

Magosvongwe, R. & Nyamende, Urban youth unemployment in Zimbabwe: An African-centered literary-based critique of Dangarembga's *The Book of Not* (2006), Valerie Tagwira's *The Uncertainty of Hope* (2006), and Petina Gappa's *An Elegy for Easterly* (2009), pp. 189-212

Urban Youth unemployment in Zimbabwe: An African-centered literary-based critique of Tsitsi Dangarembga's *The Book of Not* (2006), Valerie Tagwira's *The Uncertainty of Hope* (2006) and Petina Gappah's *An Elegy for Easterly* (2009).

Ruby Magosvongwe and Abner Nyamende

Abstract

*The article analyses Zimbabwean post-2000 black female-authored novels' depictions of urban youth unemployment against the backdrop of the socio-economic crises culminating from the post-2000 economic melt-down. The analysis uses an African-centred approach drawing from trajectories of the youth represented in Tsitsi Dangarembga's novel *The Book of Not* (2006), Valerie Tagwira's *The Uncertainty of Hope* (2006) respectively and Petina Gappah's short story collection, *An Elegy for Easterly* (2009). These female-authored literary narratives form an essential socio-historical record of the experiences constituting the bedrock of urban youth unemployment. Critical attention concerning the period under review has mainly focused on political polarisation and the economic meltdown, overshadowing the worst affected demographic group of Zimbabwe's population – the urban unemployed youths. The socio-economic and historical accounts of the period under question in Zimbabwe's embittered post-2000 experiences have also been mainly male-dominated. Thus, making it imperative to interrogate how female-authored fictional narratives as critical socio-historical imaginings of the same socio-economic and historical environment depict how post-independence Zimbabwe nurtures its youths for a sustainable future. In situating both texts and their criticism within the context in which they are generated and developed, this article adopts an African-centred approach in its critique. It draws mainly from Molefi Kete Asante's Afrocentric "Location Theory". The theory urges appreciation and analysis of writers' creativity, including their motifs, meaning, language, attitude, direction and vision within the cultural and historical experiences of a people. Cognisant of Zimbabwean history and Zimbabweans' aspirations, it is envisaged that this article will enhance understanding, sharpen insights and encourage readers to self-introspect on why African youths constitute the hardest-hit demographic group in terms of urban unemployment, an aspect that authors selected for this article partially focus on.*

Introduction

The article adopts an African-centred approach in its critique of the socio-economic challenges, including urban youth unemployment, confronting post-

Independence Zimbabwe as depicted in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *The Book of Not* (2006), Valerie Tagwira's *The Uncertainty of Hope* (2006) and Petina Gappah's *An Elegy for Easterly* (2009). These female-authored fictional narratives' partially foreground the colonial legacy that divided Africans and Europeans by law, determining urban spatial geography and economic opportunities accountable for people's socio-economic emancipation across the racial divide. Africans' forced relocation and concentration in marginal lands therefore cannot be far from the challenge of urban youth unemployment that present-day Zimbabwe should confront and address. That Africans were also situated in dormitory towns and townships as a cheap pool of labour servicing the country's capitalist economy remains a legacy that underpins economic opportunities across the racial divide in most independent African countries. This currency no longer adequately holds as shown in the depictions of urban youth unemployment in the selected narratives.

Urban youth unemployment in post-2000 Zimbabwe remains highly contestable, sensitive and controversial as it is directly linked to the country's colonial legacy, further exacerbated by practices and attitudes undergirding post-independence strategies, aspirations and livelihoods patterns as partially shown in this article. Selected fictional narratives' depictions cast cynical shadows on the economic, education and cultural policies – underpinning gains, vicissitudes and challenges of political independence – adopted since 1980 to the present. Further, when discussing urban youth unemployment in post-2000 Zimbabwe, it is important to distinguish who the youths are from the outset of the discussion. According to Government National Youth Policy (2013), the youths fall within the category of thirty five years and below, which age ironically roughly estimates the country's period of political independence. Analysts would then be quick to challenge why it is mostly the "born-frees" or those born after independence who are hardest hit by urban unemployment.

In examining urban youth unemployment in post-2000 Zimbabwe, the article's literary-based critique therefore takes in its stride the fluctuating fortunes of post-independence Zimbabwe. It also examines how post-independence leadership has either transformed or failed to transform people's livelihoods through policies that nurture or diminish both intellectual and material empowerment of all Zimbabweans. The fictional narratives' depictions and interrogation of the post-independence political elite's investment in human capital development projects, as well as management and redistribution of the country's major economic resources, including how these have impacted on employment opportunities becomes extremely critical. It needs no pleading that land access, distribution and management play a pivotal role in this regard. In Zimbabwe, apart from the socio-cultural, material and environmental security that land offers, it also remains the backbone of country's mainstream economy that is mainly agro- and mineral

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based. From an Afrocentric perspective, stripped to its bare essentials, land remains the primary economic motivation for colonial occupation.

Socio-cultural, political and historical developments in pre- and post-independence Zimbabwe and the indigenous majority's lived realities show that in a very great way, land remains pivotal towards sustaining the economy and people's livelihoods. Zimbabwe's history clearly shows that land is the basis of both political and economic power, as well as other securities, hence it becoming the major source of widespread discontent and deep resentment of white occupation on the part of many indigenous peoples (Palmer, 1977, p. 246). Palmer (1977) and Phimister (in Stoneman, 1988) observe that the different Rhodesian colonial land legal instruments witnessed the majority of Africans below 30 years constituting the hardest hit group that was left landless and unemployed. Rendered landless thus, it means this demographic group would be perpetually impoverished, including their progeny who could be parents to present-day unemployed and unemployable ranks. Exclusion from the land entailed disconnections from the basic human resource that embodies all principal exploitable economic resources – agriculture in all its forms, mining, natural vegetation and dwelling place – completely disabled, vulnerable and marginalised. Therefore, discussing urban youth unemployment outside these historical realities would both fragment and misrepresent the reality, knowledge and truth as lived and experienced by the majority of Zimbabweans themselves. This is not to suggest that post-independence practices and conditions are absolved from the cocktail of factors that fanned urban youth unemployment. The inferences to post-independence urban youth unemployment in the selected Zimbabwean black female-authored fictional narratives are examined against these lived realities.

Theoretical Framework and Rationale

The article adopts an African-centred approach, including Afrocentricity and Asante's Afrocentric location theory in examining urban youth unemployment in post-2000 Zimbabwe. This is because philosophical underpinnings and theories used in the reflections and constructions of knowledge about Africa and the African experiences have revealed that "whoever holds the key to the construction of theory does also hold the key to power" (Ramose, 2005, p. 33). For this reason, African realities and experiences can best benefit and empower Zimbabweans should their definition and naming of experiences and phenomena derive from African-centred perceptions and understanding of reality, knowledge and historical facts/truth. The latter is especially critical in light of Zimbabwean hotly contested post-2000 experiences and crises, including escalating urban youth unem-

ployment. Failure to correctly characterise forces at play would fragment, exaggerate and de-contextualise urban youth unemployment in post-2000 Zimbabwe thereby misleading planners and administrations in their search for lasting solutions to the ever present challenge that the Zimbabwean society should address.

Afrocentricity as a theory and “philosophy looks at life from a whole systems perspective” (Temple, 2010, p. 143), in order to help people to “rebalance, to rectify, to put [their]/your life and experience in a different order” (*ibid.*). Asante takes it as “the measure of our life” (Mazama, 2003, p. 9) using African values and culture in the examination of African experiences and people’s understanding of their environment and phenomena. It entails that for regeneration, despite their contact with other cultures, Africans should centralise African values and ideals for their cultural point of anchor. These are best suited to help them understand the African world in which they live, its demands, expectations and challenges with a view to building sustainable human and social development within the African environment and world. Afrocentricity is cogently defined by Karenga as “essentially a quality of perspective or approach rooted in the cultural image and human interest of African people” (Mazama, 2003, p. 8).

Afrocentricity has as its central concern perceptions about the reality of the African experience for African people and the crucial role attributed to the African social and cultural experience as the ultimate reference (*ibid.*, p. 9). This aspect underscores the importance that this article attaches to the views explored by some Zimbabwean black female-authored fictional narratives of the post-2000 period that explore the post-2000 Zimbabwean challenges as experienced and projected by Zimbabweans. The latter is believed to highlight depicted experiences according to these writers’ own understanding and appreciation of the Zimbabwean lived experiences culturally, economically, historically, politically and socially. This choice of approach has been necessitated by the fact that urban youth unemployment cannot be examined outside the question of sustainable human development in the post-2000 period, a question that the selected Zimbabwean black female authors grapple with in their fictional narratives. How Zimbabweans understand, name and define their own challenges and experiences is central in examining the challenges bedeviling the country. Self-naming and self-defining the Zimbabwean post-2000 experiences, as exemplified by the selected fictional narratives in question, constitute part of self-consciousness, an aspect crucial for, and indispensable to survival. Therefore, relinquishing the responsibility to name and define the environment and conditions accountable for the depressed economic and employment opportunities for the urban Zimbabwean youth would thus be complicit in annihilation of the victimised who are often blamed for their own victimisation.

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Hudson-Weems' (2004) concern for Africans to self-name and self-define resonates with this article's concern for Zimbabweans to self-name and self-define urban youth unemployment from an African perspective. It "speaks to her/[the] (sic) conviction that unless African people are critically aware of who they are, which, to a large extent is a product of what happened to them and what they accomplished or could not accomplish, they will remain oblivious to what they are capable of achieving" (Gwekwerere, Magosvongwe & Mazuru, 2012, pp. 97-98). Impliedly, then, solutions to Zimbabwean urban youth unemployment lie in Zimbabwe with the Zimbabweans depending on how they conceive their realities. Clarke (1991, p. 58) buttresses this view when he observes:

What we do for ourselves depends on what we know about ourselves and what we are willing to accept about ourselves. When other people control what we know about ourselves, they will also control what we do for ourselves.

Thus, Zimbabweans' own exploration and examination of developments in the post-2000 period are critical and indispensable in both understanding and designing sustainable approaches towards resolving urban youth unemployment in post-2000 Zimbabwe.

According to Kanyenze Kondo and Martens (2006, p. 21), sustainable development puts people at the centre of the development process. It is also concerned about how the present generation is striving to meet its needs "without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (*ibid.*). This fact, thus, entails that the Zimbabwean youth unemployment question should neither be de-contextualised nor divorced from the experience of being an African in Africa. This aspect brings up the issue of the fortunes of Zimbabwe's political independence that have continued fluctuating, and continue being greatly complicated by the inherited economic structures, systems, ideals and mechanisms among other challenges that political independence should confront and dislodge in order to meet the expectations of a truly liberated society.

Ramose (2005, p. 33) argues that African conception of reality, knowledge and truth should be released from slavery and dominance under the European epistemological paradigm. Ramose further argues that rational justice demands the restoration of territory to its rightful indigenous owners and reparation to them because of "colonial dispossessing/[seizure] (sic) of territory as well as enslavement of the colonised" arising from unjust wars of conquest (*ibid.*). African conception of reality, knowledge and truth is intricately linked to the invaluable role that art plays as a vehicle that strives to maintain checks and balances on socio-cultural behaviour and other developments in society. There is no such thing as art for

art's sake. Art is supposed to promote "existential sustenance" (West, 1989, p. 230) of the community and the society that it serves. This interface is what this article exploits in its evaluation of urban youth unemployment using fictional narratives. Culturally, art should influence maintenance and shaping of critical social values, ideals and practices. Hove (*Social Change Development, Number 26*: p. 3) succinctly summarises this role of art in upholding African philosophy of life, among Zimbabwean communities in particular. Hove observes:

In times of despair, the artist will fuse images of hope. In times of plenty and over-abundance, the artist will always portray the folly of over-eating at the expense of cultivation of other values.

For these reasons, in examining urban youth unemployment in post-2000 Zimbabwe, artists' views are worth exploring as they are culturally presumed to offer sharper insights about social developments. The selected fictional narratives in this article thus provide the necessary intricate interface between art and the socio-economic and historical developments undergirding urban youth un/employment. Summing the indispensable discerning place that art occupies in African communities Armah (1973, p. 204) observes:

What are we if we see nothing beyond the present, hear nothing from the ages of our flowing, and in all our existence can utter no necessary preparation of the future way?

In light of Zimbabweans' tumultuous history, socio-political, as well as cultural developments arising from racial domination of resources, especially land, including the deeply entrenched antagonistic interests surrounding it across the racial divide, it would require Solomonic wisdom to disentangle the colonial legacy of land domination from the contemporary economic woes and resolve the conundrum amicably. This is because whereas for settlers land is entirely an economic resource disposed for exploitation for individual financial aggrandisement – a legacy deeply entrenched in Zimbabwe's inherited economic systems, in the African worldview, land is the epicentre of life and communal heritage. Florence Stratton (1986, p. 12) submits: "Land is a powerful deity in its own right, the creator of life and owner of everything that resides on its surface". Thus, whilst land may not necessarily be the principal thrust of this chapter, it appears to be inextricably tied to the economic mi/fortunes and un/employment opportunities in post-independence Zimbabwe. This remains a nexus that is crucial and indispensable in exploring, examining and understanding urban youth unemployment in the post-2000 period that this article analyses through the selected fictional narratives. Further, the cultural and psychological innuendos embedded in the land-related developments are worth examining in the appreciation of urban youth un/employment in the post-2000 period.

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That the trajectories that have been projected concerning redistribution of resources would in more than one way reflect on the ideological struggles bedeviling the country's realities whereby land, in both pre- and post-independence Zimbabwe, has been critical "as a political and economic weapon by the whites" (Palmer, 1977, p. 246) is irrefutable. That these realities continue to impact on the country's agriculture and mineral-based economy and the un/employment levels of the youths would be worth examining. Managing land and inter-racial and intra-racial relations would invariably have direct impact on the performance of the economy that in turn directly determines un/employment levels in the country. The land-race-economy-employment conundrum is therefore worth exploring. Urban youth un/employment in post-2000 Zimbabwe as inferred in the selected fictional narratives is explored against the backdrop of this cocktail of factors.

Vicissitudes of political independence vis-a-vis urban youth unemployment

Realities of the post-2000 challenges have touched the majority of the population in a very real way. The youth who are the future of the country, that is, those aged from thirty five years and below, or mostly those born after 1980, the born-frees according to common Zimbabwean discourses, are considered the worst-hit group. This coincidence, as noted earlier, is curious. It is ironic that urban unemployment mostly touches the generations born after the country's attainment of political independence, the era that is politically perceived to be unfettered to European or Western domination. African-elected governments believed to be people-centred and therefore people-driven, are thus expected to uplift the marginalised majority from the quagmire of poverty hold the political reigns, especially the youths who are believed to constitute half the country's population.

The difficult question confronting these post-independence African-elected governments in this regard, then, would be how best they should rise up to the challenge of meeting people's *uhuru*¹ expectations. How also could they come up with transparent practicable approaches that could effectively harness and tap this human potential for individuals' and the country's the greater good? If the leaders do not take these political and economic questions in their stride, as would seemingly appear to be the case in the mayhem characterising the land occupations of

¹ A Swahili equivalent of the Shona term Ufuru that means liberated, self-actualised lives, as well as secure livelihoods sustained in a politically independent and peaceful environment that nurtures people's creativity in their bid to have healthy fulfilled lives. It also strives to promote everyone's right to life through a more equitable distribution of resources at community and national levels.

2000 and beyond that sort to stem African structured poverty, then whose interests should these governments be protecting? The apparent negation of the liberation war promises to redistribute land compounded by the ripple effects of the 1990s Structural Economic Adjustment Programmes need not be ignored.

If, as Armah (1973, p. 204) rightly argues, leaders “see nothing beyond the present, hear nothing from the ages of our flowing, and in all our existence can utter no necessary preparation of the future way,” how would they morally justify their continual stay in office? Zimbabweans, especially the youth, expect leaders to develop programmes that foster sustainable livelihoods, now and in future. Achebe (1989, pp. 157-158) observes: “A writer wants to ask questions... to excite general enlightenment by forcing all people to examine the condition of their lives because, as the saying goes, the unexamined life is not worth living...a writer ...aspire[s] ... to widen the scope of that self-examination”. This vision resonates with Afrocentricity’s major tenets, among which are critical self knowledge and critical historical knowledge deriving from introspective engagement with the present. As a theory, Afrocentricity derives its strength in self-retrospection in order that people may come up with sustainable practicable solutions based on lived experiences, gleaning wisdom from past foibles and strengths. As Stewart (2004, p. 3) rightly observes: “It is not taboo to go back and fetch what you forgot...we must go back and gather the best of what our past has to teach us, so that we can achieve our full potential as we move forward.” In so doing, Afrocentricity, urges Africans to define themselves not as victims, but as key-players/agents taking full social responsibility for their economic and political transformation. An examination of the selected fictional narratives that follows below embraces these aspects. Indigenous Zimbabwean folklore recognises life as a struggle that should be conquered, resonating with African philosophy summarised by Okot p’ Bitek (1986, p. 25) thus: “Problems, crises, challenges are, have always been and will continue to be a necessary ingredient of living. And, it is precisely the facing and tackling and solving of them, that life is all about”. The problem of urban youth un/employment that post-2000 Zimbabwe is grappling with need not be taken differently. It would be intriguing to find out the stance embedded in the selected fictional narratives concerning the same issue.

One Ben Freeth, son-in-law to a Chegutu displaced commercial white farmer, Mike Campbell, made an intriguing statement regarding black un/employment opportunities at their il/legal displacement and removal from their Chegutu commercial farm: “When they don’t work for us, who do they work for?” Mr Freeth’s sure-footedness touches on the sensitive aspect concerning who the owners of the Zimbabwean economy are. The fate of displaced farm labourers and others in the post-farm invasions period of 2000 and beyond cannot be viewed separately from the systems undergirding Zimbabwe’s economic perform-

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ance. Ben's statement brazenly projects white supremacy and black inferiority. He places black and white in distinct categories of wealth generator-cum-manager as opposed to subservient labourer. Similarly, urban youth un/employment could be a result of similar complexities. How the selected female-authored fictional narratives examine urban youth un/employment in post-2000 Zimbabwe is worth noting.

Contrary to the traditional scientific methods of research often used to ascertain poverty and sustainable human development levels in communities, it is hoped that the fictional narratives selected for this examination would help unravel the socio-economic, political, historical and cultural realities undergirding what has been widely perceived as the high urban youth unemployment rate in the post-2000 period. The urban youth unemployment situation in post-2000 Zimbabwe has a cocktail of factors that call for investigation using approaches that are cognizant of the uniqueness of the country's experiences within the broader global context, particularly in light of the multipronged problems bedeviling the country during the period in question.

Urban Youth Unemployment: Emerging Perspectives Inferred from Dangarembga's *The Book of Not* (2006)

In line with the Afrocentric theory that informs analyses of the selected fictional narratives as a window into examining urban youth unemployment in post-2000 Zimbabwe, depictions and concerns are appreciated within the context of the country's cultural, socio-historical and political contexts. The depictions are examined in accordance with the realities undergirding developments in the country that constitute these narratives' backgrounds. For as Achebe (1989, p. 159) argues: "If you want to get at the root of murder ... you have to look for the blacksmith who made the matchet". Resonating with this philosophy, Dangarembga adopts a retrospective approach in examining impoverishment and employability of indigenous Zimbabwean youths before and after independence.

Dangarembga's fictional narrative was produced against the backdrop of the sharp nosedive of the country's economy since the attainment of political independence. This abject period ironically touches on the historical and/or political basis of urban youth un/employment in the post-independence period. Ironical too, is that the phenomenon of urban youth un/employment appears peculiarly racial. This could be perhaps because of the demography of Africans who constitute both the marginalised majority and the majority of the country's population as well. Dangarembga's narrative operates at multiple subtle ideological and phi-

losophical levels in its examination of post-independence Zimbabwe's economic woes and failure of the small elite leadership to rise up to the expectations of lifting the majority of the people from abject poverty, especially unemployment of the urban youth. Dangarembga infers to a forgetful elite that preoccupies itself with self-enrichment, thereby failing to enact the promises of the revolution. Her narrative also apports blame to some perceived docility of the Zimbabwean population who appear complicit in the continual plunder of the country's resources by a political-economic system originally designed to privilege a minority clique. Ironically, failure to overhaul the system entailed that the subtle strategies ensured fostering of selfish strategic interests against the marginalised majority. Therefore that urban youth unemployment is a product of manipulation and machinations of the system could not be an overstatement. Kagoro (2008, p. 44) argues: "[H]uman agency is [thus] an unavoidable component" when examining Zimbabwe's urban youth un/employment in the post-2000 period.

Through Tambudzai the narrator and chief protagonist, *The Book of Not* explores the historicity and interrelationship between dis/empowerment strategies in colonial Rhodesia and post-independence Zimbabwe and how these strategies in turn interplay with urban youth un/employment. The narrative has the white-run Catholic Young Ladies College of Sacred Heart (Sacred Heart) as the entry point into the struggles, disempowerment, dislocation and travails of blacks in colonial Rhodesia and post-independence Zimbabwe.

Sacred Heart where Tambudzai receives her secondary school education is symbolically a miniature of colonial Rhodesia. Its quarter system that Tambudzai rightly describes as a result of "an offensive government that conceived of people as divisible portions" (Dangarembga, 2006, p. 152), sees Sacred Heart enrolling only six African girls up to Form Six. This ensured that the majority of Africans remain excluded from strategic points of the political, administrative and economic systems. In line with the country's dominant colonial ideology, all systems and machinery are designed to serve the white population that is in charge of the country's resources and its human capital. Human capital is developed in line with the desires and needs of the deeply entrenched economic interests and privileged lives of the minority white population. This background partly informs the black majority's fortunes or lack of fortunes in Rhodesia and Zimbabwe that Dangarembga's narrative explores. Examining these two periods back to back through Tambudzai the chief protagonist's travails and warring ideals – being black and poor, yet academically gifted, depicts the quandary characterising most Zimbabwean urban youths today. Aspiring to embrace the limitless horizons that education as a Gordian sword offers so that, like Tambudzai, they can put their contemptuous poverty-ridden African backgrounds behind, and be acceptable enough, and be included among the erstwhile materially and intellectually superior white minor-

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ity. This mentality and its psychological penetration have witnessed a materially crippled youth, especially urbanites, who unfortunately, bank on academic education alone as the solution to urban youth un/employment. Through Sacred Heart education, Tambudzai's sense of being becomes disfigured and impaired. Ngugi (1987, p. 56) observes:

Education, far from giving people the confidence in their abilities and capabilities to overcome obstacles or to become masters of the laws governing external nature as human beings, tends to make them feel their inadequacies, their weaknesses and incapacities in the face of reality and their inability to do anything about the conditions governing their lives.

Ironically, the tenets of the inherited education system that many trust, intrinsically trained the majority of the population to be ultimately labourers and workers, not creators of wealth in their own right. Dangarembga subtly foregrounds objectification and disempowerment of the black Zimbabweans in the pre- and post-independence phases whereby both land and other critical resources, including institutions that develop and shape the country's human resource, black and white, favoured one racial grouping. In Rhodesian consciousness, conception and motto, land is exclusively white: "This land is my land" (Dangarembga, 2006, p.160). In their view, according to the narrator, Tambudzai, it is irrefutable that "'Rhodesians never die', a long banner above the cake table reassured. The phrase was not punctuated by an exclamation mark: it was a statement of fact" (*ibid.*, p.153). Against this Rhodesian sure-footedness is the 1970s armed liberation struggle whereby the Rhodesian regime labels and butchers the African population for being terrorists destabilising white Rhodesian interests (*ibid.*, pp.172-173).

Yet, for the majority of the African population: "After the war. Everyone will have something. That's what the elder siblings are promising (*ibid.*, p.182). The armed liberation war "opened up the prospect of revolutionary transformations of ... the land question" (Phimister in Stoneman, 1988, p. 8). Land in the indigenous Zimbabwean perspective is perceived as the major tool towards unlocking the controlled and proscribed designation of blacks as labourers and consumers that colonial Rhodesia designed. Dangarembga depicts that jobs open for the black person in urban Rhodesia are that of "a nanny, a cook, a boy gardener, boy messenger, boy driver ..." (Dangarembga, 2006, p.110). These second class citizens only achieved names for themselves when they become "terrorists" (*ibid.*, p.110). Ironically, as Phimister (Stoneman, 1988, p. 8) rightly observes: "There was no shared vision of the future beyond the recovery of land lost to the whites". This could partly explain the absence of a grand economic plans and programmes that

would develop and absorb the youth for gainful employment in the country's urban centres more than thirty years into independence.

It is clear that the designated jobs for the African "boy" population and the infantile images used by Rhodesians were deliberately tailored to psychologically and culturally subdue the indigenous population who would naturally look down upon themselves as lesser human beings needing white mentorship and guidance in all their undertakings. In Tambudzai's view, the white economic and education systems do not consider them "well-rounded human being[s]" (*ibid.*, p.155), perceptions that have kept post-independence Zimbabwe beholden to alien economic theories and strategies that may be tangential to Zimbabwean material and economic demands. The corollary to such intellectually and materially crippling designations is continual material and intellectual impoverishment that further entrench psychological incarceration of people since the Rhodesian philosophy "prophes[ie]d their future[s]" (*ibid.*, p.151) beyond political independence. Rhodesians were sharp, purposeful and focused. When they built a school, they knew they were building it to produce black English men and women who would join the system and not to oppose it. The tragic condition is further compounded by the living fact that 'boy' jobs resulted in low and stagnant wages that created and perpetuated the cycle of poverty among the majority of the African families whose progeny constitute today's majority urban population. This means the legacy of structured poverty also entrapped the youth for generations to come, producing the country's "rejects" that Tambudzai spurns. To this end, expecting abundant urban youth employment opportunities hardly three years after independence would be nothing less than a miracle.

Rhodesian education and economic policies and systems, ensured that the greater majority of the black population are insufficiently equipped, if at all, and could not be in a position to creatively manage the country's resources in order to enhance sustainable human development through job creation in the country's post-independence phase. Psychologically and intellectually, boys would always be boys, more acutely so in view of the Africans' alienation from their land and its traditions in both pre- and post-independence Zimbabwe. The dislocation from the indigenous cultural values that would guide indigenous Zimbabweans to manage the new dispensation in line with the armed liberation ideals partially accounts for the post-independence leadership's inability to design development and empowerment programmes that would develop the "total person" and follow them through.

Dangarembga's Tambudzai also shows the population's disgruntlement at the post-independence leadership's failure to uplift the people's standards of living and their failure to manage the economy, including maintaining the urban infra-

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structure that they inherited, in itself a living reality characterising contemporary Zimbabwean urban local authorities. Driven by love for trinkets and high propensity for corruption, the local authorities run down existing infrastructure characterising Harare that Tambudzai bemoans. It would be inconceivable to believe that the same spiritually bankrupt and morally depraved authorities would expand the same infrastructure to accommodate and absorb the urban youth. These fundamental underlying causes are worth noting.

Closely linked with the above is the observation that the country's education system, through its demoralised teachers, does not seem to adequately prepare the youth for the future. For example, Tambudzai says, "I cannot say what happened to the classes I taught, since I was not interested" (Dangarembga, 2006, p.196). Coupled with this absence of focus and lack of commitment, Dangarembga's Tambudzai insinuates that teaching is not usually taken by highfliers. This would hypothetically impact on the calibre of the product coming out of the majority of public institutions. Tambudzai reminisces: "My self-esteem suffered another setback, for it seemed only rejects were required to shape our nation's children" (*ibid.*, pp.198-199). Compounded by the colonial policies deliberately "making of poverty" (Setai, 1998) for the African population, the end result would most likely exacerbate urban youth unemployment.

As observed earlier, compounding the leadership's glaring failure to manage existing economic systems is the received education system that appears not to adequately prepare the youth to be creators of wealth and be future generators of employment. For example, Tambudzai makes a pertinent observation concerning teaching in Zimbabwean public schools: "teachers taught to transfer knowledge and discipline" (Dangarembga, 2006, p.196), and never to develop the children's creative and critical skills that would invariably influence children to diversify their talent and potential. From the narrative, it would appear that children end up joining the traditional professions like teaching as was the case initially with Tambudzai before she joins the white-owned and white-run advertising agency, but still an employee.

Conversely, it could also be justifiable to argue that the youth could be also evading and shunning the traditional professions that are lowly paid. Tambudzai resents joining the lowly-paid teaching profession, first teaching "at a craft school, where people work with just their hands, without thinking!" (*ibid.*, p.195). This is despite her "spending all that time with all those Europeans" (*ibid.*, p.195) according to Mai. It is tragic that the young elites shun the crafts in favour of white-collar jobs that they esteem as closeness to whiteness. Failure to embrace and expand

the craft industry as an alternative to the traditional jobs could also explain the shrinking urban employment opportunities for the youth. Yet ironically, arts and crafts are viable economic avenues that are worth exploring.

There is also an indication that certain enclaves are specifically cut out for whites in the white-run and white-dominated economic systems in the post-independence period. This is evidenced by Tambudzai's experiences at the advertising agency. By the time that Tambudzai joins the agency, Tracey Stevenson, her former Sacred Heart classmate and competitor, is already within the managerial structures. African youth could do better for themselves if they stopped chasing after whites' only enclaves where they may not fully develop their potential as they are relegated to the menial jobs as at Steers et al where Tambudzai eventually works: "All the other workers on the floor were white so that everything had to be thought out, the smallest greetings mapped and manoeuvred" (*ibid.*, p.216). The set-up for formal employment in the private sector as shown through Tambudzai could be indicative of an economic environment not yet tuned to absorb the majority of the African youth.

Externalisation of the youth's talent

Further, if Tambudzai's example is something to go by, externalisation of expertise is exacerbated by the youth's inability to believe in their own untapped talent and potential. They continuously seek accommodation in white-owned companies. This has continuously immobilised the youth as they always look outside of themselves for economic uplifting, leaving them vulnerable to manipulation and exploitation by the existing companies and employment agencies. The political and economic systems should be designed in such a way that the youth could collectively come up with strategies advantageous to them so that they may be able to receive appropriate rewards for their labour and products. Tambudzai makes a pertinent observation in this regard: "Oh, was I ever going to function in the new Zimbabwe, if I couldn't go to necessary lengths, stop letting people put their names to what in the end was mine" (*ibid.*, p.220). Tambudzai is a "loser" (*ibid.*, p.216) because she allows the advertising agency and her white co-workers to fatten themselves using her talent without them acknowledging her invaluable talent, long working hours and contribution. In this regard, though Tambudzai's situation may not be applied wholesale to what currently obtains in the country, there is dire need for the country's leadership to capitalise and maximise on local talent and resources in order to address the issue of urban youth un/employment. Vocational training centres that absorb non-academically gifted youths, as is the case with the current Ministry of Youth, Indigenisation and Economic Empowerment, may be one practical way towards addressing the conundrum. Urban youth un/employment could also be partially contained if the locals

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could creatively market local products. Tambudzai observes how opportunities can be easily created through marketing indigenous products, country and talent: "Words – you could do so much with words" (*ibid.*, p.220).

Further, Zimbabwean youths should not expect opportunities to suddenly fall from the sky. They have "something that [they are] was good at. ... It [is] wonderful to believe in [their] prowess again" (*ibid.*, p.222). Tambudzai's rumination here brings up the issues of agency and "a powerful and victorious sense of self as Africans" (Mazama, 2003, p. 12), major prerequisites necessary for Zimbabwean youths to capitalise on their talent and the resources within their immediate reach. Though inadequately substantiated, Dangarembga's trajectory suggests that urban youth unemployment could be partly self-inflicted. Tambudzai's grovelling for accommodation among white agencies whilst shunning developing African children's talents is offered for careful reflection. If Africans hate themselves because of poverty, and continuously search for white approval with "the desperation of a drowning man" (Fanon, 1967), if whites desert them, who then would think for them and be their role model? These are fundamental questions undergirding urban youth unemployment.

Tambudzai reminisces about her fame-winning copywriting at the advertising agency: "I was not to meet the client. My copy was, but I was not good enough to merit that. And even that, ... like everything else about me was incorrect. My copy was not good enough; under someone else's name, it was" (Dangarembga, 2006, p.236). ... "This act that put Dick's name to my work was good for everybody;" (*ibid.*, p.237). Because she is black her talent goes unacknowledged and Dick ironically becomes the "wordsmith" (*ibid.*, p.241) who gets copywriter and visual artist awards for the Afro-Shine Campaign as recognition of the "exceptionally special talent" (*ibid.*, p.241). Yet, the awards should be Tambudzai's for her craftsmanship and "hard work" (*ibid.*, p.242).

Tambudzai's experiences are commonplace in Harare whereby NGOs thrive on consultancies for the paltry fees that they offer to the financially-compromised youths who do freelance pieces. This keeps the youth outside the formal employment sector. In addition, they never receive the acknowledgement, patents, monetary gains and intellectual property rights. The best recognition Tambudzai earns for herself on the night of the awards celebrations is the attack from the advertising agency owner, Mr Steers. He mockingly admonishes her for standing in his way, saying that Tambudzai is "not made of air nor of glass" (*ibid.*, p. 239). It can be argued that "[t]he fruits of African labour [remain] of minimal economic benefit to the Africans. In addition, they pa[y] dearly in terms of quality ... of life"

(Setai, 1998, p.26). Policies and practices in the existing white-run companies appear to exclude African youths. Those fortunate enough to be absorbed are exploited. Thus existing conditions further foster socio-economic and employment problems inherited from Rhodesia, thereby perennially marginalising the majority of the youth. The long term effects of the “expatriation of surplus produced by African labour out of African resources” (Rodney, 1981, p. 162) characterises what post-independence Zimbabwe should contain.

Further, absence of career guidance for the majority of school children evidenced by Tambudzai’s going into teaching after completing a degree in Sociology partially explains the current unemployment phenomena. The youth hold academic and other qualifications that do not guide them into productive career paths. Thus, despite the high literacy levels among the country’s youth, unless that talent is tailored into specific career paths, the employment opportunities would remain bleak. The Ministry of Education should have deliberate policy and infrastructure that spur the youth into prospective career paths in order to enhance sustainable human and social development.

Further, it would also be inconceivable to expect that the minute elite – “New Europeans” “in this new dispensation” (*ibid.*, p.198), brandished to further European interests – would ever dream of creating employment opportunities for others when they were psychologically brainwashed to be individualistic and arrogant against the lowly Africans. Dangarembga shows this aberration and deficiency through her depictions of the Eurocentric Maiguru and Babamukuru’s dreams for Tambudzai at completion of her “A” Level studies in Mathematics, Biology and Chemistry:

You see Mai. Soon Tambudzai will be off on her career... If she is lucky she will be accepted overseas. The British Council will give her a scholarship. She will leave all this behind her, and when she qualifies, it will be all forgotten (*ibid.*, p.180).

Here Dangarembga shows the psychological conditioning of the minute privileged African elite, who in their parochial view, look up to Europe for solutions to the African population’s poverty and employment challenges. Their inability to relate their impoverished livelihoods to the obtaining colonial material and economic cultures is worth noting. With their kind of intellectual and psychological conditioning, it would be inconceivable that they would lift up their communities from being receptacles of poverty because in their view, Africans are destined to be employees and never generators of their own wealth. Further, in the white-dominated economy in the post-independence phase, in Dangarembga’s view, African “presence as well as [his]/her proper person simply will not be accommo-

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dated, and cannot be under any circumstance controlled by even a residual colonial trace" (Mustafa, 2009, p. 401).

Minority holding of resources vis-a-vis sustainable human development

Further, if, as Tambudzai observes, "those who legally held the land but did not own it" were the think-tanks behind Rhodesian economic success, who would have successfully filled the gap that they left at their departure at independence (Dangarembga, 2006, pp. 196-197) in order that the economic systems would keep running efficiently? The previous owners of land and the mainstream economy "hailed their households into aeroplanes headed for the shortly-to-be-superior standards in South Africa, Canada, Britain, Australia and new Zealand" (*ibid.*, pp. 196-197) at the inception of black rule. This is the danger of having major resources in the hands of a minority clique. Further, the privileged minority would ensure that the economic system would serve only their interests as a clique. To then open the floodgates overnight and expect the same entrenched systems to intrinsically transform, stretch and sustain the formerly marginalised majority would be unrealistic. Compounded by the conundrum of racial domination of resources, one would wonder if the same antagonistic owners and managers of the economy who could have remained in the country would freely allow furtherance of Zimbabwean economic interests that brazenly undermine Rhodesian economic interests and privileges. Tambudzai's experiences at the advertising agency partly reflect the lived realities characterising post-independence economic sector.

As was the case with her struggles at Sacred Heart, changing the white-dominated economic sector to accommodate the African youth would be "a scale of struggle similar to David and Goliath" (*ibid.*, pp. 163-164). The advertising agency, like most white-run employment agencies in Zimbabwe, similarly seduces and betrays her. Thus, making it "harrowing [for the youth] to be part of such undistinguishable humanity (*ibid.*, p. 211) in "this... our new Zimbabwe (*ibid.*, p. 210). The apprehensive undercurrent shows that it would be both self-deluding and self-defeating for Zimbabwean youths' to ever dream of Rhodesian whites to design employment programmes that undermine the original imperial design to keep Africans in their place as originally espoused by Cecil John Rhodes (Thomas, 1996, pp. 270-271). Rhodes' vision resonates with the imperial vision and its legacy in Zimbabwe. It is therefore imperative that Zimbabweans intrinsically counter the "African ... deficiency syndrome" (Mazama, 2003, p. 16), which psychological impediment stands between them and the actualisation of their potential.

The African deficiency syndrome that emphasizes European guidance and reason stands to be a major obstacle to the intellectual freedom that Zimbabweans need so as to create programmes suitable for their own sustainable human development, including urban employment creation for the youth. This thesis would lead to the much-needed enrichment and advancement of humanity, not just Zimbabweans. Tambudzai's seduction and exploitation at the advertising agency that she joins after defecting from the lowly-paying teaching job at completing degree studies in Sociology exemplifies this point. To this end, Fanon (1991, p. 316) advocates that: "For Europe, for ourselves, and for humanity, we must turn over a new leaf, we must work out new concepts, and try to set afoot a new man ... [to] advance [humanity] a step further". Through Tambudzai the chief protagonist, Dangarembga foregrounds the imperative to restore African dignity through repossessing the land whose policies and usage are predominantly designed to protect the economic interests and privileged lives of the white minority. Barclay (2010, p. 153) cites Mugabe corroborating on the centrality of land in Zimbabwe's post-2000 economic, political and social stability: "Land comes first before all else. ... This is the one asset ... that has a direct bearing on the fortunes of the poor and prospects for their immediate empowerment and sustainable development". This assertion is not far from the truth when one critically examines the influence that the Rhodesian commercial farmers have in sustaining, financing and influencing school policies at Sacred Heart, an epitome of pre-and post-independence Zimbabwe.

Thus, urban youth un/employment and ownership of economic resources should be examined back to back. They are two sides of the same coin, deserving equal critical attention. Closely knit with the debate on urban youth un/employment is why Dangarembga's fictional narrative that is historically-based, foregrounds the underlying racial tensions against the backdrop of the massive economic and political instability characterising post-independence Zimbabwe, especially the post-2000 phase. Dangarembga's trajectories in the narrative appear to project the conundrum of urban youth un/employment in words succinctly surmised by Kgoro (2008, p. 44):

To deny the external hand in Zimbabwe's crisis would be as treacherous as to excuse the Mugabe regime [constituting the country's think-tank, as well as the youth themselves]... Critical Zimbabwean activists and scholars must boldly acknowledge these factors as mutually reinforcing, namely a corrupt [and] unaccountable ... regime and an equally corrupt, hideous, extractive, racist imperial forces. ... We need to engage both. We need to hold both to account.

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Post-independence vicissitudes vis-à-vis urban youth unemployment

Urban youth un/employment has several layers that Zimbabwean female authors expose. The article analyses some of these layers from Valerie Tagwira's *The Uncertainty of Hope*, published in the same year as *The Book of Not*. Tagwira's fictional narrative is set against the backdrop of the brutality and violence of 2005 Operation Murambatsvina (Operation Restore Order/*Murambatsvina*). Ironically, *Murambatsvina's* victims are epitomised by the black township of Mbare, especially the youth and women. Through the law student and Mbare resident, Faith's bitterness against the insensitivity of *Murambatsvina*, Tagwira exposes the repercussions of rigorous programmes that are implemented by the government without both grand alternatives and consideration for the marginalised poor urban folks. Tagwira becomes more reflective as she turns her gaze away from the imperial forces to the developments in Zimbabwe's urban centres so that Zimbabweans may retrospect on their people-elected leadership's culpability in undermining their prospects for improved livelihoods in the post-independence period. The *Murambatsvina* trajectories of violent urban displacements and the general rot that the narrative projects shows a society embroiled in survival for the moment.

The fire-fighting strategies by both government and victims portray a society crippled to deal with long term solutions to the socio-economic challenges with the urbanites worst hit by the vagaries. Tagwira shows that if even the adults like Garikai, Onai's husband and father to Ruva, are laid off by established companies like Delta Beverages which re-locate to South Africa, it needs no begging that the shrinking formal sector has no room to absorb the youth. To this end, the aspect of "uneven globalisation" (Kagoro, 2008, p. 47), bent on serving and representing western interests in Africa is one major factor accounting for urban youth unemployment in the post-2000 period. Thus, unless the formal employment sector stabilises, and the western owners of major multi-corporations and other companies holding the bulk of Zimbabwe's formal employment sector engage in constructive dialogue with the sitting government, formal urban youth employment would be but a chimera.

In Mbare, where the story mainly takes place, market stalls at Mbare Musika are owned by adult women among whom are Onai and Katy, the chief protagonists. It is apparent that there are no youths involved in this informal trading sector. The few times that the youths are seen is when their minute number vends in sweets, freezits and other small items along streets and at the bus termini. The urban space then, appears to hold no economic room for the youth whose presence is a threat to the meagre economic resources in both the formal and informal sectors.

Without tangible government support and practicable strategies, the urban youth continue being victims of conditions and legacies they are born into. This reality is incontestable given the number of youths currently traversing the urban landscapes vending a variety of wares including fresh fruits and vegetables. However, as a stop-gap measure, urban vending remains one unacknowledged avenue that could be capitalised upon to salvage urban youth employment prospects. However, that they are vermin on the urban landscape through displacement from the only homes that they knew further compounds their plight.

Tagwira brings up another avenue that could salvage urban youth un/employment as land redistribution. Ironically, though it offers bright prospects for the youth like Tom Sibanda an emerging entrepreneur, the land redistribution process appears marred by opaqueness, political patronage, cronyism, the bigwig-syndrome, and self-aggrandisement among most members of the ruling elite. This set-up inadvertently excludes the urban youth from accessing land unless they are correctly connected politically. Concerning this anomaly Kagoro (2008, p. 48) observes:

Land taken from the white man has not necessarily gone to the tiller ... Deracialisation or Africanisation has actually limited rather than enhanced efforts to democratize the state and economy. ... dislodging white control does not necessarily result in control of the economy by the mass of black workers and peasants.

The bleak picture of life in Tagwira's Mbare, as well as that the intricacies of a dog-eat-dog culture that has crept into society, generally show the apprehension the urban youth have concerning their chances of formal and informal employment. However, that some privileged urban youth can salvage their situation is shown by Tom's determination to be involved in transformation projects. Tom's sister Emily, a medical doctor, joins hands with other young activists to build an NGO that would aid displaced women-headed families to secure accommodation in the post-Operation *Murambatsvina* phase. This redemptive streak among the urban youth is worth noting. With the necessary support, the innovativeness and creativity among the youth themselves could help stem destitution.

Unlike Tagwira's hopeful depictions, Petina Gappah's short story collection, *An Elegy for Easterly*, gives curious insights concerning urban youth unemployment in post-2000 Zimbabwe. The short story "In the heart of the golden circle" exposes how young women commoditise themselves, like Roxana in Daniel Defoe's English 18th Century published novel *Roxana*, to climb the social ladder and secure their livelihoods. This is because, as was the case during the colonial period, women's chances of employment in harsh economies are lower than those of their male counterparts. Further, women have "very little asset security especially land rights and property" (Kagoro, 2008, p. 51) thereby keeping them on the mar-

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gins of sustainable development and economic security. Some of the factors accounting for this anomaly have already been discussed earlier under the examination of Tambudzai's experiences in *The Book of Not*. However, Gappah in "Aunt Juliana's Indian" and "The Maid from Lalapanzi" show young women mostly absorbable as domestic workers, again rendering them insecure. Their security hinges on the goodwill of their newly-rich African employers.

While "In the heart of the golden circle" explores the general economic and social marginalisation of the young female elites characterising post-2000 Harare, "The Mupandawana Dancing Champion" exposes the tragedy of post-2000 urban factories male lay-offs amidst the vagaries of inherited colonial land inequalities. The laid off adult male is homeward bound and displaces the young rural male school-leaver from any employment prospects at the Growth Point. The youth board the bus that is city-bound. It is ironic that the sandy and overused rural fields can sustain neither, hence their entrapment between the growth point and the hostile city. The depiction further accentuates the challenges of urban youth unemployment. A critical reader, however, cannot miss the dire consequences of depending on economies hinged upon and entrenched in systems enacted to protect privileges and interests of a minority. The impact on urban youth employment in this regard cannot be a matter of conjecture.

"An Elegy for Easterly" dramatises the double blow of landlessness in Harare and the tragic implementation of Operation *Murambatsvina* that Tagwira also explores. The victims are further relegated to the fringes of existence, yet they are already among the poor of the poorest of the disenfranchised masses in post-2000 Zimbabwe. Their poverty that is partly the legacy of colonialism and dysfunctional domestic economic systems would partly account for heightened urban youth unemployment. This point that repeatedly comes up on discourses pertaining to continual marginalisation of the majority of African children in pre- and post-independence Zimbabwe is an issue that cannot be continuously ignored.

The voluntary emigration to the Diaspora has pushed most of these Zimbabwean professional youths at the bottom of the rubble:

I gave up teaching and Jimmy engineering to be in England, where the curse of the green/[Zimbabwean] passport condemned us to work in the unlit corners of England's health care system, in care homes where we took out the frustrations of our existence by visiting little cruelties on geriatric patients (Gappah, 2009, p. 234).

Of note is continual externalisation of expertise, especially the highly qualified youths. This would indirectly perpetuate the country's dysfunctional economy.

Draining of professional human capital entrenches Zimbabwe's dependency on the West for sustainable economic development if the inherited systems are not overhauled. This is an issue that requires creativity, innovation and dialogue within both government ranks and among the ordinary Zimbabweans themselves in order to find a pragmatic solution to the economy and urban youth un/employment. As clearly evidenced by all three historically-based fictional narratives focusing on post-2000 Zimbabwe, political independence is not a panacea. In as much as Zimbabweans struggled for political independence, the onus is on them to equally struggle for economic empowerment in order to create a secure economy that can empower both their urban and rural youth.

Conclusion

The problem of urban youth unemployment that this article explores does not require scientific solutions as evidenced by the historical, socio-cultural and economic experiences that the explored narratives exemplify. Solutions to Zimbabwean urban youth un/employment lie in Zimbabwe with the Zimbabweans, especially the political will to overhaul entrenched exclusionary economic and resource management systems. Disruption in the management of both the land and the inherited colonial economic systems, as the narratives have shown, would inadvertently entail a dysfunctional economy that ricochets on the employment chain that in turn negatively impacts urban youth employment. Sadly, the inherited education system and elitist values make most urban youths shun the soil. They are therefore locked up in a cycle of marginalised existence as their livelihoods should be sustained by a hostile commercial industrial sector. Exclusion of the youth from both economic and land redistributive programmes require conscious efforts from Zimbabweans themselves to address. With the much needed political will, and more equitable redistribution of the country's resources, the challenge of urban youth un/employment would not be insurmountable. Further, the youth's own self-confidence remains invaluable towards a desirable future as they ingenuously tap into the local resources using their own talent.

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