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“Harare, *Haarari*—S/He Does Not Sleep”: Imagining the City in Charles Mungoshi’s *Ndiko Kupindana Kwamazuva* and Ignatius Mabasa’s *Mapenzi*

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ABSTRACT

Despite the fact that over two decades and the coming of independence lie between the publication of Charles Mungoshi’s *Ndiko Kupindana Kwamazuva* [*How Time Passes*] (1975) and Ignatius Mabasa’s *Mapenzi* [*Fools*] (1999), the city—a key setting in both novels—is described in similar, often congruent, images by the two male protagonists, Rex and Hamundigone. Salisbury, later Harare, is likened to an undefeatable seductress who traps and ruins men by introducing them to her twin pleasures of cheap beer and fast women. Thus, on the surface, the city appears to be responsible for social corruption and moral decay. A close reading of the imagery in both novels, however, reveals that both authors refrain from regurgitating the programmatic and rather simplistic “old society versus modern lifestyle” trope that has permeated the discourse of urbanization in Shona literature. Instead, they intimate that larger sociopolitical forces are the root causes of social malaise in colonial Rhodesia and, subsequently, independent Zimbabwe.

“**H**arare, Harari, haarari; hakurarwi” ‘Harare, *Harari*, s/he does not sleep; where no one sleeps’ (Mungoshi 138; in the following cited as *MUN*)—these words are uttered by Rex, the protagonist of *Ndiko Kupindana Kwamazuva* [*How Time Passes*].¹ With these different versions of the word Harare, the character initiates a play on words that reveals the inherent meaning of the city’s name: “*haarari*” (s/he does not sleep); through its passive locative form “*hakurarwi*” (where no one sleeps) it is translated into a place whose inhabitants do not sleep. The depiction of Zimbabwe’s capital as restless reappears similarly

in the words of Hamundigone, the protagonist of Mabasa's novel, a war veteran who lost his job as a teacher because he is allegedly mentally ill: "Harare. *Blazo*, hanzi havarari muHarare. Ko, iko kunyepa here? Hamurarwi muHarare, uye zvese zvirimo." 'Harare, *Bra*, it's said they don't sleep in Harare. But then, is it a lie? No one sleeps in Harare, and everything is there' (Mabasa 33; in the following cited as *MAB*).

This play on the semantic meaning of Harare, initiated by Rex and echoed by Hamundigone, can be read as reproducing the discourse of the "modern" city as foreign through its invocation of the prominent "the city that never sleeps" trope. Yet, simultaneously, it anchors the city within the local context by pointing to the origin of the place name, which dates back to the time of Neharawa, a chief who, prior to the arrival of the Pioneer Column in 1890, had settled in the area that was subsequently developed to become the colonial capital, Salisbury (Chikowore 3). According to Shona folk etymology, chief Neharawa and the land over which he ruled were nicknamed Harare because any attempt to attack his dominion was thwarted by his forces that, allegedly, were always on alert.² Upon Zimbabwe's political independence in 1980, the capital was renamed from Salisbury to Harare.

As illustrated by this example, in this paper I aim to explore the complex and, at times, paradoxical ways in which Harare is portrayed in the imagery of the two novels. In both, Harare functions as setting as well as theme. According to Ranka Primorac, "plots built around the theme of a big city's potential to destroy innocence and beauty have marked the entire history of Zimbabwean fiction" (13). The city as a symbol of moral decay and social corruption has been particularly dominant in Shona and Ndebele novels. In his seminal work *Aspects of the Shona Novel*, George Kahari summarizes this point:

The urban areas in which these stories are portrayed are more than themselves—symbols. In contrast to the rural areas which stand for all that is traditional in outlook, the urban areas are soul-destructive, destroying such things as human relationships and such values as hospitality. The urban areas are melting pots in which "things fall apart." (107)

While a few scholars have challenged this binary view with regard to Zimbabwean literatures in English, offering new ways of "reading" urban space (e.g., Samuelson; Manase; Muchemwa; Nutall), the scant body of secondary literature tackling the representation of the city in Shona and Ndebele literature foregrounds the moral didacticism prevalent in novels of urbanization or, in other words, the conflict between the "modern" and "traditional" lifestyle (see Kahari, *Aspects*; Veit-Wild, *Teachers*; Chiwome, *A Social History*). Cognizant of the constraints imposed by the Rhodesian Literature Bureau, Flora Veit-Wild, for instance, remarks, "[t]he majority of Shona and Ndebele writers were constrained and repetitive in theme and style, imitating their predecessors, centering on fictions mostly around the ever-recurring themes of culture clash and moral decay in the cities" (*Teachers* 246). Similarly, Emmanuel Chiwome notes: "Writers who could not discuss sensitive issues were free to explore the devastating effects of urbanisation on the African mind" (*A Social History* 145).

These observations also entail some truth with regard to *Ndiko Kupindana Kwamazwava* and *Mapenzi*. Despite the fact that over two decades and the advent of

independence lie between the publication of these two novels, the city is depicted in almost analogous terms by the two male protagonists. In various vivid images, Harare becomes the personification of an alluring yet perfidious place. Hence, on the surface, both novels appear to perpetuate a well-established motif in Zimbabwean literature: the city as a hotbed of moral decay.

Yet, while the city appears in familiar tropes of seduction, stench, and despair, a close reading of the imagery in the two novels reveals that both authors refrain from the moralistic tone that conventionally pervades Shona literature. In this way, they challenge what Meg Samuelson refers to as “the ‘Jim Comes to Joburg’ trope” (251), in which the danger and moral degeneration of the “foreign” city is set against the stability and calm of “traditional” life in the country.

While *Ndiko Kupindana Kwamazuva* employs a rather simple and typical theme of Shona literature, namely “the infidelity of the husband who drinks and womanizes in town and thus ruins or endangers his marriage” (Veit-Wild, *Teachers* 279), it breaks away from other Shona and Ndebele novels by foregrounding the psychological landscape of its characters (Chiwome, *A Social History* 145). The minute descriptions of the estrangement and inner turmoil the characters experience in their everyday lives is buttressed by an ominous sense of futility that pervades life in the urban, as well as the rural, areas. By depicting neither the city nor the country as possible sites of refuge and belonging, the novel insinuates that under their present circumstances the characters are powerless subjects with no possibility of shaping their own lives.

In *Mapenzi*, set in post-independent Zimbabwe of the 1990s, Harare appears as an equally harsh and troubled place. Yet, while in *Ndiko Kupindana Kwamazuva* city life is represented as degenerating, in Mabasa’s novel urban space functions as a stage on which the lives of various characters unfold in a snapshot-like manner. Moreover, the city is also portrayed as a landscape onto which the characters inscribe their identity and belonging. This is particularly evident with regard to language: caught up in their daily struggles, the characters speak out in registers that are defined by their status and environment. Moreover, the very heterogeneous and polyphonic nature of *Mapenzi* blurs conventional binaries, such as “modern” versus “traditional,” that have commonly been mapped onto urban and rural spaces.

STENCH AND SEDUCTION: WRITING THE CITY IN FAMILIAR TROPES

Mapenzi has revolutionized the Shona novel in many ways, introducing numerous new trends to novelistic writing in Shona, particularly with regard to language and narrative structure (see Chirere 221; Veit-Wild, “Zimbolicious” 696–97). The novel’s originality is also reflected in its rich intertextuality. As Veit-Wild points out in her essay in this volume: “non-linearity and fragmentation as well as the putting together of different literary genres (*Mapenzi* includes poetry, songs and folktale), the playfulness of tone, irony and intertextual referentiality characterize the novel as a postmodern work of literature” (14). One aspect accompanying the novel’s “intertextual referentiality” is that it positions itself squarely within Zimbabwe’s literary tradition. Zimbabwe’s rebel writer, Dambudzo Marechera, for instance, is directly mentioned in the plot, and the novel, according to Veit-Wild,

“can be read as a sort of Marecheran text in (mostly) Shona” (“Zimbolicious” 695). In addition, the novel establishes links to Mungoshi’s writing. The idiomatic title of his first novel, *Makununu’unu Maodzamwoyo* (1970), for instance, is quoted in *Mapenzi*’s opening chapter: “Makambozvinzwawo here kuti makununu’unu maodza mwoyo?” ‘Have you heard the saying, grief withers the heart?’ (MAB 5). On a literary level, this trend of speaking back can be found in the metaphors and similes that are used to describe the city in *Mapenzi* and *Ndiko Kupindana Kwamazuva*. Hamundigone echoes the images that Rex uses in his description of Harare by rehashing the phrasing or drawing on the same semantic fields.

In both novels, the desperation and despair that marks urban life is captured in the trope of stench. In Rex’s introspection, for instance, the image “nhamu inonhuhwa” (poverty stinks) appears twice: in his recollection of the first kiss he received from Magi, his lover and his wife’s best friend, as well as in his descriptions of Harare. Regarding the kiss, he has the following to say: “Ndakambonzwa VaMbaimbai, baba vangu, vachiti nhamu inonhuhwa. Handina kunge ndaziva kuti vairevei. Ndakazviziva musu uyu: ndiyo yainhuhwa mukana maMagi.” ‘I heard once Mr. Mbaimbai, my father, saying poverty stinks. I had not known what he meant by that. I came to know about it on that day: it was poverty that smelled in Magi’s mouth’ (MUN 95). The smell of poverty in Magi’s mouth foreshadows the disastrous trajectory of their relationship and, at the same time, accentuates the intrinsic link between Magi and the city, which also stinks of poverty:

Unozviita chirambakusakara neHarare? Unoti ine tsitsi here? . . . Kwakaenda vamwe ndiko uri kuendawo uchiisiya yakadaro ichiseka, ichifara, ichinhuhwa nenhamu dzayo. (MUN 147)

Do you think you never grow old of Harare? Do you think it has mercy? . . . Where others have gone is where you are going to leave it, laughing, enjoying, stinking with its poverty.

The personification of the city as “laughing, enjoying, stinking with its poverty” is mirrored in an image used by Hamundigone, in which Harare is rotten and stinks: “A, Harare inondipaza musoro sefoshoro inopakura manyowa. Handinzwisisi, yakaora, inonhuwa, asi ndinoida.” ‘Ah, Harare destroys my head like a spade shoveling manure. I don’t understand it, it’s rotten, it stinks, but I love it’ (MAB 33). Similar to Rex’s realization that Harare lacks mercy is Hamundigone’s depiction of the city as heartless and shameless, an aspect he illustrates with a simile in which Harare’s filthiness is compared to unwashed dishes: “Asi Harare hainyare munombozviziva izvozvo anamai? Uye Harare haina mwoyo. Inenge ndiro inopakurirwa isina kusukwa.” ‘But Harare is shameless do you know that mothers? And also Harare is heartless. It is like a plate that you dish into when it has not been washed’ (MAB 32).

Indeed, in *Mapenzi*, images recur that center on *manyowa* (manure), *ndove* (fresh dung), as well as *madhaka* and *nhope* (both meaning mud) in order to comment on the socioeconomic deterioration and corruption that have become endemic to the Zimbabwe of the 1990s. In the opening chapter, “Munhu” ‘Man,’ the foreboding voice of the unknown narrator remarks, “Mvura yatinogezera miviri nemweya yehupenyu yabvondoka. Upenyu hwedu hwave madhaka.” ‘The water in which we bathe our bodies and soul is muddied. Our lives are nothing

but mud' (*MAB* 5). The image of filthy and dirty waters reappears as Bunny who, as someone also pushed to the edge of insanity out of fear that he has contracted HIV from his landlady and lover and as such is one of the characters who feels very close to Hamundigone, compares the lives of young people in Harare to the Mukuvisi, a heavily polluted river that flows past the city: "Imi, hupenyu hwevakomana muHarare hunege mvura yaMukuvisi isina muridzi!" "The life of youths in Harare is much like the water of Mukuvisi, it has no owner!" (*MAB* 42). Thus, the city is embodied in tropes of stench, dirt, and rotting, which, like Rex's "stench of poverty" metaphor, is strongly reminiscent of "the Ayi Kwei Armah-motif of 'stench' as symbol of social corruption" (Veit-Wild, *Teachers* 308). Francis Etsé Awitor's remark with regard to Armah's writing that he uses "excremental language . . . to depict the corrupt society as well as the stifling and dirty environment in which the characters live" (48) also applies to the two Shona novels.

While the city's decay is captured in the stench motif in *Ndiko Kupindana Kwamzuva* and *Mapenzi*, its enchanting nature is captured in yet another familiar trope: the city as seductress. This trope is a slight alteration of what Florence Stratton has termed "the Mother Africa trope," which, in its essence, is "the embodiment of Africa in the figure of a woman . . . [and] is deeply entrenched in the male literary tradition, the sexual imperatives it encodes shaping the writing of such diverse authors as Senghor, Soyinka, and Ngũgĩ" (39). In Zimbabwe's literary tradition this trope appears most prominently in Musaemura Zimunya's poetry. In his two poetry collections *Kingfisher, Jikinya and other Poems* and *Country Dawns and City Lights*, two female figures—Jikinya and Loveness—are turned into icons representing the country and city, respectively (Muchemwa 45). The city—in the form of Loveness—is portrayed as a femme fatale to whose "erotic enticement" black men fall victim (Ibid. 47). This is captured in the following lines of the poem entitled "Loveness":

Loveness is sunshine
 Loveness is long fingernails
 and highheels—the higher you move
 the hotter it becomes.

Samson fell in flames
 Like a jumbo jet
 His eyes are death emblems.
 She was his death sentence. (37)

This trope of the city as enchantress reemerges in Mungoshi's and Mabasa's novels in two strikingly similar images. Rex's statement, "Dai Harare yaive mukadzi waiti akandipfuhwira." 'If Harare was a woman you would say she has given me a love potion' (*MUN* 136), is echoed by Hamundigone as he proclaims: "Ndaimuda musikana iyeye Harare ikandipfuhwira ndikamukoshiwa." 'I loved that girl but Harare gave me a love potion that made me forget her' (*MAB* 28). By comparing the lure of the city to a woman who administers a love potion, both characters underline the intoxicating effects of city life. Indeed, as both characters assert, Harare cannot be defeated; it robs men of their agency, as illustrated, by the former, in a rhetorical question, "Ungaiita sei Harare isina mugoni . . . ?" 'What can you do to Harare, no one can defeat it . . . ?' (*MUN* 137) and, by the latter, in the imperative

form, “Hamuigoni Harare iyi! Isiyei yakadaro!” ‘You cannot defeat Harare! Leave it like that!’ (MAB 33).

By emphasizing that Harare is an irresistible seductress, Rex and Hamundigone also evoke the longstanding, clichéd trope that fuses the attractions and perils of the city with prostitution. Indeed, Hamundigone explicitly draws this link by using an extended metaphor in which Harare appears as a prostitute:

Usiku, kana zviye kwati tsva-a, Harare zipfambi rakazvipenda-penda zvakadarikidza mwero. Inopfeka uso hwemagetsi emarudzi nemarudzi ichi-vavarira kunanzva zvanza zvine dovi remadhora nemasenzi. (MAB 32)

At night, when it is dark, Harare is a garishly painted whore. She wears a face of multicolored lights trying to lick palms smeared with peanut butter of dollars and cents.

This multilayered image explicates the dangers of the city by pointing to its lure; in the darkness of night, Harare shows her true colors—she is nothing more than a whore that dons a flashy facade in order to fulfill her true aspiration: to extort “*madhora nemasenzi*,” the *shona*-lized words for dollars and cents.

In *Ndiko Kupindana Kwamazuva*, remarks crop up throughout the novel, particularly in the gossip of the village women, which link the city to prostitution and depict city women as prostitutes. However, it is in Rex’s first-person narration—as he describes the two women in his life, his wife Rindai and his lover Magi—that each of the women, like Zimunya’s Loveness and Jikinya, are turned into analogies. Whereas Rindai denotes the virtue, warmth, and nurturing aspect of the quiet, yet hard life in rural areas, Magi stands for the fast-paced, attractive, yet destructive city life. Indeed, Rindai is described as a “slow-burning log” (“Rindai aiva moto wamatanda” [MUN 82]) and as “a quiet deep pool with clear water” (“Rindai aive dziva hombe rine mvura yakanyarara, yakachena, inotonhorera” [MUN 82]), while Magi, in contrast, is painted as engrossing, yet fickle, “she is a veldt-fire that thunders with huge flame” (“Magi aiva moto wesora waitinhira nokuita marimi makuru” [MUN 82]) and as a small, narrow stream that turbulent water cuts and churns: “Magi kaive kakorodzi kana kakova kane mvura inorwadza nokucheka nokutamba-tamba pamatombo egomo rinamawere akadzika zvikuru.” ‘Magi was a small, narrow stream that has painful water that cuts and that tumbles on the rocks of a mountain with a very steep slope’ (MUN 82).

A VILLAINOUS CITY AND A FUTILE EXISTENCE

Rex, however, does not blame Magi for the destruction of his marriage and the emptiness that has come to pervade his life. Instead, he ends up blaming Harare for his downfall. As he returns to the city from a prolonged stay in the countryside, where he spent two happy months with his wife Rindai who had moved there in order to escape the tribulations of their marriage, he returns with a fixed set of plans: to stop drinking beer, to end his affair with Magi, and to regularly visit his wife. Yet, his plans are quickly overturned and in his quest to unravel what has happened, he concludes: “Zvandakanga ndabva kumusha ndichironga zvakanga zvabvarurwa-bvarurwa neHarare.” ‘What I had planned on my way from the village had been torn apart by Harare’ (MUN 138). The duplication of the verb

-*bvarura* (to tear apart) emphasizes that his plans were utterly destroyed by the personified city.

Indeed, in his first-person narration, in which “he sits back to review his life and to try to discover where and how he went wrong” (Pongweni 104), he deduces that the city emits a frenzy that quickly caused him to overthrow his admirable plans and to resume his city life where he had left it: getting drunk and sleeping with his wife’s best friend:

Pane chimwe chinhu chiri muzita rinonzi Harare chete. Pane chimwe chinhu chinoita kuti wava muHarare ukanganwe twese twawabva wakaronga kumusha kwako. Pane nyemwe rinongouya, nyemwe rinenge shavi rourombe, rinongukuti kwindi waera wati kwiti chete paMuisika weHarare. (MUN 135)

There is something in the name Harare. There is something that causes you to forget all the plans that you had when coming from your rural home once you get to Harare. There is an excitement that comes, an excitement like a vagabond’s spirit, which just comes over you as soon as you arrive at Harare’s bus terminal.

This short excerpt provides a glimpse into Mungoshi’s style. According to Chiwome, “the novel uses language in its simple lyrical form to achieve unprecedented depth of portrayal of human feeling and behaviour” (“Modern Shona” 145). The poetic tone of Rex’s first-person narrative is characterized by the repetition of key phrases or terms, often at the beginning of a sentence, as illustrated in this example, in which each sentence begins with “*pane*” (there is). “*Nyemwe*,” which means excitement or frenzy, is also repeated twice in one sentence, underlining Rex’s attempt to pinpoint its exact quality, which is enunciated in the simile “*nyemwe rinenge shavi rourombe*” ‘an excitement like a vagabond’s spirit.’ Akin to comparing Harare to a woman that administers a love potion, the simile underscores the idea that a potent, magical power bedevils men as they enter the city. Yet, by comparing the excitement of the city to the spirit of a vagabond, the former is also imbued with an irresponsible, precarious, and destructive quality.

The result, nonetheless, is the same: it is Harare that leads him astray; it is Harare that lures him into getting drunk, which in turn results in him waking up in Magi’s bed the next morning. This is emphatically captured in yet another passage in which he laments the tragic attractions of Harare: “*Ndiyo Harare iyi. Harare mwoyo womunhu: Harare, Harari, haarari; hakurwari. O, Harare! Chimboitaiwo huro imwe chete yeHarare tione mukasavitsa gumi.*” “This is Harare. Harare is a person’s heart: Harare, *Harari*, (s)he does not sleep; where no one sleeps. O, Harare! Just have a sip of Harare and we will see if you do not get to ten’ (MUN 138).

Thus, akin to other Shona novels, such as Paul Chidyausiki’s *Nyadzi Dzinokunda Rufu* (1963) and Aaron Mwoyo’s *Uchandifungawo* (1980), the city—in Rex’s retro- and introspection—is portrayed as a corrupting force to which men fall victim (Chiwome, *A Social History* 146). Indeed, concerning the representation of urban space, Mungoshi says:

The city was the villain, in most of our stories, and not the white man who had brought the town into our rural lives. And the city had nothing to do with whites, no. The city was the slums and the ghettos where only blacks lived. We

didn't see the poor lives in the ghettos, the drinking, whoring, killings as having anything to do with the prejudiced rule of the white man, even if we saw it, we were not allowed to bring it out in our stories. We wrote of our own lives as if the white man didn't exist. (qtd. in Veit-Wild, *Teachers* 24)

However, in *Ndiko Kupindana Kwamazuva* we find a metonymic reference that insinuates that the misery of black experience in the urban center is linked to the unjust and racist nature of colonialism. As Rex describes "the poor lives in the ghettos, the drinking, whoring, and killings"—in a series of sentences that all start with the verbal construction "ndikaona" (I have seen)—he also states: "Ndikagoonawo zvitupa zvichiremba munzvimbo dzinokwirirwa mabhazi semireza yourombo." 'I have also seen *zvitupa* hanging at bus terminals like flags of poverty' (MUN 146). *Zvitupa*, the passes black men had to carry under Rhodesia's pass law in order to curtail their movement within Salisbury, can be read as a metonymy for the colonial administration. And the metaphor "flags of poverty" implies that it is this system that drains the people—economically and psychologically.

Indeed, Mungoshi, in writing the first psychological novel in Shona, offers a deep insight into his characters' inner turmoil and conflicts and hence their entanglement in a web of social tensions and circumstances that lie outside of their immediate control. Rex, in the words of Chiwome, "becomes his own-prosecutor" (*A Social History* 149) and Magi, the "loose" city woman, is likewise not blamed for Rex's undoing. Instead, she is portrayed with compassion, as a conflicted woman, troubled and frustrated by the disappointments she has experienced in her past—as hinted at in the following example: "Magi akaseka zvakare. Kuseka kwacho aiti akarekerera divi iri, ororekera iro sengoro yakazarisa iri kufamba munzira isina kunaka, ina magadhi kana mihomba." 'Magi laughed yet again. As she did that she would tilt to this side and then to the other, like an overloaded wagon traveling along a bad road, [a road] with potholes or ridges' (MUN 26). The image of an "overloaded wagon" can be seen as referring to Magi's mental state; she is, as Alec Pongweni mentions, "mentally overloaded" (166) by the painful memories she reveals in two stories—one of which relates to herself, the other to her sister's suicide—both tragedies linked to the refusal of both their boyfriends to take responsibility for making them pregnant. The "potholes" and "ridges" entail a foreshadowing element, insinuating her further betrayal by men such as Rex. Thus, as Veit-Wild points out, "Mungoshi again identifies what has made her into what she is: society—that is, male society" (*Teachers* 284).

In addition, Mungoshi challenges "the moralizing dichotomy of city versus country life" by portraying the countryside as bleak (Samuelson 251). The fact that Rindai has to work hard in order to eke out a living and fight the allegations of witchcraft against her, as well as putting up with the ceaseless gossip of the bored village women, hints that the village's communal and moral fiber has been tainted by rural-urban transmigration, a consequence of the demands of the colonial economy. Thus, Kizito Muchemwa's remark with regard to *Waiting for the Rain*, Mungoshi's acclaimed English novel that was published in the same year, also holds true for *Ndiko Kupindana Kwamazuva*: "For Mungoshi, the rural, a product of laws of impoverishment and dispossession, is not an idyllic landscape on which to place the burden of representation" (48).

As implied by the titles of Mungoshi's two novels, in *Waiting for the Rain* the bleakness of life in the tribal trust lands is captured in stifling images that hinge on an apathetic sense of waiting and drought, while in *Ndiko Kupindana Kwamazuva*, this bleakness—suffusing life in the country and the city—is captured in imagery that foregrounds the “monotonous cyclical passage of time” (Chiwome, *A Social History* 150). Rex repeatedly uses images that are imbued with a sense of defeat and futility in his first-person narration, as, for instance, in the following statement that centers on the passing of seasons:

Ndiko kuerera kwoupenyu, mazuva achipindana, zhizha richipa nzvimbo kumatsutso, matsutso achipa nzvimbo kuchando. Chando. Wozoshama zuva radoka. Yasvika nguva yokudzokera kwatakabva. (MUN 33)

The wet season gives way to the harvest season, the harvest season gives way to winter. Winter. Then before you know it, the sun is set. Then we return to the source.

Indeed, for Rex, the senseless passing of time is intrinsically linked to his experience of an urban lifestyle. Initially, he savored his escape into the joys of city life:

Tasara tega kudaizvi naMagi ndakapinda muHarare somunhu aizvikanda mudziwa zvese nebhachi, bhurukwa, bhutsu, tai namasokisi. Harare yakandipinda mutsinga. O, o Harare! . . . Papi pawaienda ukasanzwa kuti kuna Rex Mbare? Ukabvunza kuti Rex Mbare ndiani zvaireva kuti iwe ndiwe wakanga usingazivikanwi. Mukadzi takanga tapingudza, mari taita yokufurisa madzi-hwa, vamatekisi vatiziva, vamabhawa vaitiziva, vamarokwe vaiti vakationa vaititi Bra Rex, zvinoreva munhu mukuru kwazvo muHarare. Kana wakanga usingazivi isu, vawaizoti vanaHarare ndiani zvino? O, o Harare. (MUN 119)

When we were left on our own, Magi and I, I stepped into Harare like a person throwing himself into a pool with everything: jacket, pair of trousers, boots, tie, and socks. Harare entered into my veins. O, o Harare! . . . Where would you go and the name Rex Mbare was not heard? You could only show your ignorance of the city by asking who Rex Mbare was. The wife, we had tamed, money we were blowing our noses with, the taxi drivers knew us, the barmen knew us, the women, whenever they saw us, they would say *Bra Rex*, which means a very big person in Harare. If you didn't know us, then how could you ever claim to know anything of Harare? O, o Harare.

As time passes, however, he discovers that the thrills of living it up with Magi—visiting bars and nightclubs, getting drunk, throwing around money, and thus being a well-known patron of Harare's nightlife—are fleeting; his uncertainties and disillusionment are illustrated by the disappearance of the triumphant tone that marks his former observation, “Harare yakandipinda mutsinga” ‘Harare entered my veins’ with a rueful question: “Ungaidii Harare yakupinda mutsinga?” ‘What can you do when Harare enters your veins?’ (MUN 137). In the end, rendered tired and depressed, he feels defeated by the city because life has lost its meaning, as captured in his idiomatic reference to digging his own grave: “Ndaneta neHarare. Hauchisiri upenyu uhwu. Zvichizoguma sei? Kuzvicherera guva kwandiri kuita uku.” ‘I am tired of Harare. This is no longer life. How will this end? What I am doing is digging my own grave.’

In the plot, this pervasive sense of futility is also reflected in the portrayal of Rindai's desolate and lonely life. She occupies herself with work—which, according to the scornful tongue of her mother-in-law, Kwiripi, will leave her as thin as a cooking stick (“Nhaka runoonda somusika” [MUN 8]) or as dark as a crow because of the sun (“Nhaka ruchasviba segunguo nezuva” [MUN 8])—while she wastes away, waiting to hear from her husband, who, as captured in the gossip of the village women, has dumped her like a rusty hoe (“gwibhidhi kwakadaro sebadza rava nengura pamushapo” [MUN 9]).

Despite Mungoshi's silence about the political developments of Zimbabwe, deeply embroiled in the war of liberation at the time of the novel's publication in 1975, this turn inward, into the psychological landscape of his characters, can be read as an implicit commentary on the debilitating effects that Ian Smith's settler regime had on the mind and the lives of the African people. As Maurice Vambe writes,

The readers come to know the insidious nature of colonialism through the creation of such areas as the barren rural reserves to which Rex's wife, Rindai, and parents VaMbaimbai and Kwiripi have been condemned, and the spiritually sapping urban centres where in the novel the likes of Rex Mbare are banished to. (56)

By insinuating that life in colonial Rhodesia, in the country as well as in the city, is bleak and futile, Mungoshi departs from the moral didacticism that suffuses the city versus country binary in other Shona novels. The view that both the city and the country are troubled sites in which ordinary people strive, yet fail, to carve out a meaningful existence, is also alluded to by the ending of the novel: Rex and Rindai, who reconcile following the tragic death of their first-born daughter, retreat to the small town of Chivhumudhara.

By refusing to depict the country as a romanticized, ancestral home and by microscopically examining the conflicts his characters experience in their everyday lives, Mungoshi also challenges African nationalism's insistence “on a single image and identity to describe the response of black people to colonialism” (Vambe 57). Thus, the novel—like *Waiting for the Rain*, in which the old man “refuses to allow [the] liberation struggle a stable, optimistic signification” (Chennels 21)—insinuates that the liberation from colonialism may not bring the anticipated alleviation to ordinary men and women. Political paroles are replaced by a move into the private realm, in which Rex, the anti-hero, is overpowered by outside forces, which, in this context, are represented by the city.

A STATE OF FOOLS, URBAN IDENTITY, AND RESILIENT LANGUAGE

By the time *Mapenzi* was published, the political environment had drastically changed: Zimbabwe gained independence in 1980, which meant that the settler regime had been replaced by majority rule and the first black government had been instated. Yet, while the transition was marked by discontinuities, it also entailed some continuities in different guises. In the novel, the racial boundaries of Salisbury, for instance, have been reinscribed into Harare in the form of class. This is alluded to in Hamundigone's comment that he will not visit his elder

brother Ruka, who lives with his family in the leafy suburb of Gunhill, since they behave like *vairungu*, a term used to denote the British, but in this context is a more general reference to white people (MAB 29). Yet, Harare is also depicted as a place that has changed with the advent of independence. Again, this is insinuated in Hamundigone's speech. Although he emphasizes the colonial heritage of Harare—that it was built by white men and that blacks left their rural homes in order to come to the city in search of work—he is quick to remark: “Asika vazhinji varimo ndisu vatema uye tinoti hapana chinyowani nekuti kana iyo Salisbury yacho yakatowana Harare iripo.” ‘Anyways, most of the people here are us blacks and there’s nothing new because even Salisbury found Harare here already’ (MAB 33). This statement implies that the city is no longer a restricted and foreign place. On the contrary, the gaining of independence ushered in a new era in which Harare is now predominantly inhabited by Zimbabweans. By claiming that “Salisbury found Harare here already,” the protagonist points to the historical fact that prior to the arrival of the colonial settlers, Shona people had inhabited the area for centuries, thus challenging the myth that the city is a European invention imposed on a rural and backward African continent.

Yet, while the city has undoubtedly changed with the advent of independence, most visibly with the removal of the pass laws, it is still depicted as a harsh and decrepit place. This is captured in the debilitating experiences the various characters face in their daily lives. VC, the brother of Bunny, peddles *mabanje* (marijuana) out of his room in Chitungwiza's Unit D in order to eke out a living. He ends up being beaten to a pulp by Heaven, Hamundigone's niece and the daughter of his landlady, and her boyfriend Eddie, as he attempts to protect their maid, Saru, who has been forced by Eddie to have sex with him. Reminiscent of the Magi in *Ndiko Kupindana Kwamazwava*, the Magi of *Mapenzi*, the sister of Bunny and VC who has a child with Hamundigone (he made her pregnant while he was her high school teacher), prostitutes herself in order to subsidize her meager student loans and, at the end, is raped by her married lover Mangwiwo. Mai Tanya, the wife of Saba, a drinking and whoring acquaintance of VC, sells *freesits* in an attempt to raise enough bus fare in order to escape from her abusive husband, who eventually beats her to death. Indeed, in contrast to Rex's narrative, in which Harare appears as the villain that caused his defeat, in *Mapenzi*, different locations across the city and the satellite town Chitungwiza function as settings in which the insanity of Zimbabwe in the 1990s unfolds. As Chiwome writes:

Mabasa . . . takes Harare, the capital city of independent Zimbabwe, as a site of struggle. Mapenzi reflects urban Africans in different situations behaving as fools or people with mental disorders (*mapenzi*; a literal translation of the title). The spaces that are treated as specific sites of struggle include high-density suburbs, the highest institution of learning, downtown Harare, emergency taxi pick-up points, as well as the cemetery. . . . Each site characterizes specific struggles that reflect the pathology of Zimbabwean society. (“Modern Shona Literature” 168–69)

This “pathology of Zimbabwean society” is captured in images that center on disease, mud, and stench, as well as heartlessness, that resurface throughout the novel—some being repeated by the same, or a different, character, others reappearing in slightly different guises by drawing on corresponding semantic fields.

A central theme of the novel—that madness is a sickness that has befallen the entire nation—is, for instance, already alluded to in the opening chapter in the metaphor of a “mind” that is “numb”: “Pfungwa dzave nechiveve. MuZimbabwe muya mave nechirwere, chirwere chisiri njovhera kana mukondombera.” ‘My mind is now numbed. In Zimbabwe, there is now a disease, a disease that is neither syphilis, nor AIDS’ (MAB 5). The idea that madness has come to dominate the urban landscape is, for instance, expressed by VC as he comments on Saba’s ghastly behavior toward his wife:

Asi chokwadi kupenga kwakadai kuchaperawo riinhi? Sekuru Saba vakatengera hure madhirezi maviri nepeya imwe chete yebhutsu. Asi mukadzi wavo ukamuna unototy kuti hembe dzake idzi ndedzekunhongwa here kana kuti ndedzenhaka. Zvasekuru Saba vakomana! Ndiko kubvinza kwemwoyo yedu, mweya nenjere tiri muno muHarare. (MAB 51)

But honestly when is this madness going to end? Sekuru Saba bought a whore two dresses and a pair of shoes, but when you see his wife you wonder whether her frightful clothes were found somewhere or whether they are hand me downs. The things Sekuru Saba does, guys! This is the way our hearts bleed mind and soul while we are in Harare.

Yet, the motif of madness is most poignantly captured in the speech and character of the novel’s protagonist, Hamundigone. By repeatedly proclaiming that it is not he who is mad, but, on the contrary, everyone around him, he emphasizes that life in the Harare of the 1990s is steeped in insanity: “Ndingafare kana ndikawana kwekuvererekera kuri kure neHarare. Kure chaizvo nehupenzi huno. Hupenzi hunosanganisira kuona hupenzi hwevamwe ivo vasingaoni hwavo.” ‘I would be glad to find a place to slip far away from Harare. Far away indeed from this madness, which sees the madness in others while refusing to acknowledge their own’ (MAB 30).

For Hamundigone, the reason for this madness is linked to the betrayal of the masses by the ruling elite. For instance, as he describes Harare to his copassengers in a *kombi* traveling from Bindura to the capital, he proclaims:

Harare, yakaoma iyi! Yakapenga kunge pfuti yandaridza muhondo ndichiri Komuredhi. Komuredhi ani? Hamundigone. Pfuti yakatizwa nei? Nebhunu. Haa-a ikozvino handichisiri Komuredhi manje, nekuti kana nemagwereveshe ese awevo maKomuredzi. (MAB 29)

Harare, this Harare is tough! It is crazy like the gun I used to fire in the war when I still was a comrade. Comrade who? Hamundigone. Who ran away from the gun? The Boer. Ha, I am no longer a comrade now, because even lizards are now comrades.

The metaphor “even lizards are now comrades” provides the explanation for why life in the city is marked by hardship and insanity: in post-independent Zimbabwe, people have received lucrative government posts based on their claim to be former freedom fighters, while those who did the actual fighting and were injured, like himself, are left with nothing. This core message is reiterated throughout the novel. Magi, for instance, picks up on it as she asserts that some feel entitled to

hold important positions despite never having fought in the war, let alone held a gun; instead, “vaitogocha nyama zvavo munanaBotswana nanaZambi umu, hondo yapera vakazouya vachatiratidza madzvanga avakatsva nenyama yemabraai vachiti aive mavanga emabara emuvengi” ‘they were busy braaing meat in Botswana and Zambia, then when the war ended they came showing us scars where the meat they were braaing burnt them saying that they are scars from enemy bullets’ (MAB 106).

Thus, the novel links the madness of city life, which is manifested in the collapse of morality and righteousness, to the shattered dreams that surrounded the war of liberation. While a whole nation fought, only a select few enjoy the riches of liberation. As Hamundigone states, “Ndakarwa kuti tese tiwane, tese tidye, tese tigute—kuti kana toziya, toziya tese, kwete kuti munhu mumwe chete ndiye anenge achitambura nekudzvova tsvi.” ‘I fought so that we all could be haves, all eat, and all prosper so that if we starve, we all starve, not only for one man to have excess’ (MAB 140). The people—as exemplified by the glimpses the novel provides into the lives of the different characters—continue to struggle, continue to be poor, and are forced to rely on themselves to escape the hardship. Indeed, the 1990s were a period that was marked by unrest and protests in the city: the introduction of Economic Structural Adjustment Programs by the government in the mid-1990s resulted in the rise of unemployment and cuts to government subsidies and social welfare programs (see, for instance, Muzondidya 194).

Thus, in many ways, Rita Nnodim’s comment on the representation of Lagos within contemporary fiction resonates with the Harare of *Mapenzi*: “it is a city that represents the crisis of the postcolony, which has become the background of everyday practice” (321). Yet, unlike Mungoshi’s *Rex*, the characters of *Mapenzi* do not react with dejection or a fatalistic attitude. Harare is their home and they are determined to carve out their existence there. In fact, the city is shown to be a fluid, yet contested, space of belonging and identity formation. Or, in Muchemwa’s words, it is portrayed as “a critical arena for the production of a modern African subject” (4). While *Rex*, in *Ndiko Kupindana Kwamzuva*, foregrounds the destructive nature of Harare—picturing it as the abode of the poor and downtrodden (MUN 145–46)—in Hamundigone’s narration Harare offers space to all sorts of people; everything and everyone can be found in the urban space:

Hamurarwi muHarare, uye zvese zvirimo. Kana usingazvione hauone, tsvaga magirazi. Zvidhahkwa, vanamati, zvifeve, vemapati ekufara, vemapati emisangano yengochani, vemapati ezvematongerero enyika, vekumafirimu, *mastreet kids*, matsotsi, zvese. (MAB 33)

No one sleeps in Harare, and everything is there. If you can’t see it you are unable to see, get glasses. Drunkards, the religious, the adulterous, party people, gay association members, political party members, moviegoers, street kids, thugs, everything.

Nevertheless, the reality that the characters’ identities are rooted in their urban milieu is most poignantly illustrated in the highly innovative use of language within the novel. The characters who are caught up in their own struggles in different locations across the city speak out, as Chiwome puts it, “in social registers

that are determined by their condition" ("Modern Shona Literature" 169). Thus, each character uses a specific urban sociolect, which is marked by borrowings, slang, and code-switches that often function as the lynchpin of metaphors and similes. In congruence with her status as a university student, Magi often switches from Shona to English when she speaks. Commenting on the plight of women, she states, "Ndipo patine disadvantage ipapo isusu vakadzi, nekuti takafanana nemaproducts ane shelf life." "That is our disadvantage as women, because we are like products that have a shelf life" (MAB 129).

As indicated by Magi's simile that hinges on "products that have a shelf life," most characters use images that either draw on industrial items, such as trains, airplanes, and traffic lights, or consumer goods that symbolize urban modernity, such as lipstick, Coke bottles, ice cream, and instant coffee, in order to enunciate their point or feelings. Hamundigone, for instance, likens Harare to bubblegum: "Harare is *fokoro* mhani. Inenge *chibubble gum* chinomesa shaya nekupedza mate mukanwa." 'Harare is fucked up. It is like bubblegum that causes your jaws to become stiff and dries up the spit in your mouth' (MAB 30). The urban vernacular that marks Hamundigone's speech is further indicated by his use of *fokoro*, a slang word that is a *shonalization* of the English swearword "fucked up."

By speaking *chidhoroba*—the language of the city (see Nyota and Mareva 112)—the characters of *Mapenzi* mark their belonging as denizens of Harare. Yet, the "modern," which is signified by urbanity, consumerism, and industrialization, does not supersede the "traditional" or "local," which, in contrast, is anchored in Shona idioms and customs. Instead the multiple and heterogeneous voices that speak out throughout the novel offer different perspectives—predominantly determined by gender, class, age, and education—that affirm, as well as contest, conventional binaries, such as "modern" and "traditional," "oral" and "literate," or "indigenous" and "Western."

This ambiguity is evident in remarks in which the characters insert references to popular brand names that are synonymous with modern city life. Similar to the insertion of code-mixes, borrowings, and slang, images that are built on these references often foreground the urban identity of the respective speaker. This is illustrated, for instance, in VC's shout-out to his best customer, Sanchez—"Haa-a, apa Sanchez waita *rise* kunge *Gloria Flour* chaiyo." 'Ah, Sanchez, man you've just risen like *Gloria Flour*' (MAB 62)—in which *Gloria Flour* functions as the pivot of the simile, imbuing it with a slang-ish, hip character. Yet, other products, particularly hygiene articles, are also used ironically as a comment on the degenerative effects of consumerism. Hamundigone, for instance, mockingly emphasizes the link between soap and the colonialists' quest "to produce 'modern bodies and manners'" (Burke 168) as he chides Kundai, a young female university student who, through her manner of speaking and dress, can be identified as a *masalad*, a term denoting young people who imitate urban, globalized youth culture (Veit-Wild, "Zimbolicious" 687):

Haisisiri nguva yanaSmith ino, ndiko saka takarwa hondo. Inga wani ndagezawo makuseni, ne*Lifebuoy*! Hausi kuinzwa kunhuwiririra? Ndageza mukanwa ne*Colgate*, iyi yandinotori nayo muhomwe yebhachi, zvese neteethbrush yako. (MAB 12)

This is no longer Smith's time, this is why we fought the war. Why, I bathed this morning with Lifebouy Soap. Can't you smell it on me? I brushed my teeth with Colgate, see I even have it in my jacket pocket.

According to Burke, "the cleanliness embodied in soap, especially scented or fancy toilet soap, as well as related toiletries, has suggested complicated transformations of the self, simultaneously desired, criticized, and feared" (176). This point, which he illustrates in his landmark study *Lifebuoy Men, Lux Women: Commodification, Consumption, & Cleanliness in Modern Zimbabwe* by referencing the writings of Zimbabwean authors in English—Tsitsi Dangarembga, Chenjerai Hove, Shimmer Chinodya, and Dambudza Marechera (176–78)—is also reflected in a statement by Magi in which she critiques urban lifestyle by linking it to an obsession with hygiene products and practices:

Kuzviita kunge tumwe tunhu twuri *special*, twakafunda, twakachena zvekusapfugama kufuridza moto. Kuzvigadzirira zvinhu nezvihnu, nezvimwe zvisina basa rese. Mapepa emutoireti tinoda akapfava zvekuti dai donje raisazovhiringidza mapombi tairishandisa futi. Tapedza tinotsvaga tuma-air freshener asi handiti ndove yagara inonhuwa. Woona tomhanyira tusipo tewkugezesa maoko, katauro kekuomesa maoko negirazi rekuzvionesa naro nyangwe uchizviziva kuti iwe ndiwe. Tunhu netunhu. Vakomana! (MAB 159)

We make ourselves out to be very special creatures, educated and too smart to kneel down and blow on a fire. We make for ourselves all sort of things, some of which are not necessary. We want our toilet paper to be so soft that if cotton wool did not mess up the plumbing that is what we would use. Afterwards we look for air fresheners when dung stinks anyway. Then we look for soap to wash our hands, towels to dry them on and a mirror in which to examine ourselves even though you know that you are you. All kinds of things. Guys!

Yet, while Magi's remark mirrors a desire that has been expressed frequently in Zimbabwean literatures in Shona, as well as in English, by young and old characters, namely the "desire to restore respect for the elders, respect for 'tradition,' to reconstruct a world that has been lost" (Burke 179), it is also in her dialogue that apt naming, a vested practice in Shona oral and literary tradition (Kahari, *Rise of 143–44*), is played with and turned upside down. Pointing to the *shonalized* meaning of her English name—*magi*, derived from mug—she illustrates her destructive relationship with men by comparing herself to a mug that is used for communal drinking in beer halls: "Apa ndakaita *Magi*, kapu yemubhawa chaiyo inonwirwa doro nemunhu wese, ichimboenda kumba kunoitirwa weti nekukorobherwa yozodzokera kubhawa kunonwira doro futi." 'I became like a *magi*, the two liter mug used for communally drinking the traditional brew in the beer-hall by everyone, and then is taken home to be used as a chamber pot and a bucket for scrubbing the floor before returning to the beer-hall to be drunk from again' (MAB 48). Hence, while we find allusions to common tropes, discourses, and practices in the language used by the various characters that have marked Zimbabwean literature, in Shona as well as in English, *Mapenzi* simultaneously plays with and subverts them through its highly heterogeneous, polyphonic, and pastiche-like nature.

CONCLUSION

Reminiscent of the programmatic portrayal of the city in Shona literature, Harare is portrayed in *Ndiko Kupindana Kwamazuva* and *Mapenzi* through familiar tropes of seduction, danger, and decay. A close reading of the imagery, however, reveals that both authors break with the moralistic tone of their predecessors. Instead of reiterating conventional binaries, both novels imply that larger sociopolitical forces lie at the root of the characters' despair, turmoil, and disillusion.

Yet, while the city, in *Ndiko Kupindana Kwamazuva*, is revealed as an unlivable, hostile space in the protagonist's introspection, Harare appears much more multifaceted and vibrant in *Mapenzi*. Although life in the city post-independence is still marked by inequalities, uncertainties, and hardships, urban space is also shown as a place of belonging. Indeed, by speaking the language of the city, the characters illustrate their resilience by imbuing their speech with puns, irony, and humor and by simultaneously rooting their identity in the various urban milieus they inhabit.

The insertion of code-switches and slang is a recent trend in Shona literature; alongside Mabasa, only a few writers, such as A. C. Moyo and Joyce Njenje-Makwenda, have experimented with language in their novels (see Veit-Wild, "Zimbolicious" 694). However, recent publications such as *Chibarabada* (2015) by Tinashe Muchuri, part of a young group of poets and writers who work closely with Mabasa, indicate that more and more writers will break away from the programmatic and conservative writing style that used to mark Shona literature. The novel's title, *Chibarabada*, is a term that is based on the ideophone *barabada* (to get up slowly from the ground) and refers to illicitly brewed alcohol, an allusion to the novel's chronicling of the ups and downs of urban life in contemporary Zimbabwe. Hence, both writers, Mungoshi and Mabasa, have introduced incisive new stylistic devices into Shona literature that have influenced whole generations of writers and will continue to do so.

NOTES

1. The translations are taken from the *Berlin Shona Novel Corpus* (*BeShoNo*) and were altered, where necessary, by myself with the help of Jacob Mapara. Translations of quoted text excerpts that were not parsed in the *BeShoNo* have been done by myself, again, with the support of Jacob Mapara for *Ndiko Kupindana Kwamazuva*. English excerpts from *Mapenzi* are based on two unpublished translations of the novel by Joyce Mutiti and Tendai Huchu.

2. This information was provided to me by Jacob Mapara and Zvinashe Mamvura in informal conversations.

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