, NJ, B and B Press, 2011), p. 74.

[12] S. Dorman, '"We have not made anybody homeless": Urban development, citizenship, and the Zimbabwean state', *Citizenship Studies*, 20, 1 (2016), pp. 84-98; D. Potts, '"Restoring Order"? Operation Murambatsvina and the Urban Crisis in Zimbabwe', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 32, 2 (2006), pp. 273–91; M. Bratton and E. Masunungure, 'Popular Reactions to State Repression: Operation Murambatsvina in Zimbabwe', *African Affairs* 106, 422 (2007), pp. 21–45.

withdrawal to avoid further violence. Though on a less extreme scale, the aftermath of the 2018 elections again saw the deadly use of force against protesters. In between these moments of escalation, the ZANU-PF government routinely menaced its population through surveillance, forced removals, and the arrest, abduction, torture and sexual abuse of critics.[13] This quotidian repression created an atmosphere of terror which, combined with dire economic prospects, caused millions of Zimbabweans to leave the country.[14]

Literary resistance: combatting censorship and thematizing repression

The present collection contributes to an already rich scholarly tradition. Since state repression has been a reality in Zimbabwe for well over a century, it has formed the backdrop of many works on the country's literary scene. Scholars have explored the political role of literature, the ways in which literature has been used to interrogate the meaning of Zimbabwe, and how authors have resisted official storytelling through counter-narratives.[15] Often the artistic responses to repression are studied by focusing on a specific instance or aspect of repression, whether by addressing particular moments, like Gukurahundi or the post-2000 'crisis', or specific groups, like girls, queer or white Zimbabweans.[16] The present collection contributes to this rich literature, while complicating notions of repression and resistance. Through essays that study multiple moments and forms of repression, and how they have affected literary and artistic production, a bigger picture comes into view. Repression emerges as selective, negotiated, nervous, producing new forms of resistance in the attempt to silence it. The artistic responses, too, turn out to challenge any simplistic understanding of 'resistance', told as they are not only against but also with the powerful, sometimes reifying identities and reproducing patterns of

[13] Human Rights Watch, 'World Report 2021: Rights Trends in Zimbabwe', Human Rights Watch, 15 December 2020, https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2021/country-chapters/zimbabwe.
[14] J. McGregor, 'Introduction: The Making of Zimbabwe's New Diaspora', in J. McGregor and R. Primorac (eds) *Zimbabwe's New Diaspora: Displacement and the Cultural Politics of Survival* (Oxford, Berghahn Books, 2010), pp. 7–9.
[15] R. Primorac, *The Place of Tears: The Novel and Politics in Modern Zimbabwe* (London, I.B.Tauris, 2006); R. Muponde, *Some Kinds of Childhood: Images of History and Resistance in Zimbabwean Literature*, First edition (Trenton, Africa World Press, 2015); R. Muponde and R. Primorac (eds), *Versions of Zimbabwe: New Approaches to Literature and Culture* (Harare, Weaver Press, 2005), http://eprints.soton.ac.uk/338770/; T. Ndlovu, '"All That Doesn't Make Headlines": Responses to Zanu-PF's Imaginaries of Belonging in Recent Fiction from Zimbabwe', *African Studies*, 76, 1 (2017), pp. 140–62.
[16] A. J. Chennells, *Settler Myths and the Southern Rhodesian Novel* (Harare, University of Zimbabwe, 1982); A. Chitando and M. Manyonganise, 'Saying the Unsaid: Probing Homosexuality in The Hairdresser of Harare', *Journal of Homosexuality* 63, 4 (2016), pp. 559–74; A. Harris, 'Writing Home: Inscriptions of Whiteness/Descriptions of Belonging in White Zimbabwean Memoir/Autobiography', in R. Muponde and R. Primorac (eds), *Versions of Zimbabwe: New Approaches to Literature and Culture* (Harare, Weaver Press, 2005), pp. 103–17; G. Ncube and G. Siziba, '(Re)Membering the Nation's "Forgotten" Past: Portrayals of Gukurahundi in Zimbabwean Literature', *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 52, 2 (2017), pp. 231-47; O. Nyambi, *Life-Writing from the Margins in Zimbabwe: Versions and Subversions of Crisis* (London, Routledge, 2019); H. T. Ngoshi, 'Erasure of Girlhoods, Inscriptions of Womanhood: A Study of Erased Girlhoods in Selected Zimbabwean Fiction', *Nawa: Journal of Language and Communication*, 4, 2 (2010); R. Pilossof, 'The Unbearable Whiteness of Being: Land, Race and Belonging in the Memoirs of White Zimbabweans', *South African Historical Journal*, 61, 3 (2009), pp. 621–38; A. Rasch, 'The Family Connection: White Expatriate Memoirs of Zimbabwe', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 44, 5 (2018), pp. 879–93.

domination. Reading these essays back to back, one is struck not only by the multifarious nature of repression, but also by the variety of writing and genres to which it has given rise as well as by the futility of trying to impose one interpretative or moral framework on all who write in response to repression. 'Writing Repression in Zimbabwe' acknowledges the specificity of particular instances of repression while inviting readers to see the connections between different historical moments and artistic responses.

This repressive context has simultaneously circumscribed the space for literary expression *and* been engaged critically by authors. 'Writing Repression in Zimbabwe' thus aims to study repression both as a phenomenon that restricts literary voices and as a theme with which writers engage. State repression can be negotiated and interrogated through choices of form and content, and the essays in this collection bring a wide range of perspectives and genres to bear on the study of these artistic choices.

Some of the articles examine the ways in which literary repression in the form of censorship constrains writing and publishing. Through particular case studies and theoretical interventions, they demonstrate how the Zimbabwean scene has expanded into new and informal arenas and created new art forms, in a mutual process of adaptation between artists and censors: artists adapt to the censorious climate and censors try to keep up with new art forms. The capacity of literature and art to find new outlets and conceive of new stratagems to outwit the state never ceases to amaze. Furthermore, the collection adds much-needed attention to the role of online fora as spaces for counter-narrative literary production. While there is an emerging field of research on online dissidence and resistance to ZANU-PF on social media, this has so far been mostly viewed from a social science perspective.[17] By examining artistic activities and audiences online, several of the essays in the present collection indicate new and crucial lines of inquiry for future literary research.

As mentioned earlier, the articles chosen for the special issue not only address the mechanics of literary and cultural repression, including censorship, but they also focus on different groups of writers, who respond—via various genres—to the repression that they and others around them have experienced. From a wide variety of angles, the articles examine the political implications of aesthetic choices of genres, narrators and language. They explore novels, memoirs, epistolary writing and online fiction as well as related creative genres like theatre and film. The effect of unexpected narrators, including child and animal narrators, is examined and so is the capacity of language to disarm and disturb, persuade and manipulate. Many of these essays comment on the

[17] H. Mangeya, I. Mhute, and E. Jakaza, 'Social Media Narrations and the Dialogue on Mugabe's Legacy during the Zimbabwe "Coup"', in C. Sabao and R. R. Mahomva (eds), *Re/Membering Robert Gabriel Mugabe: Politics, Legacy, Philosophy, Life and Death* (Bulawayo, LAN Readers, 2021) pp. 238-62; N. Mboti, 'Social Media Dissidence in Zimbabwe' (PhD Thesis, University of Johannesburg, 2019); S. Mpofu, 'For a Nation to Progress Victims Must "Move on": A Case of Zimbabwe's Social Media Discourses of Gukurahundi Genocide Silencing and Resistance', *African Identities* 17, 2 (2019), pp. 108–29; G. Karekwaivanane, '"Tapanda Zvamuchese": Facebook, "unruly publics", and Zimbabwean politics', *Journal of Eastern African Studies,* 13, 1 (2019), pp. 54-71.

centrality of narrative, whether it be government narratives that promote the ruling party as heroic representatives of the nation while silencing other voices, or counter-narratives that speak truth to power, or ambiguous narratives that create their own silences even as they protest against repression.

Since we focus on literary responses to repression, we find it important to thematize the notion of literary resistance. Literary resistance is a complex and problematic phenomenon in its own right. Any given literature resisting particular forms of state violence or ideology often remains unknowingly influenced by such violence as well: it remains rooted in and sometimes even dictated by it, creating a challenge to the notion of literary autonomy. In recent studies, it is acknowledged that literary opposition is shaped by the issues it wants to oppose, and should therefore be contextualized in the cultural field from which it emerges.[18] In white Zimbabwean writing, for instance, the recurrent failure to acknowledge the long history of white supremacy and its enduring legacy undermines any 'right-minded' opposition to the existing regime. Several articles concentrate on white Zimbabwean writers' complex relationship with the repressive and violent politics of independent Zimbabwe, particularly in the midst of the Fast-Track Land Reforms. These articles address white victimhood as a problematic claim which refuses to acknowledge the undertones of colonial, repressive ideologies that continue to structure social and economic privileges in contemporary Zimbabwe.

In connection with the theme of literary resistance, another topic that recurs in many of the essays is the question of identity and belonging. The contributors examine the ways in which literature has been used to stake claims to national belonging for opposition voices, to complicate hegemonic assumptions about identity, or to prop up the identities of writers or readers. Thus, the literary field has become a territory of competing claims and alliances as the state monopoly on definitions of belonging is vigorously challenged for a variety of purposes. While writing has become a tool for re-emphasizing existing alliances and identity claims among some groups of writers and their readers, there are less visible groups whose voices are not acknowledged. For instance, in contrast to the international attention that white Zimbabwean writers, often living and working abroad, have drawn to the 'Third Chimurenga', other experiences of repressive Mugabe-era politics remain less visible both nationally and internationally. Several of the authors address the silencing of the Gukurahundi and describe efforts to give voice to that past. Literature has also been a vehicle for calling attention to other crises, like Operation Murambatsvina, electoral violence, or the HIV/AIDS crisis.

This special issue is the first product of a newly established network initiative, *Literatures of Change: Culture and Politics in Southern Africa*, which seeks to create a platform for humanities

[18] B. Ö. Firat, S. De Mul, and S. Van Wichelen, 'Introduction: Commitment and Complicity', in B. Ö. Firat, S. D. Mul, S. V. Wichelen, S. De Mul, and S. Van Wichelen (eds), *Commitment and Complicity in Cultural Theory and Practice* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2009) pp. 1-20; M. Sanders, *Complicities: The Intellectual and Apartheid* (Durham, Duke University Press, 2002).

scholarship on Southern Africa in the Nordic countries.[19] The network's first event, 'Writing Repression', was organized in collaboration with the Nordic Africa Institute in Uppsala and took place in May 2019. Despite the Nordic origins of the organisers, the event gathered a wide range of Zimbabweanists based elsewhere in Europe and Southern Africa, and this special issue includes contributions by most of the participants. We are grateful for the stimulating conversations at the workshop, and it has been a privilege to edit this special issue. At the same time, this collaboration took place during the worldwide outbreak of Covid 19, and unfortunately, many researchers have as a result been unable to contribute to the issue, despite presenting brilliant papers at the workshop. This work – by Robert Muponde, Tinashe Mushakavanhu and Nicklas Hållén – greatly enlivened our debates and sharpened the papers that appear here. In the following, we outline the essays and point to some of their fascinating intersections.

The image that emerges in the following articles is a complicated one of a stubbornly productive literary scene under sustained attack from a censorious state, which nonetheless still manages to disturb official narratives.

'Writing Repression in Zimbabwe': Overview of contributions

The collection opens with an essay by award-winning novelist Novuyo Rosa Tshuma, in which she reflects on her critically acclaimed *House of Stone* (2019). Her essay focuses on challenging existing categories of thought and describes some of the strategies she employs in the novel to 'trouble those reflexes we have about our worlds.' This, then, is a challenge to local repressive narratives, as well as to the enduring neo-colonial reading practices of Westerners engaging with non-Western texts. Like the novel itself, her essay elegantly weaves together moments of repression and resistance: the early anti-colonial struggles of the late 19th century, the war of independence of the 1970s, the Gukurahundi of the 1980s and the crisis of the early 2000s. The novel, she explains, seeks to demonstrate the connections between colonial and post-colonial violence and to counter 'contemporary hegemonic commemorations in Zimbabwe of these early [anti-colonial] struggles as belonging only to the Shona ethnicity'. In writing about a history marked by so much violence, she asks, 'How not to wear down the reader with "violence-fatigue"?' How, instead, to give the novel a 'human shape' that avoids the flattening of characters, condemned to 'play out a perpetual victimhood'? She discusses some of her solutions, like focusing on the activities of ordinary citizens, normally edited out of the official account of the past, and uses humour and discomfort to upend the reader's assumptions. In a context prone to polarization, Tshuma insists on complexity, whether by exploring the tortuous emotions of a black soldier loyal to the Rhodesian state, by exploding the ethnic categories of

[19] 'Literatures of Change: Culture and Politics in Southern Africa', NTNU - Department of Language and Literature, accessed 18 March 2021, https://www.ntnu.edu/isl/literatures-of-change. We are grateful to the Nordic Research Councils who have made this collaborative work possible through the NOS-HS grant.

Shona and Ndebele as nationalist constructions, or by noting the way in which the haunting presence of the past makes the main protagonist 'both victim and victimiser'.

As Tshuma notes, on the one hand, 'Gukurahundi is a period that has been erased from public history in Zimbabwe,' while on the other, it is subject to 'constant evocation by various political groups in the country'. It is this paradox that Jocelyn Alexander's essay explores. Naming it a 'noisy silence', Alexander carefully documents the many ways Gukurahundi has been narrated, from the official silencing of the history to immediate and enduring attempts at telling. This is a 'complex process of collectively telling and retelling stories in bad conditions' whose politics is 'mutable', serving both the interests of the present and the demands of the past. Her essay details the pre-history of the Gukurahundi and the narrative frameworks for its interpretation provided by the liberation struggle, and she explores the shifting political uses of Gukurahundi, for both the government and various oppositional groups. In tracing the 'noisy silence' outside of the realm of party politics, she takes us through a range of genres: from the memoirs, novels and oral histories feeding the 'reading hunger' of the 1990s, over the ground-breaking *Breaking the Silence* human rights report to the post-millennial round of creative interrogations of the past that it sparked, including Owen Maseko's exhibition, re-burial rituals and documentary film. In all these efforts at story-telling, she finds negotiations of belonging and attempts to hold perpetrators to account. Like Tshuma, Alexander asks how a history of repression can be told.

The state's efforts at silencing and the noisy resistance this engenders are also the subject of the next two essays. By tackling the question of censorship, Ashleigh Harris and Hazel Ngoshi provide essential context for the rest of this collection. How does the censorious state respond to literary and other cultural production, and how have Zimbabwean artists negotiated attempts to stifle voices? They raise intriguing questions about the interplay between censorship and cultural production. Harris argues that 'in a time of mass and social media, censorship is less concerned with the content of a critique than with its capacity to go viral.' She studies what forms critique takes as an 'index of how censorship operates'. This leads her, like Alexander, to study a wide range of genres: she notes the continuum from the published book which is read by so few as to be largely ignored by the state, to highly visible yet anonymous anti-government graffiti. In between these art forms operate other, more immediate art forms, like the YouTube phenomena Magamba and Bustop Tv and 'hit-and-run theatre' performed without warning in public spaces (ephemeral enough to avoid the censors' gaze but at the price of small audiences). These forms are hard for the censor to catch, but they are also high risk, as stories of the torture of YouTubers attest. Harris explores the balance that artists have to strike in reaching a large audience yet escaping the notice of the censors, and she argues that some contexts make censors more jittery than others. She documents the different government reactions to the same play, Stephen Chifunyise's *Rituals,* which criticises the 2008 electoral violence, in different locales. While allowed to appear in Harare, it was shut down in Bulawayo. This leads Harris to conclude that 'censorship is itself a multiple and fragmented phenomenon, justified by varying interpretations of the law, and exercised unevenly across different locations within the nation state.'

Hazel Tafadzwa Ngoshi's essay also explores the interplay between censorship and art, examining strategies of dissent in theatre, novels, and the fascinating new genres of online fiction. Like Harris, she thus examines the affordances offered by online communication for circumventing the control of the repressive state. However, her conclusions are more ambivalent. Addressing self-censorship or 'significant silences', she argues that online novelists tend to avoid politically potent topics and focus instead on more mundane themes like romance and religion. This 'inability to tell creates a new aesthetics that works within rather than subverts the constraints imposed by the repressive system.' This leads her to comment on the 'insidious nature of censorship', even as she also, more optimistically, looks between the lines for 'everyday forms of resistance'.[20] Ngoshi ends on a cautionary note, suggesting that online, too, there are limits to free speech. While on the one hand, '[t]echnology has taken us beyond the censorship age', on the other, the government has repeatedly shut down the internet and hired trolls to menace opposition voices.

Astrid Rasch's essay picks up the attention to online fora, while documenting the reception of memoirs. Like Harris and Ngoshi, she is interested in how audiences have engaged with works that criticise the regime, in this case counter-narrative memoirs by Joshua Nkomo, Ian Smith, Peter Godwin, and Panashe Chigumadzi. She contends that texts that purport to be counter-narratives may themselves engage in hegemonic projects. In catering to audiences who favour the narrative of the memoirist, these texts facilitate the identity work of their readers. She thus questions the texts' subversive potential through an examination of how they have been received and appropriated by various narrative communities, arguing that 'the state is not their primary conversation partner'. Rather, 'most readers have turned to these books to have their identity and worldview confirmed, seeing themselves as allies of the author', even if those identity projects differ widely depending on the author and audience.

Maria Olaussen and Oliver Nyambi also explore some of the ambiguities of texts that are critical towards state repression. Their articles suggest that such texts may enact hegemonic projects in their own right. Both Nyambi and Olaussen focus on white writers' ideological reactions to state repression, racial politics and violence during the Fast-Track Land Reform and after. Olaussen traces the trope of human-animal relations as a cultural signifier in the context of the Third Chimurenga and its politicized violence, where white farmers' assumed closeness to animal suffering has become highlighted in contemporary white writing. Contextualizing her reading of Ian Holding's novel *Of Beasts and Beings* with respect to his other fictional work, Olaussen argues that there is an unsettling reliance on animalization in the novels, where the figure of the animal perpetuates rather than unravels racially conflicting undertones. While there is a certain need in the novel to address white guilt concerning colonial history and seek atonement for a failure to act ethically, the tropes of the suffering animal and human-animal transformation—through which white atonement is sought—remain attached to a racial rhetoric of animalization.

[20] J. C. Scott, 'Everyday Forms of Resistance', *Copenhagen Papers,* 4, 89 (1986), pp. 33-62.

Whereas Olaussen's article focuses on Ian Holding's rather subtle, although troubling, attitude towards the racial divide, Nyambi's article detects clearer racial undertones in Cathy Buckle's approach to environmentalism during the Fast-Track Land Reform Programme. According to Nyambi, rather than merely focusing on the traumatic questions of owning and losing land during the Third Chimurenga, Buckle also judges land appropriations in terms of ecological (in)justice. Buckle's open letters, which have a wide readership outside the country, cast land invaders in a negative light, equating white understanding of nature with preservationist ideas in contrast to black farm invaders' mistreatment of nature and animals. Buckle's rhetoric and stereotypical images of farm invaders cement a dualistic approach to these questions, and invite her readers to see the invaders as "native others" along the lines of the long-standing racial divide. Buckle's counternarrative to ZANU-PF's nationalist agenda produces an ideologically troubling reading of the land questions; her refusal to investigate the back stories of the invaders eventually undercuts the credibility of her portrayal of her own victimhood.

Minna Niemi's article also examines representations of environmentalist discourses, showing how Dangarembga's *This Mournable Body* (2018) represents environmentalism as intrinsically aligned with white economic power. Dangarembga's novel is also set in the timeframe of the Fast-Track Land Reform Programme, but rather than focusing on questions of land justice, it portrays how, in the midst of the Third Chimurenga, traditional farm tourism becomes plagued by difficulties. Nevertheless, the international tourism industry is shown to quickly adapt to the political situation, as it creates new exploitative forms of ecotourism: urban and rural forms of 'poor tourism'. According to Niemi, *This Mournable Body*, the last novel in Dangarembga's trilogy focusing on Tambudzai Sigauke's life story, represents uneven development and neoliberal politics in turn-of-the-century Zimbabwe.It depicts drastic societal changes in both urban and rural settings plagued by overlapping vectors of political repression and economic crises. Niemi argues, however, that Dangarembga's vivid and timely portrayal of economic oppression is slightly undermined by the ending of the novel, which juxtaposes Western capitalism with an alternative *unhu/ubuntu* business model, presumably removed from the depredations of white capitalism. She concludes instead that '[t]he global marketing forces behind neoliberal values might remain smart enough to exploit ecotourism as much as "authentic" cultural values, including Unhu and Ubuntu, in order to make a profit'.

Lena Englund's article also examines contemporary writing and its complex relationship to Zimbabwe's present political situation. Englund focuses on questions of childhood innocence in Lauren Liebenberg's *The Voluptuous Delights of Peanut Butter and Jam* (2008) and Irene Sabatini's *Peace and Conflict* (2014), which are both told from the perspective of child narrators. Englund contextualizes her reading of Liebenberg and Sabatini's novels in the rich framework of contemporary Zimbabwean writing on childhood. However she argues that Liebenberg and Sabatini's approaches differ from the more common depictions of childhood in contemporary Zimbabwean writing, where the image of the child often emerges as a symbol of the young nation itself, which is still in the process of becoming. Instead, these writers, through their child

narrators, create a break from the repressive nation and suggest that the children's future will not be tied to the troubled nation. By so doing, they suggest an unbridgeable divide between the Rhodesian past and Zimbabwean present.

All told, this collection breaks new ground by offering a view of the interactions of the literary imagination and repression which serves to disassemble and reassemble the elements of the contemporary 'crisis' itself. While repression in Zimbabwe has often been studied by social scientists and historians, the present collection demonstrates the value of using literary criticism and scholarship to examine the interplay between official and dissenting voices in the public sphere. Contributors highlight the centrality of literature and the arts more broadly in formulating protest and positing alternative realities. The result is that repression is rendered far from total, even if it is always dangerous and distorting.

This work makes two important points. Firstly, official violence and censorship is shown to select and negotiate; state institutions are nervous and unsure of what the threat is – books or online content, novelists or comedians, ideas or performance – and how to respond to it. Secondly, the articles examine how stories are told with and against the powerful, sometimes unknowingly, revealing not only the fragmentation of resistance but also the location of powerful actors outside the state apparatus as well as outside the boundaries of the nation state. Literature insists on the complexity of the histories of violence and human agents within it, but in no easily predictable way. Just as ZANU-PF experiments, so do writers, re-presenting history, seeking out and challenging or affirming audiences, reifying or contesting identities and belonging, producing new genres, and reproducing racial divides in new clothes. All in all, this special issue locates complex, powerful forms of repression and resistance in unusual places and traces their reproduction, interaction and transformation in novel ways.