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Hollows left behind

*A women's 'biography' of Zimbabwe/Rhodesia:
an exegesis and accompanying novel*

PART ONE

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Abstract

Hollows Left Behind comprises an exegesis and a postmodern, polyphonic novel which seek to provide a feminine, ‘biography’ of Zimbabwe/Rhodesia wherein female protagonists trespass into liminal spaces, exploring binaries: coloniser/colonised, black/white, male/female. The novel is framed as ‘biography’ for it offers counter memories as an alternative to orthodox, largely masculine-inscribed histories, often influenced by political and social agendas. Silence is the core of the project and the intention is to ‘unconceal’ minor voices in pursuit of ‘truth’.

The novel ‘translates’ silences into three interweaving narrative strands. Each strand is set within a tumultuous era of Zimbabwe/Rhodesia and they depict the lived experiences of three female protagonists: Billie, Ruth and Clea. Billie’s (1890s) strand re-enacts the establishment of the British colony, Rhodesia. Ruth’s strand focuses on the Liberation War of the 1970s while Clea’s strand is set in Zimbabwe, 2015. These characters have been silenced, but they have also silenced themselves, and represent groups that have been largely written out of the historic canon: women settlers, female guerrilla fighters and birth mothers who relinquished babies. The ‘unconcealment’ (aletheia) of their stories reveals lacunae in the ‘grand narratives’.

The exegesis tests the often opaque boundaries between history, biography and fiction, and interrogates the nature of ‘truth’. It investigates the complicity and resistance of women settlers to the imperial vision and engages in debates circulating the appropriation and depiction of O/other stories. The exegesis is a biography of the novel, incorporating its journey from conception to completion as it maps my personal journey into the country’s contentious history. It explores the influence of particular research methodologies –archaeology (Foucault), hauntology (Derrida) and psychogeography (Dubord, Benjamin, Holmes) and records the creative decisions which underpin the strands. I aim to provide a more nuanced interpretation of Zimbabwe/Rhodesia as well as to explore themes of personal and national importance: identity, memory/myth-making, and personal agency/complicity. However, the quest to ‘unconceal’ truth has been a lesson in humility and caution so therefore, in keeping with my feminine approach, I offer my novel and exegesis as my experience, my truth.

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¹ Archives of the Family of the Counts de La Panouse and the Chateau de Thoiry en Yvelines 78770, France

Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), no material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

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INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY RIGHTS

I, Susan Zana Bell, assert my moral rights in the works: exegesis and novel.

Genesis: Origin, Intention and Outline of Project

When I was twenty-two I sat down in Scotland to write my first novel. It was a muddled affair about my birth country, Rhodesia, and the 1970s civil war: an uneasy alliance of fiction and memoir that I quickly abandoned. The war was too immediate to ‘see’ properly. It was at that moment I realised I was not interested in writing a memoir; my own life holds little interest. My first published short story some years later depicted a South African woman’s thoughts on her move from Johannesburg to New Zealand: the tangled complexities of white privilege and terror, of immigration and labels. Although I could relate to these, the fictional element provided a reassuring distance from my own experiences; my character was not me.

I went on to write six novels across a range of genre, four of which were New Zealand or Australian historical novels of various sorts in which I could explore ‘safer’ (in that they were not my own) colonial worlds through women’s lives. Women’s issues are core to all my novels. I also wrote biographical and travel articles, and many short stories which provided opportunities to experiment with structure, voice, style. This creative project draws upon and is shaped by that diverse writing background.

However, the idea of writing a book about Rhodesia/Zimbabwe, nagged at the back of my mind like unfinished homework. The country I read about in books and newspapers and watched on documentaries was never quite ‘my’ country – the complexities and nuances were too often glossed over or lost. In 2001 I chanced upon Billie’s story on the internet and knew instantly that she was my way into the book. Born Fanny Pearson, she was an English working-class girl who, aged eighteen, ran away to Africa with a French count, Edmond, in 1890. When Cecil Rhodes banned women from going into Mashonaland she dressed as a boy, called herself Billie, and was the first (known) white² woman to venture into the area. Some

² I use the terms ‘white’ (incorporating British, Afrikaans, Greek, Jewish etc.) and ‘black’ (incorporating Shona, Ndebele and other tribes) as generic descriptors in keeping with Africa’s political and media usage. These binary terms may suggest I am privileging race in my discourse but broad-brush racial categories used to be legally inscribed and underline many past and, in part, present issues. They replace the earlier native/pioneer, European (Rhodesian)/ African binaries. Many ‘whites’ arguably could be classed as ‘African’ in that they ‘belong to’ or are ‘of’ Africa. These racially-based classifications also do not adequately recognise the Indians, Chinese, ‘Coloureds’ (those of racially mixed heritage) etc. who are a part of the country. ‘Zimbabwean’ includes all

years later she and Edmond married and she became known as Countess Billie. I had always wanted to write a biography, and I knew immediately this was a life I wanted to explore, to tell. Her real-life story captured the imagination, defying both ‘civilising pioneer’ and ‘invading colonial’ representations.



Figure 1 *Fanny Pearson aka Countess Billie*

Figure 2 *Edmond, Vicomte de la Panouse*

(Reproduced with permission from Panouse archives)

I visited Africa in 2004 and while there began tentative research into Billie’s life. In the Cape Town National Library archives I was both delighted and disappointed to find an out-of-print biography already existed. However, while the biography fascinated me, I was very aware that it had been written by a man in the early 1970s when Zimbabwe was still Rhodesia. His world view was not mine; there was room for fresh interpretation.

On that trip I spent only three days in Zimbabwe and stole one morning to go to the National Archives. I flicked through 1890s memoirs and examined tiny black-and-white photographs of ox-drawn wagons, grass huts, indigenous peoples and moustachioed European men. Very occasionally I glimpsed women in long skirts. These Victorians did not resemble the ‘heroic pioneer’ image I had grown up with, nor the more recent ‘rapacious settler’ image. They were just people and probably not so different to my parents who had emigrated to what was then Rhodesia in 1948 after their turbulent war-service experiences in North Africa, Italy and India. Rainy, post-war Wales could not compete with the prospects and adventures offered by the colonies – all a mere ten-pound-ticket away. They chose Rhodesia because it was sunny and exotic.

peoples. However some (usually emigrated) whites still define themselves as Rhodesian. The distinctions between Rhodesia and Zimbabwe remain strong for both blacks and whites. The novel and exegesis, for the main part, are concerned with the Shona for the novel is set in Mashonaland.

Despite these glimpses into my country's history which was and was not my own, when I returned to New Zealand I shelved the idea of Billie. It was too hard to conduct research from so far away, especially since Zimbabwe was in the grip of hyperinflation³ and bordering on collapse. The internet was still relatively new; Google was but a few years old while Facebook and the Gutenberg Project's online catalogue were a couple of years away.

Ten years later I came into some money and I was surprised – or maybe not – that my first impulse was to look for Billie. In consequence I went to Europe to find her childhood home and Edmond's château. I had to know where they had come from to understand what they were going to. The following year I returned to Harare and spent two weeks haunting the National Archives of Zimbabwe, walking the streets in Billie's footsteps, and wondering about the relationships between her adventures, the civil war of my teenage years and the Zimbabwe of today. Here at last was my novel.

And here too, now, was the treasure trove of the internet, which had been rapidly expanding in the intervening ten years⁴. Working in my tiny cabin in rural New Zealand, I could download colonial texts long out of print through the Gutenberg Project. I could buy rare books from other countries or interloan them from Australia. I could access a wealth of online academic papers. What's more, information was proliferating. YouTube had been born in 2005 and suddenly I could watch documentaries, films and interviews - and every year more and more came online. In a decade the world of research had changed dramatically⁵.

In the meantime, New Zealand universities had begun offering doctorates in Creative Writing and I perceived the advantages of tackling this project within an academic framework, especially since some years earlier I had been very taken with Kate Grenville's *In Search of the Secret River* (2006) which had grown out of her exegesis when writing *The Secret River* for her PhD. I had written my

³ In 2008, the *Telegraph* reported inflation had hit 231 million per cent. A loaf of bread which had cost Z\$500 at the beginning of August was costing between Z\$7 000 and Z10 000 – if, indeed, one could be found. (Berger, 9 October 2008 <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/africaandindianocean/zimbabwe/3167379/Zimbabwe-inflation-hits-231-million-per-cent.html>)

⁴ According to the Internet World Statistics site (<http://www.internetworldstats.com/emarketing.htm>), in 2002 around 9% of the world was using the internet. By 2012 when I began to seriously contemplate writing the book it had risen to 39%. By September 2016, half the world's population was now on the internet.

⁵ There is a miscellany of resources in the appendices which include memoirs, bricolage texts, biographies, articles and YouTube postings. They were invaluable for world-building in each of the three eras. I have included a timeline for Billie.

Australian/New Zealand historical novel at much the same time and we had followed very similar writing journeys, though mine had not been recorded. From a creative point of view, I was keen to broaden and deepen my understanding of the creative process in general and my own practice in particular. More especially, I hoped the required academic rigour and objectivity would help since I was venturing into a minefield. There had been many deaths, tragedies and atrocities on both sides during the civil war. Feelings can still run high and my own personal demons lurked under the surface. The lurching Zimbabwean situation that I was witnessing from afar compounded the difficulties I faced. How on earth was I to write about a country whose precarious stability continued to teeter unpredictably from year to year? The Zimbabwe I had visited in 1987, 2002 and 2015 had all been radically different. Which Zimbabwe should I write about and would it already be out of date – irrelevant – by the time I'd written the book?

No matter. The novel – the creative project – had to be written. Billie's story gnawed at me and I sensed the structure of the book: it would be a polyphonic novel written in three narrative strands that would capture the inception of Rhodesia in the 1890s, its death throes in the 1970s, and 'present day' Zimbabwe – whatever that would eventuate to be. As always I would use a feminine lens, especially since much of the Rhodesian discourse has been masculine, so each strand would have a central female protagonist: pioneer Billie⁶ (1890s), guerrilla fighter Ruth (1970s), and Clea (present day) - a birth mother recently contacted by her adopted-out daughter. The characters embody individuals who are all too often marginalised, forgotten or - perhaps worse - appropriated as representations to serve socio-political agendas. The interweaving strands would create a palimpsest, revealing the spaces, erasures and silences that the constant scribing and re-inscribing of the country's history has either unconsciously or deliberately created. The past and present would be in constant dance, in tension, and the fusion of these three subjective voices would, I hoped, form a vigorous, living 'biography'⁷ of the country. This history would also be inscribed onto the land itself (even as the land was inscribing itself on the people), symbolised by the changing faces of Salisbury/Harare, and this city would form the taproot of the book.

⁶ I usually refer to Fanny as Billie for this is how she is generally known but usage is dependent on context. The spelling used in documents shifts between Billy and Billie but her biographer settled on Billie and I prefer it too.

⁷ The choice of this term will be explained in the following section.

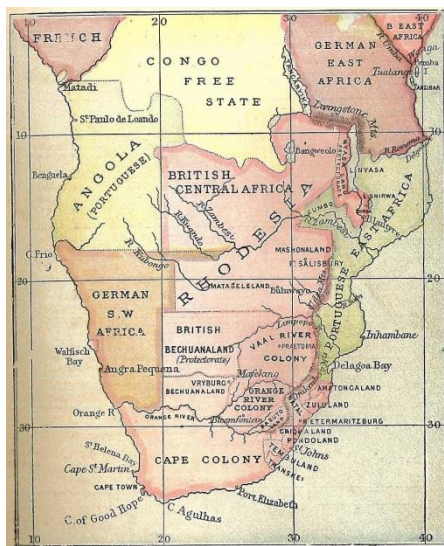


Figure 3 Rhodesia Map, 1896
<https://goo.gl/Jxj5Vh> 2/11/2017



Figure 4 Zimbabwe Map, 2017
<https://goo.gl/12FrGn> 2/11/2017

I was concerned that I might lose readers in this complex structure but found it reassuring to be writing the novel within the academic framework as this ensures informed feedback. The creative project, therefore, is not necessarily in its final iteration.

While I did not follow first and second order journaling methodologies (Bacon, 2014), I did keep ‘organic’ journals in which I pondered on methodologies and theories, as well as recording issues that pertained to the writing process. As a practitioner, it was fascinating to finally chart – and yet still sometimes miss – elusive elements of the creative process. As a writing tutor, it helped me rethink or reshape strategies and approaches I use with students.

There were many challenges as I sought to burst out of the bubble of white privilege I had grown up in to view the country from different standpoints and to explore the silences engendered by propaganda, censorship and ingrained, systemic societal and racial divisions. Apart from the massive historical research required to convincingly recreate 1890s Rhodesia, I needed to revisit the 1970s which had lain shut away in my mind for many decades. There were also contentious issues. I had been opposed to minority rule from my mid-teens, but having spent years arguing with, yet accommodating, close friends of very different political persuasions, and having also spent years defending the rights of people whom I never knew intimately, whose languages I could not speak and whose customs were a mystery, I well knew that Rhodesia/Zimbabwe abounds with contradictions and complexities. The challenge would be to capture these in fiction. Then there was the problem of how to portray the ever-shifting Zimbabwe of ‘today’. What claims did I have to

write about a country I left over half my lifetime ago? What right did a white emigrant have to comment on Zimbabwe? Come to that, what right did I have to comment on people of the past - on their motivations, decisions and actions which might seem to mean one thing but could have meant something quite different? The PhD offered a means to tackle the ethics underlying these questions, to penetrate liminal spaces, and to interrogate expedient, oversimplified binaries: male/female, white/black, colonised/settler. Further, it offered a means to critically reflect on and breach my own self-imposed silences regarding a country about which I felt so strongly and so ambiguously.

However, I did experience some tension between the rigours of academia and the oft-times fragile process of writing a novel. There were discourses on one side, silences on the other. Sometimes I feared that the ‘voices of my education’⁸ would drown out the whispers I could barely discern. When they were particularly bad I wondered if I, like D.H. Lawrence, would end up cursing these voices. At other times there was the magic of a coin sliding into a slot – a recognition that vague shadows I was chasing actually had form, had substance. I knew Walter Benjamin’s ‘ragpicker’ instantly – that was me! I was delighted to discover Michel Foucault posited my fossicking in discarded texts as a research methodology. Words like *hauntology* and *psychogeography* had immediate resonance and became integral concepts within the project. I found ‘my tribe’ not so much in academic feminists, as I had expected, but in western women anthropologists whose well-intentioned research into the experiences of black women incited vigorous debate and sometimes condemnation for their trespass into cultures they did not know, and for their perceived appropriation of voices that had already been silenced by men over the millennia.

I immersed myself in post-colonialism and postmodernism. I was also interested in historiography, having given up history when I was fourteen. These explorations helped formulate the underlying approaches and philosophies of the novel while hauntology and psychogeography played significant roles in the actual shaping of the book. Yet I hope that my touch with all has been light, almost invisible. While writing the exegesis, I went out to my cabin one morning to find a spider web fixed between the door frame, a cabbage tree, a flax bush and the gutter. By using such disparate anchor points, the spider had woven a web that was large and strong for all its delicacy, and I realised that these theories and methodologies

⁸ Taken from *Snake*. <http://homepages.wmich.edu/~cooneys/poems/dhl.snake.html> 2/11/17

are the anchor points from which I have woven my story. The contact is fine – infinitesimal really – but essential and grounding. Ideally, these guiding concepts thread the work, giving it form, giving it strength, yet remaining almost transparent in the doing so.

The relationship between the creative project and the exegesis proved all the more challenging when it came to discussions circulating the ‘shape’ and ‘purpose’ of the exegesis. In procedural terms, it is the combination of the creative and critical components that forms the ‘original contribution to knowledge’ (Brabazon & Dagli, 2010, p. 28), yet there seemed to be considerable debate as to what form this synthesis takes (for example Bourke & Nielsen, 2004; Milech & Schilo, 2009; Nelson, 2009; Webb, Brien & Burr, 2011; Hocking, 2011). An overview of Australian universities' criteria (Webb & Brien, 2008) proved interesting. Curtin University of Technology sought the articulation of a research question that both works in conjunction would answer. Deakin University required the candidate to develop and argue a position located within relevant research literature. Edith Cowen University saw the exegesis as ‘a small thesis which presented an academic explanation of the creative work and/or an exposition of the linkages between the works’ (p.7). The University of Melbourne saw the PhD in Creative Writing as making a distinct contribution to knowledge that ‘rests on the originality of approach and/or interpretation of the findings and, in some cases, the discovery of new facts’ (p.17). Monash University replaced the term ‘original contribution’ with ‘a cultural contribution of substantial significance’ (p.13).

My goal was to write an alternative, subjective, feminine history of Rhodesia/Zimbabwe told as fiction. I aimed to write women back, to venture into silences and spaces, to understand what makes essentially ‘good’/ordinary people do ‘bad’/unconscionable things. There are writers who are tackling some of these aspects disparately. Fine novelists like Petina Gappah, Tsitsi Dangarembga and Noviolet Bulawayo are writing Zimbabwean women’s stories. There are male soldier memoirs and novels from the different armies (for example, Cocks, 1988; Kanengoni, 1997). There are also contemporary white memoirs (for example, Fuller, 2002; Godwin, 1996; Lessing, 1995) and novels (e.g. Lessing, 1950; Wallace, 2010) but I have not located much contemporary fiction about the settler community apart from one novel in Wilbur Smith’s *Ballantyne* quartet (1860s – 1970s) which centres on male protagonists. Andrea Eames’ novel *The White Shadow* features a woman guerrilla fighter. Yvonne Vera wrote both historical and contemporary fiction

focused on black women's stories. I have read the fiction of the black writers (for example Hove, 1988 and Maraire, 1996) because their lives and experiences are different from mine. I have not sought out many contemporary white Zimbabwean novelists since I prefer to work with primary sources and memoirs as a means to keep my fictional interpretations fresh. My novel therefore would be distinctive in its historical span, its privileging of women, and its polyphonic approach – all of which would, I hoped, offer new perspectives on old stories by venturing into historical lacunae and foregrounding marginal characters (real and fictional) within national narratives.

The project circulates around silences – but how could I 'hear' them and how might I reveal them? Here lay the core of my research question, which encompassed methodology ('listening' became a tactic for the project), as well as the creative concern of how to open space to some (feminine) voices but to also indicate other silences (such as the 'black' voices in the 1890s and present-day strands) and lacunae in national and personal histories. The *meuse*⁹ became a potent symbol and I began by aligning myself with Foucault's scavenger to pick over the detritus of historical documents to rediscover and repurpose historical fragments that I could combine with scraps taken from the present to create my narrative. I would 'make do' with whatever fragments were available. This 'making do', claims Webb & Brien, 'allows the intuitive leaps and creative shifts designed both to heighten the artistic quality of the work and develop its knowledge potential' (2010, p.199).

Questions proliferated in the light of my excavations: what is nation, what is nationality, what is identity? I did not necessarily expect to find answers to any of them. The writing was both inquiry and result or, as Julia Colyar would have it, product and process, noun and verb (2008, p.422). She points out that writing is not only invention but an instrument of self-reflection (p.421), and I found that the fluidity of fiction, with its subtleties and freedoms, provided the perfect medium for me to reflect, evaluate, speculate, and draw inferences. Milan Kundera claimed, 'The novelist's ambition is not to do something better than his predecessors but to see what they did not see, say what they did not say' (cited in Webb & Brien, 2010, p.195). Here perhaps lay the key to 'original contribution', maybe even 'cultural significance'. At the very least it was a goal worth striving for. In addition, in both

⁹ When a small animal like a rabbit sleeps away from its burrow, it forms a nest-like hollow in the grass that mirrors its shape and weight, and when the animal departs, this hollow - this *meuse* - holds the memory. Now an obsolete (haunting) term
[\(https://memoryslandscape.tumblr.com/post/139196125183/](https://memoryslandscape.tumblr.com/post/139196125183/) retrieved 21/11/17).

the exegesis and the creative work I have sought to avoid what Robert Nelson identifies as the ‘sins of exegetical writing’ (2009, p.3): indulgence, blandness, inconsequentiality, evasion, pretence, naivety, inconsistency, problematic ideology, poor structure, uncritical writing, the unpoetic and pomposity (p.4). While many of these points are ultimately subjective, I found them personally useful to bear in mind while writing and editing.

The creative project is a ‘ragpicker’ novel and my exegesis, in part, reflects this mosaic approach, with shifting styles and tone within the different sections, while the inclusion of images supports my bricolage research in which photographs and places have played an integral role. In keeping with my feminine lens, I use ‘mother language’ which Ursula Le Guin (1989) defines as ‘uniting and binding, the language of conversation and stories. It is inclusive and subjective, offering rather than claiming’ (p.150). ‘Father language’, she posits, is the discourse of institutions, and politics. She also advocates offering personal experience as truth and this has become a core tenet of the project. The first section ***Research*** parallels the research/literature review approach and mirrors the three narrative strands. Within this section, *Writing History* depicts my personal exploration of historiography and the dance between history, biography and historical fiction. It touches on the methodologies of Foucault and Derrida, which informed the research. Core concepts such as hauntology are introduced, to be explored in greater depth in the following sections. *Writing Colonial* backgrounds my research into the Rhodesian pioneer women of the 1890s as a basis for Billie’s strand and picks up Foucault’s archaeological approach and Derrida’s spectres. *Writing Post-Colonial* centres on the research backgrounding Clea and Ruth’s narrative strands, with particular focus on the representation and appropriation of Other. *Journeys* reveals psychogeographic influences in significant research travels. ***The Creative Project*** details the novel-writing process. *Writing Postmodern* contextualises creative decisions pertaining to the novel’s structure and leads into the *Writing* of the individual narrative strands in which the challenges and solutions for each is discussed. ***Revelations***¹⁰ reflects on the creative work: its contribution, significance, possible weaknesses and future possibilities.

¹⁰ I am using the biblical terms Genesis and Revelations because I like the *Bible*’s symmetry which begins at the beginning and finishes with still-to-come future, much as my novel does with the nation’s history. The terms frame this academic document in such a way that it aligns with traditional formats but it also - in keeping with its creative roots - takes liberties with the form.

Research

Writing History: Writing in Sand

*Ka kuhumai koe ki runga o nga tapuwae o Manaia me ana uri whakatupuranga.
You are about to follow the sacred footprints of Manaia¹¹ and all of his descendants.*



Figure 5 (and detail) *Some things remain invisible until we are ready to see* 18 October 2016

I have never before seen this inscription attached to a rock at the beginning of the path down through the dunes to my local Ocean Beach in Whangarei though I've passed this way many times before. Is it new or has it been here for years and I've never noticed? Sometimes things remain invisible until we are ready to see. Today I see and the words strike a visceral chord.

I am at the beach because I'm escaping, for just a few hours, the books and papers that cram my cabin and reflect my obsession with the dance between history, biography and fiction; language, a signifier, always at one step removed from the signified. What, indeed, is history? Simon Schama suggests it is the business of representing something that is no longer there (cited in Campion 2002, p.10) while R.G. Collingwood claims it is an act of 'historical imagination' in observing past events (cited in Lemisko, 2004, p.1). Novelist Penelope Lively describes it as a kaleidoscope (2006, p.4). In 1903, J.D. Bury announced that history is 'herself a science, no less and no more' (cited in Curthoys & Docker, 2004, p.69) even though his very use of the feminine marker lets slip that history is something more animate, perhaps desirable – a conquest, maybe.

Is history the events of a past recalled in the present, or is it the living-memory/present written down to be read in the future? Does it look backwards or

¹¹ A legendary Maori chief.

forwards? Are the footprints going to or from? Artificial questions, perhaps, because the ‘past’ is always woven deep into the DNA of the ‘present’ and, as Jacques Derrida suggests, haunts the ‘future’ (Derrida, 1994). Yet what is it that we seek, what do we hope to gain, in this constant process of ‘re-membling’ and ‘re-creating’? History is such malleable stuff. The histories of Rhodesia are different to the histories of Zimbabwe, so by what means are counter-memories – those stories of the repressed and the omitted – now being constructed? Political and social agendas have underwritten the country’s history from its inception - as, no doubt, has been the case with every nation. Rhodesia/Zimbabwe itself is an artificial construct superimposed onto a part of Africa, and its ensuing brief history has been marked by conflict. But if history is written by the victors, what role do the losers play in recording the sagas? The purpose of my creative project is not to answer these questions but to navigate some of the confluences and divergences of history, auto/biography and fiction with their shifting, sometimes opaque boundaries to discover, if possible, what fiction might offer by way of interpretation, particularly in such a problematic national history.

Now, staring at this plaque on the rock, I feel a tingle. My journey of the past few years has been just this - the following of the footprints of ghosts - and suddenly here it is, encapsulated in this exact moment: history past laying down the path in the present to carry me forward. And so I begin walking in the footsteps of Manaia and all of his descendants (taking pleasure in the generous ‘and all of’), walking down to the beach – walking into the past.

The Path



Figure 6 *The path: the chatter of a thousand soundtracks, a visual cacophony* 18 October 2016

The sandy path is a jumble of footprints – trained, barefoot, jandalled – and so overlaid it is like the chatter of a thousand soundtracks, a visual cacophony. Some footprints veer off onto smaller paths and the odd set takes a maverick route, disappearing faint but purposefully into the dunes. How satisfying is Robert Frost's summation of lesser travelled roads with its absence of accorded value, yet the hinting of it¹². All the difference. Just this. Ozeki (2016) uses the phrase *just this* in her meditation *The Face: A Time Code* in which she describes how a venerated monk, returning after years of seeking spiritual enlightenment, is asked what he has learnt. 'I have learnt that my eyes are horizontal and my nose is vertical. Just this.'¹³ 'History' is fissured by judgements, interpretations and representations. Benedetto Croce claims the historian writes out of the interests of the present (cited in Curthoys & Docker, 2006, p.92). Can I interpret the present out of the interests of the past? Historical fiction is a metaphor, says German-Jewish novelist Lion Feuchtwanger (Brayfield & Sprott, 2014, p.12) and I cannot help but see metaphors in these detractions from the designated path. I see postcolonial and feminist histories forging their own paths to the beach, writing back, creating counter-memories.

My imagination, however, is caught by those individual prints – meuses, as it were – that have slipped away, mostly submerged in grass. Why are they there? A quick fag? A tryst? A lost dog? That is why my creative work is a novel; I am in search of the individuals rather than the main discourses of my birth country which reduce people so often to binary representations. Fiction writers are attracted to the gaps, the silences (Mantel, 2012, Barker, 2014) - perhaps especially when these gaps are what Margaret Atwood calls 'willed acts' of forgetting (Brayfield & Sprott, 2014, p.10) - and these are the voids, the liminal spaces I am venturing into with my creative work. Historians too must be beckoned by these lacunae but Beverley Southgate suggests novelists are unfettered by the constraints of a discipline, so are thus freer to look at the past in a fresh way, to explore alternative interpretations - freedoms that are not permitted to historians (2009, p.10). He proposes that fiction can help keep history creatively alive by introducing fresh evidence and propositions that extend the parameters of history's concerns. Novelists claim liberties to imagine, recreate and reposition, drawing inferences from whispers

¹² Allusion to Robert Frost's poem, *The Road Not Taken*. <http://www.bartleby.com/119/1.html>

¹³ This phrase is core to Zen teaching and translated often as *suchness*.

and silences. Irene Staunton, a prominent Zimbabwean publisher, says, ‘For me, literature is an incredibly important way of telling the truth. In fact, I believe it is more important than history in terms of being able to help us understand the complexities and nuances of any period, any situation’ (Xu, 2011, p.2). Good fiction, she believes, can record experience in all its diversity and shades of ambivalence.

Penelope Lively’s fictional biographer, Mark, muses:

The novelist has an infinity of choices...and the picture he constructs is complete in its own terms. When he says ‘This is the story and the whole story’ we must accept it. Perhaps novelists are the only people who do tell the truth (Lively, 2011, p.15).

‘Truth’, however, is a slippery term. My truth may not be your truth. Fiction’s strength, I believe, is that it can open paths and accommodate different, even conflicting, truths. My creative work pursues three individual sets of tracks, so the novel opens space not only to the distant past but to the living-memory past as well as the present to create a fictional Venn diagram of interrelating times and ‘truths’ via the three narrative strands. Because the story of my birth country is personal, I seek to engage with it subjectively. In a similar way, I have walked down Manaia’s path so many times that submerged beneath this herringbone mishmash of phantom feet are the footprints of my younger selves. My ‘knowingness’ of this path registers it differently to how it would be if I were walking it for the first time. I am reaching back even as I advance.

The Beach



Figure 7 *The beach: if you would find yourself, look to the land you came from and to which you go*

18 October 2016

The beach is wide and winter-empty, ironed flat by the relentless storms of the past week. Green hills bookend and delineate my space. Henry David Thoreau reminds us that if you would find yourself, look to the land you came from and to which you go, and indeed our relationship with the land is primeval and complex. Lucy Lippard sees historical narrative as being contained within landscape.

Place is latitudinal and longitudinal within the map of a person's life. It is temporal and spatial, personal and political. A layered location replete with human histories and memories, place has width as well as depth. It is about connections, what surrounds it, what formed it, what happened there, what will happen there (1997, p.7).

Psychogeographic elements ghost through my creative project, set as it is in Salisbury/Harare through its different iterations, tracing the symbiotic relationship between locale and identity whereby the land shapes us even as we are shaping it. Land is obstacle, conquest and reward, and the superimposed country borders refigure the space as an arena within which socio-political agendas dominate the lives of the individuals.

The wind is cold and clean and when it blows I shiver, feeling the ghosts of Manaia and all of his descendants around me – in a good way – and I think of Derrida's hauntological 'spectres' (1994), those phantoms of the past that disrupt our modes of interpretation and representation. Even as we struggle to find meaning in our past, our interpretive standpoints – created in the present – serve to reduce or banish the past and its complexities. Derrida understood this reaching-back, reaching-forward of history and advocated a 'being-with' the spectres, inviting them in without necessarily trying to account for them. As a novelist, this 'speaking for' is a central concern. My characters should ventriloquise me, not vice versa, for I do not want to write didactic fiction. Do historians see it as their job to explain, to 'speak for'? We are all in the same business, of course – historical novelists, historians and biographers – trying to fashion discourses and narratives out of the same raw material, rather like children building sandcastles, selecting and discarding shells, pebbles, seaweed and seagrasses. E.H. Carr (1987) states that it is not the 'facts' that determine what historians write, but rather the choices they make about which 'facts of the past' are selected that will then be turned into 'historical facts'. He cautions us to study the historians before we study the facts because these facts will have been selected and interpreted by them. Carr describes history as 'a continuous process of

interaction between the historian and his facts, an unending dialogue between the past and the present' (p.23).

But where do we find these 'facts'? Foucault sees disjuncture between historians and history. Not only do 'the historian and history speak from different places' (Schirato, Danaher & Webb 2012, p.4), historians also claim the authority bestowed upon them by public institutions such as universities and museums – the self-same institutions that had originally shaped them. Foucault urges a re-interrogation of official documents, for so long the staple fare of historians, stating that:

Of course, it is obvious enough that ever since a discipline such as history has existed, documents have been used, questioned, and have given rise to questions; scholars have asked not only what these documents meant, but also whether they were telling the truth, and by what right they could claim to be doing so or whether they were sincere or deliberately misleading, well informed or ignorant, authentic or tampered with (1969, p.3).

Official Rhodesian texts not only erased the histories of the indigenous peoples¹⁴, but also shaped discourses through media control, stringent censorship and the classifying of much (predominantly black) political opposition as criminal. Further, just before Robert Mugabe came into power countless documents from the civil war were burnt by the vanquished white government. An ex-Rhodesian soldier claimed:

Whew! A lot of stuff went up in smoke in this country in early 1980. A helluva lot. Salisbury was surrounded by a little cloud of black smoke – from all the army camps, government offices, police stations....When the city incinerators were all full, they sent us off to the crematorium for more burning....Records of interrogations, army set-ups and strategies, profiles of people, personal records...TV films and radio tapes, too; all the propaganda....I think that no one wanted to be checked up on....No one wanted to be held responsible for anything (Frederikse, 1982, p. iv).

The current Zanu-PF regime continues to control the media and manipulates discourses with its own self-serving depictions of key political events (Nyanda, 2016, p 68). Michalinos Zembylas' (2013) application of hauntology to societies disrupted by dictatorships and wars has particular resonance when investigating colonial histories and regimes, because Zembylas is extremely wary of the move

¹⁴ For example, in the 1970s, museum curators of Great Zimbabwe (a huge, medieval stone palace and temple) were pressured by the white government to deny that African peoples had built it, despite evidence that they had.

towards ‘totalising explanations’ – triumphalist or redemptive – that legitimise narrativisations driven by political, social or ideological agendas. Foucault’s concern with the tendency to ‘monumentalise’ official documents (1969/1972, p. 4) therefore resonates strongly, as does his suggestion that truth might therefore be found in the detritus of history. In Walter Benjamin’s *The Arcades Project*, the historian is depicted as a scavenger who picks over all that is discarded and who is ‘unconcerned with what has been accredited as precious and valuable, but rather is drawn towards historical refuse. Waste materials are used to enter into significant connections and fragments are used to gain a new perspective on history’ (Benjamin, 1999, p.252).

I take particular delight in discarded and marginalised memoirs and fictions, most of which have been out of print for many decades, because I seek alternative interpretations on old themes of imperialism, colonisation, dictatorships and suppression. Toni Morrison wrote *Beloved* because ‘the historical narrative had become over-familiar, and the task of the historical novelist is then to de-familiarise the territory’ (cited in Brayfield & Sprott, 2014, p.36). In these texts I feel the pioneer women speak out for themselves and it is my task to listen carefully. I aim to write women consistent with their times and social and educational backgrounds.

The Rock Pools



Figure 8 *The rock pools: minuscule lives pounded by massive forces* 18 October 2016

At the far end of the beach are the rock pools, tranquil at low tide – microcosmic worlds formed in, around and of the surrounding rocks. However, their tranquillity gives lie to the massive powerful forces that twice daily engulf them - pounding, dragging and hollowing. Somehow these lichens, molluscs and tiny organisms have established their own fragile worlds within which they live minuscule lives. History

is never static, though, and with every tide the rocks themselves are being ground down, microscopically, imperceptibly. One day they too will have been dissolved for all that they seem so solid now.¹⁵

In *Archaeology of Knowledge*, Michel Foucault was particularly interested in the phenomena of rupture, discontinuity and the scales of history: microcosmic and macroscopic. He suggested ‘the problem is no longer one of tradition, of tracing a line, but one of division, of limits; it is no longer one of lasting foundations but one of transformations that serve as new foundations, the rebuilding of foundations’ (Foucault, 1969, p.3). Discontinuity should be the historian’s working concept (Schirato, Danaher & Webb, 2012, p.6). Seeking to undermine the fiction of Western culture as linear, universal, progressive and continuous, Foucault developed historiographical interrogations and methods in both *The Archaeology of Knowledge* and *Nietzsche, Genealogy, History* that have been influential in backgrounding my creative work. Suspicious of the singular, authoritative narrative, Foucault viewed history as a construct under a continuous state of amendment to meet the needs of the present. He challenged what he termed ‘totalising histories’ and their perceived/manufactured causalities, instead posited the notion of multiple histories that are overlapping, contesting and always in a state of flux. Foucault also turned attention away from the ‘great men of history’ since he believed them to be as much a product of their times as they were agents of it, shaped by the discursive and non-discursive forces flowing through the positions they held. Instead, he was more interested in underlying histories and minor players.

My creative work is concerned with the ‘ruptures’ of the country’s troubled history. It contains the battles of the 1890s¹⁶ and the civil war of the 1970s¹⁷. However, towering figures like the great chief Lobengula, Cecil John Rhodes, Ian Smith and Robert Mugabe are relegated to the wings while the microscopic lives of female characters take centre stage in the normally masculine dramas of colonisation and war. To simulate the overlapping, contesting fluxes of history, my three narrative strands echo, resonate and collide with one another.

Rhodesia/Zimbabwe may be little more than an artificial construct acting within and being acted upon by the pounding forces of colonisation, civil war and

¹⁵ In Cambodia, for instance, they have recently discovered in the dense jungles near Angkor Wat the faint remains of vast, vanished cities. Their significance and the reasons for their demise are yet to be uncovered – literally and metaphorically (Dunston, 2016).

¹⁶ Rhodesian histories record these as the Matabele and Mashona uprisings. Zimbabwean history records them as the First Chimurenga – a Shona word roughly translating to ‘revolutionary struggle’.

¹⁷ Also known as the bush war, the Independence struggle or the Second Chimurenga.

postcolonial heritage, but it is the country's anthropomorphic imitation of the life cycles that leads me to frame the novel as its 'biography'. Besides, I am drawn to the modalities of biography. I like the close-focus, the personal lens, the empathic engagement of author and the sometimes surrender to the seductions of the past. While biography is generally defined as a written record of an individual's life, leading biographer Michael Holroyd defines it as 'the product of a strange coupling between old-fashioned history and the traditional novel' (2002, p.20). Richard Holmes sees it as a balance between Reason and Imagination (Holmes, 1971, p.27). It is a particularly flexible genre and I can nest Billie's partial biography¹⁸, told as fiction, within my 'national biography'.

Most biographers are candid in recognising their inextricable personal involvement in their subjects' stories, and having grown up in my birth country I concede my novel is subjective, although the use of fiction provides some distance. Andrew Sinclair goes further, claiming that the 'writing of biography is more than the discovery of another person. It is a matter of self-discovery' (Homburger & Charmley, 1988, p.123) although I would add that the writing of fiction is also a matter of self-discovery.

I am rewriting Billie's story as a twenty-first-century, postmodern, feminine text to provide an alternative to the male-authored 1970s biography. Holroyd points out:

No biographer can escape from the sensibilities and values of his age. We are caught in the same process of time from which we seek to rescue our subjects. As we explain others to our contemporaries within their terms of reference, so we date ourselves in front of our sons and daughters. For when they become adults, they will demand biographies written in the terms they understand (Homburger & Charmley, 1988, p.128).

Of course, historians and novelists too are caught in the aspic of their times, but the echoes of the hauntological themes of my novel are also here – the past co-existing in the present, with both to be buried by, and resurrected in, the future.

¹⁸ A partial biography focuses on only a discrete part of a subject's life, and is also referred to as biographical memoir (Brien, 2014, p.12). My novel is therefore a partial biography of the country in that it focuses on specific times/events and leaves out entire decades.

The People



Figure 9 *The people: who can tell their stories?* 18 October 2016

The beach is virtually empty. A couple walks its length, his capped head bent low over her headscarfed one. Why, in this big emptiness, is there a need for them to talk so intimately, so intensely? At the far end of the beach a woman is walking her dog; that is, she holds a straight course while he runs in crazed zigzags, pursuing tantalising scents that suddenly disappear, and I recognise in his erratic dashes my own ‘re-searchings’ into unknowable pasts. The woman’s hands are thrust deep into her pockets, her body fashioned into a question mark by the fierce wind. Why is she here and why are her eyes fixed to the sand rather than out over the ocean? I can surmise of course but who can tell these people’s stories? Should they tell their own? And if so, who can speak for whom? If the couple recalls this walk one day, will the man’s memories differ from those of his female companion? Will their conversation resemble the song from *Gigi*: ‘*I remember it well*’?¹⁹

What of the two young surfers out in the freezing waves? How would their ‘Other’ version differ from that of the land-bound? Can I try to describe the beach from their vantage point or would they say that until I have stood on a wave I will never understand. But I have body-surfed the flanks of waves; I have been tumbled in surf. Can these commonalities, supplemented by imagination, outweigh the

¹⁹ Sample lyrics: <https://www.allmusicals.com/lyrics/gigi/irememberitwell.htm>

We met at nine, we met at eight, I was on time, no, you were late

Ah, yes, I remember it well

We dined with friends, we dined alone, a tenor sang, a baritone

Ah, yes, I remember it well.

differences? If a tsunami suddenly came our individual narratives would violently converge, as narratives did in colonial times when pioneers and indigenous people first came in contact, and then which of our voices would be heard?

Herodotus and Thucydides both wrestled with the issue of who should tell the story and how it should be told. Now history plays the same trick on them since these two men, who worked so hard to depict people and events, are themselves depicted variously. For example they are the subject of, and subject to, academic interpretation. Justin Campion (2003) provides a tidy, albeit overly-simplified summation of their two approaches, defining Herodotus' writing as memorialising and entertaining and that of Thucydides as analysing and describing (p.9). In some texts they are permitted to speak for themselves. Herodotus tells us: 'I propose to myself throughout my whole work faithfully to record the traditions of the several nations' (cited in Curthoys & Docker, 2004, p.18) while Thucydides admits, 'I have found it difficult to remember the precise words used in the speeches' (p.48). Yet even as we hear their voices, they are being transmuted across the millennia by the breath of translators.

As a novelist, I can take the liberty of imagining them going about their historical recordings. Thucydides, that lean, grizzled soldier-statesman, bitterly resents the limp that impairs his once quick stride - a memento from a battle when he was speared in the thigh. He is, however, secretly proud of the long, thin scar - the mark of a warrior - that runs down his cheek. Not for the world would he divulge that it was caused by a branch when, as a boy, he tumbled out of a tree while stealing apples. Conscious always of the importance of his self-imposed task, he weighs evidence and meticulously cross-references all information and has old-boy network ties to all the great leaders who can give him the inside lowdown on what really happened.

Herodotus is shorter, rounder and balding, with quick bright eyes and a smile that disarms. Carelessly toga-clad, he travels light, most of his bundle comprising the instruments of his trade (Scrolls? Papyrus? Pens? Writing sticks? These mundane details are vital to a novelist - are they so to a historian?). His manner is quiet, friendly, and he has a way of drawing people out. Women and slaves are particularly expansive under this unexpected attention. When confronted with different versions of the same tale, he sees it as his duty to include them all, little realising he is presaging pluralistic, postmodern narratives by a few millennia. Yet even Herodotus

could not resist inserting his own opinions as, for example, he did with regard to Helen of Troy (<http://www.sacred-texts.com/cla/hh/hh2120.htm>).

Discussions circulating the writing of history and fiction have waged from the beginning but became particularly contentious in the twentieth century with Collingwood (cited in Lemisko, 2004) describing history in terms of ‘imaginative re-enactment’. Words are quarried for meaning: what is ‘fact’, what is ‘truth’ etc. Is it better to refer to ‘facts’ as ‘events’? Can distinctions be drawn between ‘authenticity’, ‘veracity’ and ‘truth’? Southgate (2009) poses the question of whether our lives (and those of societies and states) are lived narratively – in which case these narratives are *factual* and the historian’s job is to retrieve and verify them – or whether this is a construction imposed retrospectively, in which case they are, in part, imaginative reconstructions of events and therefore, in a sense *fictional* (p.15). Hayden White (2005) points out that historians employ narrative techniques to give their writing more life and accessibility. These include ‘emplotment’, the treatment of historical personalities as characters, and the use of motif and symbol. He sees the value of rhetorical devices and narrative structures not only for representing the truth about the past but also for possible interpretations and meanings of this truth. Yet when he reflects on the nature of historical writing and how it relates to literary writing, he says:

For I am sure of one thing: the difference between modernism and postmodernism is the difference between a sensibility that still had faith in the effort to discover the ‘ontology’ of the world and one that no longer has such a faith. This difference is fundamental for our time (p.156).

Perhaps it is because I do not possess such a ‘faith’ – a belief and confidence that there is knowledge, ‘truth’, which might, through careful process and thought, be revealed as correct and static – that I write about Rhodesia/Zimbabwe as fiction which, by its very form, declares invention, interpretation and the authorial shaping of the narrative.

If we frame history as the ‘original’, Walter Benjamin’s essay *The Task of the Translator* (2002) has resonance because historical writing then becomes an act of ‘translation’. Benjamin points out that in translation, fidelity is often privileged over freedom, but he makes a compelling case for the latter ‘which proves its worth in the interest of pure language by its effect on its own language’ (p.261). The task of the translator is to release his own language in order to ‘liberate the language imprisoned in a work in his re-creation of that work’ (p.261). Construing Benjamin’s notion of

translation in terms of ‘history’ and ‘fiction’ might be self-serving but is nevertheless pertinent. He defines the relationship between the original and the translation as a tangent that lightly touches the circle at one point, and though this point may be infinitesimally small, from there the tangent continues on its own course in accordance to ‘the laws of fidelity in the freedom of linguistic flux’ (p.261). This image of the tangent is useful with regards to the relationship of my novel to the ‘events’ of history and the present. The novel cannot, of course, encompass the many decades and stories of millions of people, but I hope that in its infinitesimally small way it bears some fidelity to the events and to the female players in those events as it ‘translates’ them.

Yet even as I imagine the two ‘fathers’ of Western history, I am remembering Amanda Foreman’s claim that we can date the silencing of women to Mesopotamia, 2400BC, where one of the earliest known legal codes decreed that if a woman spoke out of turn her teeth would be smashed by a brick which would then be displayed at the front gate (Foreman, 2016). Nevertheless, the first named author - who emerged only fifty years later - was a woman, who wrote in the first person and used terms like ‘I feel, I think, I am’. Still, as Foreman points out, this tradition of silencing women continued with, for example, Homer’s Telemachus declaring speech is the business of men and Paul’s statements in the Bible requiring women to be silent - and this, Foreman asserts, is because ‘words equal power’.

Despite having been officially silenced over the millennia, women have always been quietly scribbling in the margins. Biographies written by and about women in previous centuries were spaces in which women’s voices could be heard, and more recent biographies are a means of writing back, of recovering women lost to history as well as a means to assert women’s ‘historical subjectivity’ (Spongberg, Caine & Curthoys, 2005, p.174). Hélène Cixous, a leading proponent of *écriture féminine*, writes in *Le rire de la Méduse (Laugh of the Medusa)* ‘Women must write her self: must write about women and bring women to writing’ (Cixous, 1976, p.257). Luce Irigaray bids us fill what she terms ‘the spaces that male-dominated discourse has left blank’ (Green & LeBihan, 1997, p.246). Contesting gender-driven binaries, Cixous seeks ‘feminine’ modes of discourse, because although she sees women trapped in phallogentric discourse, she believes that some freedoms can be found within it.²⁰ Playing on the word ‘voler’, she maintains that if women are ever going to fly or soar, first they need to ‘steal’ back from men their right to speak

²⁰ This contains echoes of Le Guinn’s ‘mother language’.

(Cixous, 1976, p.887). Writing in different genres, Cixous found spaces to write ‘the body’ as philosophical, poststructuralist, creative thinking. I am writing the stories of women who have been silent and silenced as a result of political or social agendas, and in order to do so I am using memoirs and collective biographies collated by women.

The Sands

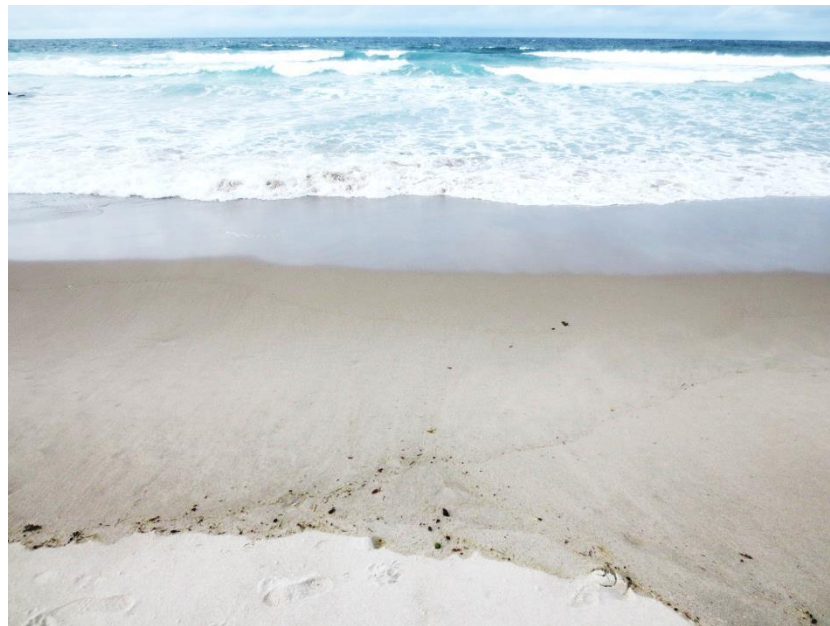


Figure 10 *The biggest, blankest page* 18 October 2016

Eddies of sand skitter across the beach, driven by mischievous winds, and I feel Manaia and all of his descendants once again tugging at my sleeve. We were here, they say, but I am not listening for I was here too and my own narrative so often gets in the way. On these sands younger iterations of myself played with my children, talked to friends – here, and here, and yes, over here too. Yet of course, Māori families also used to inhabit these beaches, gathering kai moana²¹, the women ‘gossiping’ while the men were involved in ‘important’ activities. They were here. They are here. As Derrida (1994) says, we need to listen. Derrida too is a ghost these days, starring on YouTube where he talks of how technology creates ghosts (Derrida, 1983). And I wonder at how personal histories are proliferating, fashioned out of Facebook postings, Twitter, Instagrams and selfies, all – consciously or unconsciously – self-selecting, self-editing. What will historians make of this avalanche of information in fifty or a hundred years’ time? Or will a giant magnet

²¹ Seafood.

erase it all in one huge cyber-crash, leaving us all as invisible as those Māori women gossiping, just to my left, three hundred years ago?

Where the tide has retreated, the wet sands mirror the clouds and sky, but as soon as I advance to seize this unprecedented opportunity to tread on a cloud the vision vanishes; a mirage, a chimera. This is the paradox of history. Within me, a sense of urgency is mounting. Having fled to this beach to escape, I now find the shape of that which I have been seeking in vain for months is suddenly, vividly, all about me. So many thoughts and I don't have pen or paper with me. What sort of writer am I not to have the tools of my trade with me? Then I see that I have the whole beach in front of me - the biggest, blankest page I've ever possessed - and I begin writing a mind-map in the sand with my finger. *Manaia, footprints, path less travelled. All the difference.* I write on, capturing rock pools, beach, tide and people in snapshot words – Twitter, as it were. New lines for new thoughts. My writing sprawls wider and wider across my wet canvas and I settle into this big space, the words curling in the arc of my arm's reach like a Gretchen Albrecht painting.²² As I write I get closer and closer to the water's edge, and my final words dissolve even as I form them.

When I am finished I step back to look on my work, hands on top of my head to prevent my cap from blowing off - but perhaps too a gesture of finality or surrender. It looks like a poem, this mind-map. I wonder what I may have overlooked and whether I can imprint it on my mind to transcribe later. Will my memory edit it and if so, how? Why, oh, why don't I have my phone to snapshot it? I could include myself in a selfie. The couple walks past and, glancing sideways at me, both smile before walking – surely knowingly? – right across my words. I'm taken aback. It's not vandalism; there isn't a hint of malice about them. But clearly, if you write words in the sand they are there to be trampled on. The act of writing, like history 'herself', elicits responses never intended or expected, ultimately giving way to those in the future who will write back to where I stand now. In the end, I feel the commonalities between historians, biographers and novelists are greater than their differences. We all seek understanding of the past, not only to make sense of our present but also to listen to ghosts - perhaps even enter a dialogue with them - while knowing it is also a dialogue with our personal selves.

²² New Zealand artist Gretchen Albrecht is famous for her hemisphere paintings, which she described as having a 'sensuousness and a female-relatedness that I can't describe in any other way. It had a generosity about it that the angular stretcher didn't have.'

I walk away from my mindmappoem. Already Manaia and all of his descendants are dancing across it, plucking at the words, filling the grooves. No matter, the sea will shortly erase it all.

But not entirely; for that moment is recorded here, present tense, although it is already in the past as I write, knowingly, for a future audience.

Just this.

Writing Colonial: Biding with Ghosts

While Billie was the catalyst for this project, she proved remarkably difficult to locate, to define. She left no written accounts of her life and her biography, though useful, was of limited value. I could construct a timeline of ‘events’ of Billie’s years in Africa but the woman herself was elusive, so overwritten was her story by her biographer’s assumptions and speculations posited as fact, with no referencing to support his claims. In a sense this was freeing, because I wanted to find Billie for myself, though pertinent material was scant. She is a few sentences or a footnote in histories, along with mentions of her in contemporary texts that, though affectionate, are offhand and brief. I therefore needed to locate her among the other pioneer women; if I could find them, glean their thoughts, their concerns, this might prove a means to penetrate Billie’s silences. Unfortunately, these women too had left so little of themselves behind. How was I to capture their faint, fragmented voices, and then how I might ‘translate’ these fragments into living characters that could speak without authorial agenda, post-colonial hindsight or twenty-first century preoccupations? Following Derrida’s suggestion of ‘being-with spectres’, I resolved to immerse myself in their texts and, as far as possible, set aside my own preconceptions and prejudices.

Informed by Foucault’s archaeological approach (1969), I gathered a range of women’s marginalia from the 1890s. This motley collection, all long out of print, did indeed resemble detritus: three memoirs, two collective biographies, a couple of newspaper articles and three fictional works. ‘Listening’ to these discarded, fragmentary sources for both their historical detail and what lay beneath became a tactic, but to fully understand them I needed also to listen to the silences – and in order to detect these silences I had to cross-reference the women’s writings with official histories, academic writings, masculine memoirs and information gleaned from internet sources. Women’s texts of this time are not only scant but, like all

writing, they have been shaped, either consciously or unconsciously, to fulfil functions that reach beyond the personal accounts they purport to be. Caution was thus required as I bided with my female ghosts to detect their elisions and omissions, and my research located a complex ‘complicity’ within which women have been represented by women and men alike. Women’s writing also fed – unwittingly? – into the weaving of a heroic Rhodesian identity that contributed to the oppression of indigenous peoples. Silence became further complicated within my own ability to listen and discern how to construct a novel that would traverse between collusion with and betrayal of these women of whom I’d grown inordinately fond.

A hauntological approach underlies the research, concerned as it is with the strange ‘in-between’ space that ‘reclaims the unspoken and neglected’ (Derrida, 1984, p.79) and became a means to trespass into the margins and interrogate the instabilities and erasures of memory, both personal and national. It also introduced ‘the possibility of engaging the disjunctive force of the past as a resource that can allow us to post new questions regarding our time and collective identity’ (p.83). Thus these 1890s texts, worked into Billie’s strand, informed – and contested, contradicted – the 1970s and present-day strands.

There has been little academic interest in these feminine writings and any that has appeared tends to be censorial, coming as it does from the vantage of a postcolonial framework (Cairnie, 2007). Colonial women, it has been suggested, suffer ‘double invisibility’ (Callaway & Helly, 1992) whereby historians tend to view the empire as a masculine space, while ‘academic feminists’ cannot feel affinity with them. As Chaudhuri and Strobel (1992) point out, ‘the study of Western women and imperialism is part of a process of studying not only the Other, but ourselves – and ourselves operating in less-than-politically-correct modes’ (p.290). The ambiguous relationship between the academic feminist and the colonial woman is exacerbated by the complex relationship the colonial woman has with empire; wherein she is both complicit with and resistant to the imperial vision (Callaway & Helly, 1992, p.80). But who exactly were these ‘colonial women’? Focusing on two collective biographies (gathered by women: woman writing, as Cixous might point out, ‘her self’), a memoir and an article, I will, as far as possible, let them speak for themselves. I also refer to two novels²³ for it appears women’s fiction was able to

²³ Cynthia Stockley’s novels were classed as ‘romance’. They do focus on relationships but arguably the greatest love depicted is that of the white settlers towards the African landscape. There were also masculine ‘romances’ in the heroic mould with men excelling at hunting and engaging in ferocious battles with natives. I found these less convincing than Stockley’s fiction.

accommodate spaces in which prevailing beliefs could be interrogated and subverted.

In 1960, Jessie Lloyd compiled a register, *Rhodesia's Pioneer Women 1859-1896*, each entry adhering to a format: (formal married) name, date of arrival, first and maiden names, and source of information. Sometimes there are a few biographical notes that provide ephemeral glimpses of people long vanished. For example:

MRS ARCHIE CAMPBELL 1896

Née Poppy Smith. Her husband was an 1890 Pioneer; he went back to the Union and returned with his wife in 1896 to be Native Commissioner at Fort Rixon. Mrs Campbell lived the rest of her life in Rhodesia; she died here in 1954 or 55. Information from her daughter-in-law. (Lloyd, 1960, p.7)

The gaps in the personal narrative are immediately apparent but despite the sketchiness of information this metadata yield a surprising wealth of information. Though many were British, there were women from diverse backgrounds such as Dutch, French and American. They were usually married - sometimes twice since a number were widowed. Deaths are often recorded: from malaria, black water and rheumatic fever. There were accidents. Mrs Nel, for example, was run over by a wagon wheel (Lloyd, 1960, p.30). A number died in the 1896 conflicts. Many accompanied husbands, fiancés or siblings to Rhodesia, though of course this register does not reveal the discussions - perhaps passionate arguments - underlying those decisions to come. Nuns, missionaries and nurses were drawn by vocation. Some women came as maids or child nurses. A number of women were enterprising, setting up tearooms, lodgings, stores, laundries etc.

Stories lurk behind sentences. Mrs Crombie 'having travelled the world, finally arrived in Rhodesia, met her husband and remained in the country' (Lloyd, 1960, p.10). Mrs Bertelsen 'was murdered during the rebellion, together with her husband and four sons' (p.4). Phrases capture not only the idiom of the time but admired qualities. Mrs Biller was 'a real good sort' (p.5) and Mrs Pascoe 'the soul of goodness' (p.32), while Mrs Von Hirschburg had 'indomitable courage, humour, generosity and kindness' (p.42). Many women were described as 'plucky', a trait clearly venerated.

It is easy, at first, to miss the silences. No Indian women are listed, although there was a tiny Indian community (Keppel-Jones, 1983, p.421). There is no mention

of prostitutes. Are terms like ‘hotel owner’ and ‘barmaid’ a whitewash? Are such ‘unsavoury’ details left out or are the women themselves excluded from the record? ‘Spectres’ are elusive, but as Derrida predicted, technology can encourage them. Diane Jeater referred in one article to French Marie, a successful brothel owner, who ‘dressed and acted as a man, with a pistol ever ready’ (Jeater, 2000, p.33) yet in Lloyd’s text she is recorded as owning only a mine and butchery, and is circumspectly described by her daughter as ‘a great character and much loved’ (p.3). However there are several references to French Marie online, including one account on the *Memories of Rhodesia* website²⁴ written by a great-granddaughter. It draws on familial anecdotes, and describes how French Marie not only ran brothels but also gambled, drank in bars and fought with her fists – rambunctious details that do not surface in either contemporary accounts or official histories.

Billie is listed, fittingly, as Viscomtess de la Panouse and Lloyd records her adventures ambiguously: ‘Known affectionately as “Billy”. Came from England on the same boat as the Viscomte, then travelled with his party...disguised as a youth. They were married in Salisbury.’ Billy is described as courageous, charming and ‘really a splendid little heroine and deservedly popular’ (p.32). Would she have been included on this register had she not entered into a prestigious marriage?

Cynthia Stockley (1873-1936) has a much truncated biography. She wrote nearly 20 novels and collections of short stories, and her sales, at one period, rivalled those of H. Rider Haggard. Several novels were turned into Hollywood films. In 1936 she committed suicide in England. Yet she is listed, almost anonymously, by her second husband’s name: Mrs Pelham Browne. Lloyd briefly records Stockley’s family connections before summing up her writing career as: ‘She wrote several books about Rhodesia’ (p.7). Lloyd certainly knew of Stockley’s successes for they are recorded in Jeannie Boggie’s book (1954) which Lloyd used as a reference text. There is no mention of Stockley’s death either – at the time it would have been classed a crime.

We meet the women themselves in two texts where they speak - for the most part - in their own voices. While *Adventures in Mashonaland* (Blennerhassett & Sleeman, 1893) was ostensibly written by two nurses, it is clear Rose Blennerhassett is the primary author and it fits well within the then burgeoning field of travel writing (O’Cinneide, 2012). The second text is the eclectic *Experiences of Rhodesia’s Pioneer Women: Being a True Account of the Adventures of the Early*

²⁴ <http://www.memoriesofrhodesia.com/pages/newsletter/memorylane/memorylane0109.html>

White Women Settlers in Southern Rhodesia from 1890 Elicited and Arranged by Jeannie M. Boggie. This volume, compiled in 1938, is a curious patchwork of interviews with pioneers in their later years, as well as extracts from memoirs, letters and diaries. There are also second-hand accounts, passed on by family members. Boggie stitched these together, at times overwriting the entries, presumably to provide greater cohesion, but this can complicate issues of authorship when Boggie's voice subsumes the original. In her preface Boggie explains that she compiled this text after realising that while a considerable number of books had been written about and by the male pioneers, few had been written about the part played by the women pioneers. It was not meant to be biographical but rather a 'human story connected with the early days in Rhodesia – days of well-nigh unbelievable hardships, noble endeavour and dogged perseverance' (Boggie, 1954, p.v). This enterprise provides an invaluable record of the adventurous exploits of pioneer women ranging from the amusing to the tragic.

It is impossible not to be charmed by the nursing sisters or many of the women in Boggie's collection. They relate their tales with verve and were an intrepid group - as they had to be, for:

the way from Cape Town to Mashonaland was long and perilous. Swamps, which exhaled poisonous vapours had to be crossed. Boats and canoes were not to be procured; the men were forced to swim across. Oxen fell sick, and died by the score on the long trek. Fever ravaged the pioneers (Blennerhassett & Sleeman, 1969, p.26).

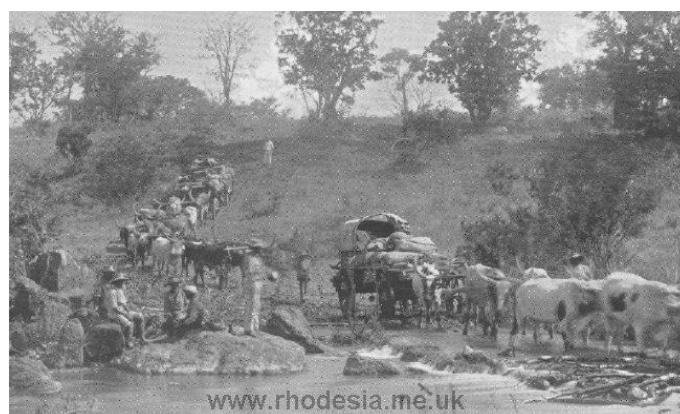


Figure 11 *On trek.* <https://goo.gl/NJJxwA> 21/11/17

There were also wild animals, starvation and accidents. Many pioneers died.

One thing that comes to my mind today...was the number of graves one saw along the road. I think it was at the Lundi River we counted about forty; while at other places we saw a single grave, or several together. I don't suppose one could find a trace of one quarter of these graves today. Such is a pity; as they serve as milestones, and are an

indication of the difficulties that were encountered by the early pioneers of this country in opening it up (Boggie, 1954, p.56).

Illness and death also visited their children. One baby passed away and ‘was then laid in another hut to await burial the next day; but oh! What a ghastly sight met our eyes in the morning. The rats had eaten almost half of the little face away’ (Boggie, 1954, p.169).

Hopes were high as people travelled north into Rhodesia but for the most part these were painfully dashed. Yet Mrs Bent is representative of the spirit of these women. ‘Many of the trek were almost destitute, owing to losses in stock. We had now been six months in a wagon; with many hardships and privations. But we were still undaunted’ (p.161). Their endurance was extraordinary. Mrs Tulloch walked two hundred miles, the last fifty with wadded shoes which caused great agony. When they finally reached a hut she recalls the joy of having ‘a roof over my head, and level floor under me and felt as if I were in the lap of luxury’ (p.96).

Anecdotes are often amusing for, as the nurses point out, ‘A person who takes life too seriously ...who can extract no fun from the odd contrivances one has recourse to, and the many inevitable difficulties, must obviously be very unhappy’ (Blennerhassett & Sleeman, 1969, p.206). There are entertaining accounts of the make-do, can-do approach of the early pioneers, Mrs Nesbitt describing life as ‘simple and unconventional’ (Boggie, 1954, p.121). Dances were ‘delightfully jolly, free-and-easy affairs’ (p.146) and there were many happy memories, much ‘kindheartedness and goodfellowship’ (p.119).



Figure 12 *Edmond and Billie entertaining*: Reprinted with permission, Panouse Archives

Encounters with ‘natives’ were, from the white women’s point of view, cordial and there are numerous records of amicable intercultural dealings, especially during the early 1890s. The fascination with ‘other’ appears to have been mutual.

Blennerhassett describes how when they were eating in their tent, ‘a troop of natives would glide silently up to it, squat in a semicircle close to the opening, and watch us intently. ...The natives could not understand our waists, or how we contrived to induce the food to pass our waist-bands’ (Blennerhassett & Sleeman, 1969, p.104). There is, however, a distinct sense of racial superiority. Blennerhassett describes Chiconga, a chieftainess, as ‘small, slight, very ugly and not unlike an ill-nourished monkey’ (p.244) though Blennerhassett concedes ‘she was a gentle savage, not without mother wit’ (p.244). When Chiconga gives a clever response to a question, Blennerhassett declares, ‘Truly a woman, savage or civilized, is rarely at a loss for an answer!’ (p.245). Blennerhassett also acknowledges the skills of the Shona - recording, for example, an incident where a group of white hunters kept missing their shots when chasing game. ‘The natives, who are all very keen sportsmen, lost all patience, threw down their bundles, and proceeded to hunt a buffalo ... and succeeded in killing him with their assegais after some little time’ (p.130).

While the Shona worked for the pioneers in the early years, they maintained their autonomy. Workers ‘came and went at their own caprice. Sometimes we had a good staff, sometimes only one boy for everything’ (p.217). Yet Blennerhassett also noted that while the Bishop worked his natives hard and paid them little,

he was the only person in the country with whom the natives would stay. I think one reason of his success in managing natives lay in the fact that he treated them consistently. His boys²⁵ were neither playthings nor slaves; were well fed, regularly paid, and cared for when sick (Blennerhassett & Sleeman, 1969, p.180).

In contrast, the Chartered Company paid only one pound a month and found it hard to obtain labour. ‘Of course the Company’s natives had many masters – some were good, others brutal and drunken; drinking was beginning to take very great proportions in Umtali. It was sad, terrible, yet men had very many excuses’ (p.181).

Blennerhassett’s candour is unusual in two regards. Firstly, ill-treatment of workers is not generally related in other memoirs, masculine or feminine. Instead,

²⁵ ‘Boy’ was used to describe indigenous men up until the 1970s. Indigenous women were often referred to as ‘girls’ or ‘nannies’

many provide numerous anecdotes of native foolishness told with exasperated good humour. Her sentences also subvert by revealing widespread alcoholism, and though Blennerhassett immediately outlines the privations and hardships that drove men to these excesses, she also identifies alcohol as a contributing cause to ill-health and accidents (p.181). Tanser (1965) records how in the early 1890s the pioneers' reputation as heavy drinkers was established (p.56), yet while Boggie's book contains some humorous accounts of 'tipsiness', none voice criticism. Stockley, in contrast, depicts the corrosive effects of alcoholism in her 1923 novel, boldly titled *Ponjola* – a slang term for drink.

There are other silences. No mention is made of the passes blacks were required to carry to enter white settlements from as early as 1893 (Keppel-Jones, 1983, p.617). The women do not talk of the hut tax, instigated in 1894 to force the indigenous people into a cash economy and thus ensure cheap labour for European enterprises (Knight, 1975, p.4; Keppel-Jones, 1983, p.400). Nor do they mention how cattle were seized and crops burnt, also to this end (Bonello, 2010, p.347). The nurses had left Rhodesia by this time but did the other women not know of these events or is there complicity in their silence? Miscegenation is not alluded to either though it was not uncommon (Bonello, 2010, p.351). It is again fiction that dares to explore colonial shadowlands. Olive Schreiner's *Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland* (1897) is an indictment of white men's behaviour towards black women but was dismissed as 'blasphemous and anti-British' (Cairnie, 2007, p.70).

Boggie never feigns objectivity and her exuberance leads to over-colouring. In describing Fanny Pearson, Boggie writes, 'She was forbidden to go up-country; but plucky little Billy resolved not to be beaten. By hook or by crook, she would get there' (Boggie, 1954, p.42). While this overblown style is in keeping with Boggie's intent to celebrate the courage of the women pioneers, it is necessary to attend closely to her accounts. Is it out of fondness for Billie that Boggie is careful to point out that on the ship to Africa the count travelled first class, Fanny in second (p.42)? Boggie is vague when she writes that 'it was only later on' (p.44) that they married. In fact it was four years later. Boggie also corrects 'several mistaken stories' to explain that 'Billy' met the count when he stayed at her mother's boarding house. However, Fanny's biographer claims she ran away to London from her farming family when she was fifteen (Cary, 1973, p.108), possibly turning to prostitution to support herself. Fanny was apparently evasive about her origins but on what authority did Boggie base her assertions? Again, we must wonder if Fanny's

marriage redeemed her in society's eyes for Boggie did not include French Marie in her book even though this feisty woman was still living in Rhodesia at the time.

Stockley's novel *The Claw* (1911) makes it clear that women who transgressed moral codes were as castigated in the pioneer society as they would have been in the drawing-rooms of Victorian London. Can we trust a somewhat vindictive fiction about vindictive women? Boggie devotes several pages to Stockley, based on conversations they had, and records Stockley as stating that most of the events and situations in her books were founded on fact. However, we need also to recognise that these conversations would have taken place many years earlier, a fact Boggie neglects to mention so the unreliability of memory needs to be taken into account.

Indebted as I am to Boggie, I approach her book with caution. Many of the recorded incidents were only been retold many years later, edited by time and memory. Perhaps unsurprisingly, none relate the poor behaviour of settlers. If there was any soul-searching, late at night, it is never mentioned. Boggie also collected the tales of the women who remained – but what of the women who left? What would their memories have been?

Boggie has been accused of aiming to 'produce a heroic, nationalist, sanitized, white and (although Boggie never uses the word) feminist narrative of the settlement' (Cairnie, 2007, p.68). This postcolonial summation, though hard to refute, also seems a little harsh. Perhaps Boggie did overreach herself in her exuberant praise which elevated the pioneer women to heroine status but maybe she would have described herself more as patriotic rather than nationalistic. Should her overblown style be interpreted as jingoism? It is admittedly hard to read without wincing: 'Saturday, 4th November 1893! A new country has been added to the British Empire. Hip-hip-hurrah!' (p.222). Her accounts are most definitely white – but 'sanitized'? How much was she consciously grooming her material?

Is it possible Boggie was merely operating within the late Victorian-Edwardian belief systems in which she had been raised? She may well have been racist: but was that her personal failing or was it also the failing of her upbringing? And I cannot help but wonder at the inclusion of four photographs in her book, which do not relate to the content. They depict black women on her farm, - by their huts, singing, sitting outside with their children. Is there affection in this inclusion or a nod to some ethnic balance, perhaps? Just as we cannot help but judge from our

times, with our beliefs, perhaps she could not free herself of hers. I feel a need to tread lightly.



Figure 13 *Raising the Union Jack* . <https://goo.gl/Ro2B5e> 21/11/2017

Cairnie (2007) describes Boggie and her contributors as rehearsing ‘the masculine narratives of the empty land waiting to be conquered and occupied’ (p.68). However, apart from reflecting the imperial creeds with which they’d grown up, it must also be remembered that these women had for the most part come from a relatively small, densely populated island. Perhaps they came not so much to conquer as to escape. Even in these days of easy international travel, parts of Zimbabwe still feel vast and underpopulated. Blennerhassett wrote:

It is impossible to travel through these immense fertile solitudes, without a feeling of intense wonder and regret that so many thousands of human beings should live their whole lives herded together in the pestilential slums of European cities (Blennerhassett & Sleeman, 1969, p.161).

Blennerhassett looked forward a time when there would be good food and housing, sufficient clothing and the eradication of disease, and this vision no doubt was shared by many pioneers oblivious to - or disregarding? - the fact that this land was already occupied.



Figure 14 *Zimbabwe can still feel vast and underpopulated.* 5 May 2014

This last point brings us to the 1896 uprisings²⁶. Mrs Marshall Hole wrote an account of the Shona settler conflict because, ‘so far as I know, none have told what we Englishwomen went through in June, 1896, when without warning the natives rose in rebellion and in a few days murdered in cold blood so many white men, women and little children’ (Boggie, 1954, p.71). It appears she was taken completely unawares as she describes being with her husband and daughter,

and so unconscious of my oldest friends were lying stark and dead within a few miles of us, we were entertaining a few people at dinner, and laughing and chatting, and making plans for picnics without a suspicion of what the next day had in store for us’ (p.71).

For the whites, the following months were ones of terror, with tales of family massacres that sent shock waves through the tiny society. Armed conflict drew the whites together and they began, unconsciously perhaps, creating a mythology wherein lives lost became viewed as sacrifices for future peace and prosperity (Bonello, 2010, p.352). Hairbreadth escapes were celebrated and several ‘were due to the splendid heroism of the womenfolk who, when their men were wounded, seized the rifles and kept the savages at bay’ (Boggie, 1954, p.266). The actions of the Shona (now termed savages) were denigrated as murder and massacre, while the actions of the settlers were framed in terms of righteous retribution. For example, after one attack ‘the rebels fled into caves in the rocks. Later, our men attacked with

²⁶ Or First Chimurenga (liberation war). The Ndebele rose in March of that year and the Shona in June. Rhodes met with the Ndebele to broker peace and the Shona uprising petered out in the face of the superior weapons of the settler community.

dynamite and killed most of the rebels' (Boggie, 1954, p.266). Mrs Marshall Hole, the narrator, does not mention whether there were women, children, old or injured among the rebels.



Figure 15 Edmond (seated second left) and this party narrowly escaped during the First Chimurenga as they travelled along the Umtali Road back to the Salisbury laager Miss Carter (centre) figures in the novel. Reprinted with permission: Panouse archives

The uprisings were crushed and the fate of the Shona and Ndebele tribes were sealed for the next eight decades. The pioneers appear to have been both outraged and taken aback that the 'cowardly' Shona had risen up against them. Mrs Marshall Hole wrote: 'It will be asked: "What made the Mashonas rebel?" and it is difficult to find an explanation' (Boggie, 1954, p.73). She blamed the witchdoctors for inciting hatred, suggesting they were resentful not only of the law banning sorcery but also of the loss of their influence over their people to the missions and schools. Again, there is no mention of hut taxes, of white farms, missions and mines pegged out on Shona land or of cattle confiscations. Fear polarises attitudes and Mrs Marshall Hole is particularly vehement in her descriptions.

When their first timidity had been overcome by the murder of a few prospectors, the savages were like ravenous beasts thirsting for blood, and ruthlessly murdered and mutilated every white person within reach, not even sparing the unfortunate coolie traders nor the colonial natives who were working for the Europeans (Boggie, 1954, p.73).

In her account, there is no record of what retaliation was taken but Mrs Marshall Hole did point out that the witchdoctors had 'paid the penalty of their sins' (they were hanged) and that 'the irresistible force of civilisation is pursuing its course'

(p.73). Chillingly, she concluded, ‘Whether or not there will be any recurrence of this fanatical outbreak, time alone can show; but at any rate we shall never again be caught napping, for no one can possibly obliterate from memory the terrible events which ushered in the rebellion of June, 1896’ (p.73).

Over the following decades the tiny white minority would pass many laws to increasingly restrict the indigenous peoples, all in the name of maintaining peace. and these appeared, on the surface, to work. Some fifty years later Boggie would write, ‘All these events happened during the difficult period of Southern Rhodesia’s babyhood and childhood. Today the country is free from native unrest’ (1954, p.279). Boggie, it would seem, shared the same myopia as the women in the 1890s, for within that same decade political unrest was to come again and would continue to erupt and escalate, culminating eventually in bloodied civil war in the 1970s. Did she not feel the tremors? Was her farm as serene as the photographs of those women workers suggest?

And so it goes with my ghosts. Reading their accounts, I learn of their daily lives and the rhythm of their speech but I am less confident I am learning how they truly thought. I admire their courage, their ‘pluck’, their laughter in the face of trials. I feel their pain in the loss of loved ones. I can understand their fear. I recognise they were trapped in the mores of their times – just as I am, for I cannot share their Victorian attitudes nor endorse their imperial vision.

This dichotomy complicated my depiction of the settler community since so many of my own creeds are at odds with theirs. I ended up feeling Janus at times, writing with two faces - writing colonial but subverting too - and I was grateful for the mantle of fiction which gave me some room for ambiguity, for leaving spaces that readers could interpret. Perhaps most disturbing was to see the echoes of attitudes that would carry into the 1970s, and to see errors made in the 1890s compounded in the following decades. The more the settler community ringed itself with physical and legal barriers, the more it enforced the indigenous people to comply with imperial codes, mores and demands, the greater the resentment that rose up against them. The tragedy – perhaps inevitability – was that goodwill between the peoples on the individual level could be dissipated and overrun in the greater picture, with such disastrous consequences, both immediately and in the future.

Writing Post-Colonial: Trespassing

If I'd thought it difficult to locate a colonial voice, the decision of whether to include a significant black character became a vexed issue. My instinctive stance was that I had no right to trespass; I did not want to appropriate or to silence. Clea is a white protagonist and initially I thought her story would unfold in two narrative strands; her return to Zimbabwe with her adopted-out daughter, Lu, was set in the present day while her memories would comprise the 1970s strand. However, when I began to write these strands, the book was suddenly like an unbalanced lump of clay on a potter's wheel. It rapidly became unwieldy and, worse, there was no interrogation of the white standpoint. Even the inclusion of a politically liberal character would leave the white minority centre stage with the blacks crowded silent in the wings. This did not reflect the reality of the 1970s, during which the blacks fought strongly to claim this stage. I therefore required a different foothold for this strand and the silence surrounding the ex-guerrilla women seemed, on an intuitive level, a space that might be accommodated within the novel. I therefore resolved to interview female ex-guerrillas and, with their permission, incorporate their stories into my novel as either fiction or oral histories.

Postcolonial theory, however, filled me with unease - shifting, complex, conflicted and disputed as it is. The titles alone of papers contained in the tome *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin, 1995) raise questions to which there are no easy or satisfactory answers: *Can the Subaltern Speak?* (Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak), *Who is Ethnic?* (Werner Sollers), *Who Can Write as Other?* (Margaret Fee), and *What Ish [sic] My Nation?* (David Cairns and Shaun Richards). Postcolonial language is characterised by complexity, hybridity and constant change since texts bring 'language and meaning to a discursive site in which they are mutually constituted and at this site the importance of usage is inescapable' (Ashcroft 1995, p.300). Terms such as *Other/other*, *ethnic*, *native*, *hybrid*, *voice*, *authentic*, *subaltern*, *boundaries* and *margins* become highly charged and are often slippery within postcolonial discourse.

The overlap of Western feminism with African academe further problematises the issues and I struggled to define my own *position of location* (Lal, 1996, p.186). My initial reservations and anxieties about the creative project deepened as I was forced into self-analysis. Am I Pākehā/Kiwi with Zimbabwean roots? To what extent does my Rhodesian core or my British ancestry colour my

interpretations? Am I Insider, having been born in Africa, or Outsider because of the colour of my skin, my parents' immigrant status, and/or my own emigrant status. Jayati Lal, attempting to define her own Insider/Outsider status when going back to her homeland, said, 'I was a "native" returning to a foreign country' (1996, p.192), a statement that resonated with my own visits to Zimbabwe. In which case, am I 'speaking from' or 'speaking of' in the creative project? Perhaps more importantly, who am I 'speaking for' and who am I 'speaking to'?

This leads to questions circulating the nature of fiction. Are authors always Other in relation to their characters or do they, in the creation of story and the craft of writing, necessarily occupy both Insider and Outsider status? These questions were of particular significance as I agonised over whether or not to include a significant black protagonist. On the one hand, inclusion might be seen as appropriation; on the other, exclusion might be viewed as silencing.

Pertinent to this section were texts and collective biographies of experiences of black women in Rhodesia gathered (again, by women) in the 1980s and early 1990s to counter, in some small way, the dominant discourse, censorship and propaganda that had been promulgated by the white regime. Yet immediately the issue of Western feminism is apparent. These studies, valuable in terms of research and resources, were largely led by white women, with the assistance of black women translators, and are therefore open to being construed as neo-imperialist discourse. Sekai Nzenza, a Zimbabwean academic, argues that the representation of African women has been caught between 'masculinist African national discourse and that of white Western feminist scholarship' (Darby, 1997, p.215-16). These academic women, albeit filled with the best of intentions, privilege gender over race and class, thus universalising their own experiences and, in the process, appropriating the experiences of African women and silencing them. Chandra Mohanty (1995) suggests that feminist writings tend to colonise the material and historical heterogeneities of the black women, re-presenting them as a composite, singular representation 'Third World Woman' which bears the 'authorising signature of Western humanist discourse' (p.260). This was the risk I would run if I wrote a black protagonist.

Margaret Strobel worked extensively with East African women and was particularly interested in insider/outsider relationships. She was dependent on interpreters but while acknowledging that they often had more nuanced understanding of situations and language, she believed the relationship of the

interpreter with the interviewees could itself be affected by social, cultural or personal differences of which she was unaware and which could lead to cover-ups or topic avoidances. Outsider status could be advantageous, she noted, when it came to moving neutrally through the classes or conflicting groups (1977, p.69).

Yet despite the hazards of appropriating and/or silencing black women, the research and collective biographies of white women academics have proved valuable and thought-provoking and their motivations for their work are generally stated in the introductions to their projects. *None but Ourselves: Masses vs Media in the Making of Zimbabwe* is a bricolage of newspaper articles and radio and television interviews, songs, pamphlets and personal interviews with men and women, white and black. Julie Frederiskse (1982) began this project in the aftermath of the 1980 landslide elections that voted Robert Mugabe into power. In her introduction, she describes the white and international communities as ‘stunned’ while black Zimbabweans were ‘jubilant’ and her aim was to account for such differences in the least prejudicial manner possible. She goes on to point out that, ‘Of the many voices in this book, there is one that is distanced from the others. That is the author’s voice’ (p.vi). Her analysis and explanations are differentiated by bold type in a bid for transparency in a milieu that had been riddled with misinformation and propaganda. It is ‘an effort to document a war of words and ideas, through the words and ideas of the people who fought this media war. Theirs is a history that might have been lost had it not been told now’ (p.vi).

While Frederiskse is scrupulous in her approach, the selection and arrangement of these items cannot help but be shaped by authorial agenda, albeit unconsciously. It is, however, an invaluable scrapbook of the turbulent 1970s where the voices of white soldiers are placed alongside those of black villagers; where government propaganda is set against chimurenga songs. There are wincing examples of racist humour and deeply disturbing accounts of atrocities inflicted by the different armies. Yet the depiction of the early 1980s optimism and excitement for the new Zimbabwe exemplifies the complexity of speaking in generalities or certainties. History went on to undermine some assertions. For example, there is denial of intertribal rivalry, labelling it as a white man’s devisory tactic (p.225), yet within only a few years Gukurahundi²⁷ would sweep through the southern region as Mugabe’s Shona forces deliberately targeted, tortured, raped and massacred many

²⁷ Gukurahundi loosely translates to ‘the early rain which washes away the chaff before the spring rains.’ It is believed up to 20 000 Ndebele civilians were massacred.

thousands of Ndebele people. The personal value of this text, however, lay in the acutely uncomfortable reminder of the deeply ingrained white attitudes, while it also opened up spaces for black realities of that time.

Elizabeth Schmidt (1992) wrote *Peasants, Traders, & Wives: Shona Women in the History of Zimbabwe, 1870-1939* to reveal how black men and women experienced colonialism differently, the black women suffering not only from punitive colonial laws but also from male domination from within their societies. It was useful in providing nuance to my understanding of the underlying power relations in the 1890s with reference to the black women that Billie would have encountered and who would have been caught up in the First Chimurenga. It also provided background into Ruth's lineage.

Situating women within the 1970s war is the subject of a number of studies (for example, O'Gorman, 2011; Enloe, 2010) but of particular value to this project was Tanya Lyon's *Guns and Guerrilla Girls: Women in the Zimbabwean National Liberation Struggle* (2004) in which she conducted extensive interviews of both Shona and Ndebele ex-combatant women within post-colonial and feminist frameworks. Lyons cites Jean Bethke Elshtain, who argued that women are largely excluded from war story – in both history and fiction – partly because of who decides on the definition and location of the 'front' and 'who is authorised to narrate' (p.25). In this work, 'guerrilla girls' are quoted extensively, and by re-presenting their experiences in their own words, their 'voices are the signifiers of their no longer being the subaltern' (p.11). Lyons details problems circulating the Western feminist-Africanist, and positions herself outside a neo-imperial discourse, presenting herself as being as unimportant and unobtrusive as possible during her interviews (p.7). Strobel also advocated this approach, although she later wondered if this might have been interpreted as being aloof or uninterested (1977, p.69).

Lyons kindly sent me transcripts of the interviews which were invaluable although, having conducted my own New Zealand oral history projects, I was struck by their clarity and 'smoothness'. The interviews are transcribed in first person but it is hard to know what editing – if any – went into presenting these apparently verbatim accounts that contained none of the tangents, circumlocutions, hesitations or repetitions so common to the spoken word. The power of these guerrilla women's stories resides in their resilience to appalling conditions. There was great hunger, a lack of clothing, medical and basic facilities in the camps which were also

sometimes target to brutal attacks by the Rhodesian forces.²⁸ There was also sexual abuse by their own male comrades, and the birth of children outside the marriage traditions of lobolo.²⁹ After the war, female ex-combatants were stigmatised as murderers or prostitutes (Lyons, p.279, 291). For this reason, many chose to silence their own voices (p.291).

Young Women in the Liberation Struggle: Stories and Poems from Zimbabwe (1984), edited by Kathy Bond-Steward and assisted by Leocardia Chimbandi Mudimu, is another fascinating collection of young women's testimonies, written in first person but clearly edited and probably translated. There is, however, something lacking in the individuality of the voices themselves, exhibiting instead a certain uniform stiltedness – i.e. short, simple sentences and high-frequency words – that may come from the young women speaking in English, their second language, or as a result of translation.

'The first time I experienced danger was in Pasichigare, near the town Chimoio in July 1978. It was Monday morning and we were at school. We saw jet fighters followed by helicopters and mirages. Suddenly I ran into the long grass and trees. I had no one beside me or behind me.' Clara Rori (p. 13.)

'I was chosen to go and do military nursing in Cuba... The Cubans like foreigners and regard it as a privilege to have a foreign friend. They like sport, dancing and festivals. They have many festivals and always invite their president Fidel Castro, who they like very much.' Gladys Moyo (p.13)

'It was in 1987 when I was chosen to do military training in China for 6 months. We arrived at our destination... late at night but that did not stop us seeing the many colours in the streets of Peking. It was just how I imagined paradise.' Jaqueline Turani (p.13)

I had a particular interest in these patterns of speaking in that I was trying to 'hear' the voices themselves of the young women - not only across nearly four decades, but also across racial, cultural and language barriers, in order that I might 'translate'³⁰ them in the creative project. This revealed to me how difficult the task would be, because when speaking in their own languages these women might present their

²⁸ Vastly outnumbered in the bush, the Rhodesian forces, with superior technology and weapons, on occasion attacked some training camps where guerrillas were amassed to inflict greatest damage.

²⁹ This 'bride price' or 'bride wealth' is similar to a dowry wherein the groom traditionally offered cattle to the bride's parents. These days, offers can include cash or other inducements.

³⁰ This is a riff on my interpretation, in the *Writing History* chapter, of Walter Benjamin's discussion on translation. I can never reproduce the actual speech of the fighters but I hope (paraphrasing and reconstruing Benjamin's argument), to 'liberate' the language depicted in one work in my own re-creation. I used a similar approach with the Billie strand.

accounts very differently. In the fictional works of Gappah, Dangarembga and Bulawayo, dialogues tend to be far more ‘free-flowing’ and colloquial.

Irene Staunton’s *Mothers of the Revolution* is a collective biography of rural women’s memories of the Liberation War gathered with translators Elizabeth Ndebele and Margaret Zingani. She believed that if these women were not recorded, they would not be heard within the larger context of Zimbabwe’s history (cited in Kaler, 1997, p.2). Staunton, recognising the fragility of individual voices, felt that in offering the narratives of some, a collective biography of many might be constituted.

Their stories capture the terror of the time, trapped as these rural women were between the ‘defence forces’ and the *vakomana*,³¹ with both sides demanding loyalty and information, and the *vokomana* also requiring food and clothes from villagers who already had so little. The women worried for their children caught up as either *chimbwidos*³² or *mujibas*³³ and about those who had slipped away to join the guerrilla movements.

These poignant testimonies reveal the Rhodesia I knew little of – glimpsed only from car windows or captured in brief news items. However, Caroline Rooney (1991) points out that these personal accounts need to be read with caution because the literate/illiterate power balance might encourage women to recall things in the manner they believed was expected. Also, given the sensitive politics both of the 1970s and of post-independence of Zimbabwe where individual safety is never taken for granted, there may be adopted strategies: ‘not only a strategic silence, a pretended ignorance, but also deliberate mis-information and the development of language codes. It can be surmised that they, or some of them, became adept at disguising not-telling as telling and a telling-of-what-the-other-wants-to-hear and so on’ (p.62). Staunton, however, might refute this claim because she claims rural women ‘are emotionally very honest. They are not looking over their shoulders at their audience; they are saying what they think and they are saying it forthrightly’ (Xu, 2011, p.3).

Rooney’s comments might also pertain to the subjects of Lyons’ and other studies, and the feasibility of shaping a convincing black character out of such ambiguity filled me with what Maria Lugones (1987) termed ‘lack of ease’. Based on her own experiences as a Latino moving to America, Lugones’ treatise on ‘world-

³¹ ‘The boys’: a colloquial term for guerrilla fighters.

³² Girls who cooked, carried weapons and supplies, gathered information etc. for the guerrillas.

³³ Young boys who helped with information, stood guard, carried messages etc. for the guerrillas.

travelling’ explores what happens when the traveller, wilfully or not, moves out of the ‘mainstream’ (or, to steal Bourdieu’s term, ‘habitus’) in which she is comfortable to another construction of life where she is the outsider – a position that is in some ways reflected during the writing of fiction. While living in the United States, Lugones encountered ‘arrogant perception’ (p.4) along with ignoring and banishing behaviours, and believes Anglo women want Latinos out of their field of vision.

There are echoes of these behaviours in the colonial reactions to indigenous peoples, the difference being that it was the settlers who were outsiders.³⁴ However, in taking their ‘habitus’ with them – Victorian legal, educational, religious, cultural, linguistic and societal frameworks – and recreating it in Mashonaland, they constructed a world view in which the indigenous people were, in effect, designated Other. It is here that I believe the kernel for the 1890s narrative strand resides. This attitude - this clinging to habitus - I suspect went far deeper than the greed and land hunger usually ascribed to colonial societies. The colonists may have had their impetus in the quest for wealth, but the development of settlements came out of the drive to replicate their already-existing, deep-grained habitus (though inevitably that was modified and changed to meet differing circumstances)³⁵ in the face of this foreignness - this Other - that surrounded them.

Arguably, 1970s Rhodesia also exhibited the arrogant perception and reactive behaviours of labelling and ignoring. The white regime banished blacks to the peripheries of towns and into Tribal Trust Lands (TTLs). There are echoes of the desire to banish Other in the present-day too; for example, in Australia’s containment of refugees on offshore sites and in the vigorous European and American debates on the closure of borders to certain groups.

Christine Sylvester posits Maria Lugones’ notion of ‘world-travelling’ as a methodology that utilises empathy as a means to ‘enter into the spirit of difference and find in it an echo of oneself as other than the way one seems to be’ (1995,

³⁴ Here I am resorting to broad-brush categories (as indeed Lugones may have done) to make a point, while recognising that these pioneers were a widely diverse group with equally diverse motives.

³⁵ Heidegger’s notion of ‘worlding’ has resonance with ‘habitus’. Heidegger sees humans as spatio-temporal beings, shaped by their existence in time and place with “a certain past, a personal and cultural history, and by an open series of possibilities” (cited in Critchley, 2009). Thus the pioneers were indeed of imperial mould; it was part of their ‘thrownness’, just as we are all inextricably part of the world that created us - a state Heidegger describes as *being-in-the-world*. Yet we still have choices within this defining temporal-spatial frame; that is, we can throw off our thrown condition (Entwurf). Therefore there were opportunities for the settlers to behave differently and make different decisions to the aggressively imperial stance that was taken. These days, we too have choices about how to deal with refugees, criminals, poverty and other social pressures and how will we be judged a hundred years hence?

p.946); that is, travelling with a loving eye and becoming ‘fluent’ in the other world. Knowing other people’s worlds, Lugones suggests, is a part of loving them. The world-traveller is not *posing* or pretending to be someone else but rather *is* that someone, using space or language in a particular way. This perhaps parallels the creative process in that authors too strive, if not always for empathy, but certainly for a deep knowing or understanding, a ‘oneness’ with their characters and those characters’ subjective experiences in order to create credible/‘authentic’ personalities – at once being both all and none of them.

Unfortunately I was unable to become ‘fluent’ through first-hand encounters with the other world. My quest for women ex-guerrillas proved impossible. I threw the net wide, but despite the kind offices of several Zimbabweans in both New Zealand and Zimbabwe I could not gather a pool of interviewees. I did have the contact details of two women but chose not to pursue these. Partly I could not escape the feeling that I was trespassing, albeit with good intentions. Nzenza’s words about Western feminist scholarship weighed heavily. In short, it felt presumptuous. I was also reluctant to involve specific individuals in my project, for while a small group of ex-combatants might be accommodated within my fictional parameters, I worried that a single strong voice might overwhelm it - send it on an unintended trajectory. In effect ‘silence’ me. Instead, I resolved I would create Ruth in much the same way as I’d created Billie - through the use of first-person accounts, imagination and empathy. It was, after all, only fiction.

However, presenting ‘Other’ as fiction is not necessarily a defence against accusations of appropriations and (mis)representation. For example, the bestselling novel, *The Help*, depicting black maids in Mississippi in the early 1960s, was criticised in some academic circles for ‘crass simplification’ (Jones, 2014, p.8) while at the same time it was vigorously defended by both black and white readers, leading Suzanne Jones to conclude that the divided reception was not based so much on race as ‘between general audiences and academics’ (p.10). Kate Grenville attracted criticism for her portrayal of Aborigine characters in her award-winning *The Secret River* (Armistead, 2012). Linda Alcoff (1992) cites a case where Anne Cameron, ‘a very gifted, white Canadian author’ (p.7) came under fire for writing in a Native [sic] identity in the first person, thereby disempowering Native [sic] authors. It was felt a privileged author had no right to speak for marginalised peoples. Alcoff explores this tenet, asking the question: if one can speak only for the group of which one is a member, how are these groups delineated? Can one be a member of many, even

contradictory, groups? Isn't there perhaps a political or social responsibility for the privileged people to speak out against oppression – even though it has enabled their own privileged position? After all, a complete retreat into speaking only for oneself sanctions the continuance of the dominant discourse. These issues echoed my own concerns because the collective biographies and studies I read had all been conducted in good faith - not to appropriate voices but to promote them. Most of them had been carried out in the 1980s and 1990s when the stark inequalities of the ex-Rhodesian society were still apparent and the academics had moved swiftly to preserve the words of women that might otherwise have been lost.

My desire to write Ruth as a character, however, was not motivated by the protective urge of the 'privileged' to speak out on black women's behalf. Zimbabwe possesses a number of internationally renowned female authors who outstrip me in qualifications, talent and acclaim and who are telling their own stories. Rather, I felt a need – for myself and for the novel – to attempt to understand something of Ruth's world. It felt an act of trespass, but perhaps all fiction is a trespass because the main impetus behind my novels is a desire to venture into worlds I do not know. Following Alcoff's lead, I wondered to which group I belong. As a woman, can I only create female characters? Am I more equipped to write Billie's story simply because we share the same skin colour? Is that sufficient to cross the divides of class, nationality and education – not forgetting the difference too of attitudes separated by over one hundred years? Or have I more in common with Ruth who is my contemporary, a compatriot, who probably listened to some of the same songs on the radio, who may have watched the same television shows? She would definitely have heard the same political speeches, though with different ears. I am reminded of China Miéville's *The City and The City*³⁶ and I wish to 'breach' for my own sake.

Although I had thought I might create Ruth using the same approach I used to create Billie, I quickly realised there are significant differences. Historical fiction lies within the realm of speculative writing in that no one actually knows what the past was like. It requires world-building and the author, ideally, is in possession of more information and understanding of that world than most readers. Real settings that incorporate contemporary/living-memory timeframes are different in that the author is depicting worlds actually lived in by readers. I knew that if I wrote as Ruth,

³⁶ Two cities occupy the same geographical space but the citizens of each city must 'unsee' each other as they go about their daily business. They are taught from childhood to distinguish the differences through clothes, manner of walking, architecture and so on without actually 'seeing' them. For one citizen to 'enter' into the other city without official sanction is a serious crime called 'breaching'.

then it must be in a way that ex-combatant women would recognise – or at least not condemn or feel abused, misused. Writing about living-memory past, especially about events the author has not personally experienced, is highly contestable territory. Participants in these events may vigorously dispute fictional representations.³⁷ For example, Louis De Bernières came under fire for his portrayal of the Greek resistance in *Captain Corelli's Mandolin* (Milne, 2000).

In the end I felt the exclusion of a significant black character was a greater trespass (wrongdoing) than the actual trespass (unauthorised use) itself. It seemed inherently wrong to write about Rhodesia/Zimbabwe, yet include only white voices. The creative issue would then become how best to depict this character in a manner that acknowledged the appropriation of lives, of experiences, of voices, and yet which held true to her fictional core.

³⁷ Not forgetting that the memories of participants have also been shaped by time and personal/cultural/societal/expedient factors.

Journeys

Journeys

Psychogeography

Psychogeography – which I interpret in its literal sense wherein the two disciplines of psychology and geography ‘collide’ (Coverley, 2006) – has been a significant research methodology both literally and metaphorically. I have travelled and walked considerably during this project, incorporating aspects of both the flâneur and the biographer and a crucial theme of the creative work is the close engagement of people with the land: the way they possess and are possessed by it. The research and writing of both critical and creative components of the project are also in and of themselves a metaphorical form of psychogeography in that an unplanned journey is embarked upon, the destination not set and the traveller is open to all possibilities and surprises.

Guy Debord and the Situationists founded the notion of psychogeography whereby new insights regarding human interactions within and on environments may be discerned by observers ‘drifting’ around urban spaces with no particular goal, yet often attracted to the undefined, neglected or ‘no-man’s’ spaces. It is at the unlooked-for intersect of human perception, human behaviours and the environment that new perspectives may be found. The concept is not new – Baudelaire promoted the figure of ‘flâneur’ whose strolls around Parisian streets were undetermined yet carried out with heightened awareness (Baudelaire, p.65). Walter Benjamin further developed the notion of the flâneur in *The Arcades Project*, balancing the bombardment and shock factor of modern cities (*erlebnis*) with the positive responses to the experiences open to the flâneur (*erfahrung*). The experience transcends the immediate for ‘it is the material culture of the city, rather than the psyche, that provides the shared collective spaces where consciousness and the unconscious, past and present, meet’ (as cited in Seals, 2013). The flâneur is both a part of and, in a sense, alienated from the city. Walking the streets without a prescribed destination is at once an intimate and isolated act.

Robert McFarlane has a particular interest in the connection between walking and the psyche although his hikes tend to more rural than urban. He sees walking as a means to thinking; it is also a way of learning the land, of hearing its history. “The

compact between writing and walking is almost as old as literature – a walk is only a step away from a story, and every path *tells*” (p.18). Further, walking old routes provides a link with the past, those who have passed this way before and MacFarlane points out, “The imagination cannot help but pursue a line in the land – onwards in space but also backwards in time to the histories of a route and its previous followers” (2012; p.18). His own writing is redolent with spectres haunting the pathways down which he treads, history not so much dogging his footsteps as guiding them.

Biographers visit locales in pursuit of their subjects and these journeys also very often uncover a curious suspension – juxtaposition? collision? – of present and past within these milieus. Richard Holmes was sensitive to the aura of place, of belongings.

‘The past does retain a physical presence for the biographer – in landscapes, buildings, photographs, and above all, the actual trace of handwriting on original letters or journals. Anything a hand has touched is for some reason particularly charged with personality’ (Holmes, 1985, p.66).

Expanding on this notion, he uses the term ‘haunting’ to describe the ‘deliberate psychological trespass, an invasion or encroachment of the present upon the past, and in some sense, the past on the present.’(p.65) and this ‘trespass’ echoes the hauntological concerns of my creative project.

As a biographer, I ‘tracked’ Billie, Edmond and the early settler community, following in their footsteps and attempting, in the process, to understand something of their mind-sets. I sought the ‘haunting’ that comes from visiting locales Billie and Edmond once inhabited – places where I might place my hand in their meuses. It was a way to glimpse, from the corner of my eye, their fleeting presences at Billie’s childhood farm, at Edmond’s family chateau.

I have visited Zimbabwe four times since I emigrated and have included snapshot memories of those trips in this section although I’ve rolled the two specifically research visits into one. My experiences during these times provided some glimpse into the lives of those who stayed and informed my writing of secondary characters like Janey and Ally. They also gave me a more immediate sense of the hurtling, unfolding history of the country.

The stories of all three characters overlap in particular settings in Harare– the Avondale Ridge, Mazowe, the churchyard – although they experience these places in very different ways. In my research visits, the ‘*dérive*’ (drift) thus not only helped

locate Billie but also informed the fictitious Clea and Ruth strands. I ‘drifted’ along Harare’s streets, connecting with my past while at the same time ‘feeling’ the different stories that lay beneath my feet. It was also a way to consciously experience this Harare which was so different to the city I had left in my twenties. A revenant, I felt keenly the dissonance between the uncanny rightness of belonging and the dislocation of being also an ‘outsider’. Clea and Ruth both drift along these same streets in the novel and in doing so, broaden their political and social understanding and reposition their sense of identity. However, given Zimbabwe’s unsettled political situation and the shortage of time, I did not walk as far or as often as I would have liked and instead I mostly drove around the city. Thus the driving along familiar roads which contain echoes of the past becomes a motif of the novel

In the practical, writerly sense, I drew upon these journeys not only to provide credibility to the world-building and to dimensionalise characters but also because they raised issues and themes upon which the novel could expand.

Three Zimbabwe - 1987

I left Zimbabwe at the end of 1981 to travel and returned only briefly in 1984 to help my parents pack up before they emigrated. In 1987 I returned again because Gay, my childhood friend, was getting married. The city was buzzing. There was a confident black middle class, and although some friends had left many still lived there, and for the most part everyone seemed settled and happy to be part of something big and exciting. Tourists, ex-pats and foreign investments were pouring into the country. I drove around on my own at night, walked anywhere in the city and felt for the large part safe – well, as safe as one ever does in Southern Africa.

Gay’s wedding was in her aunt’s garden, beside the swimming pool, backgrounded by scarlet poinsettias. The following day I flew to Victoria Falls with the bridal party and we stayed in the famous five-star colonial hotel. Waiters wore red fezzes and sashes, the food was excellent, the rooms luxurious. In Maggie Thatcher’s England, I had worked as a waitress, as a hospital cleaner and in hotels so I viewed this experience with different eyes and this colonial extravagance seemed somehow theatrical.

Back in Harare, shops were full and food seemed plentiful but petrol was hard to come by, hospitals sometimes ran out of penicillin, and schools were stretched thin to accommodate a huge population fervent for education. For a few days I house-sat a large home for acquaintances to look after their two dogs: a

frightening doberman and a sunny-tempered red setter. On the third day the cook told me he had to go back to his village. The gardener too had gone away for a few days. That night I was very uneasy, and sure enough, at 4am I heard the stealthy sounds of a burglar at the window. I raced through the house, slamming on lights and shouting, "I've got dogs. I'm setting them on you." Terror brings out an unexpectedly violent strain.

The dogs, penned up in the back garden, were in a frenzy. I threw open the gate, and swift as a black arrow the doberman took off. The red setter, beside herself with excitement, bit me! The doberman returned in a few minutes with a shard of material between his teeth. The thief had obviously escaped over the wall just in time. When I phoned the police they had no petrol, but offered to send an officer on a bicycle although it would take an hour. I told them not to worry and phoned a friend who came immediately. I drew upon my fear and that visceral sense of violence it engendered when recreating the scene of Billie's attack. It was also a reminder of how whites have always drawn together when no other help is at hand.

I went down to Bulawayo a few days later, where I heard whispers of Gukurahundi and learnt that a woman I'd been at university with had been murdered at a mission station along with her husband and baby, the other missionaries and some workers. It was said that they sang as they were about to be murdered and that a great light filled the sky. I wonder if this story survives today – we do not know at the time which stories will fade away and which will be woven into the fabric of national myth. Stories that are passed down either personally or as a nation form a major theme of the novel.

2004

Gay and I were back for three days in Harare. We arrived in the late afternoon to a foreign airport that had been built with Chinese money. We spent the first night at a four-star hotel. The curtains were limp, the carpet balding, and the sink stained. There was no hot water and the tap came away in our hand. No matter. Elated to be back, we went down to the bar to celebrate. Apart from a few well-dressed black men, it was almost deserted. The last time we'd been here it had teemed with Zimbabweans and cosmopolitan guests.

'We're in Africa - it has to be G & Ts,' said Gay.

'I'm sorry,' said the barman. 'There is no tonic.'

'No problem,' we said. 'We'll have gin and orange.'

‘Ah, sorry. There is no gin.’

We ended up toasting our return with Mazoe orange cordial.

The following morning we hired a car, but since it had only half a tank of petrol we took it to the garage. I have never seen the zeros spin around so fast. The bill came to Zim\$600,000.00.

Driving through the familiar streets was strangely marvellous, strangely apocalyptic. The traffic had increased enormously in volume and notably – rightly – almost all the drivers were now black. But the roads had deteriorated and the grass on verges was waist-high. Intersections were a crazy tumble-wash of cars going in all directions, all at once. We’d heard about the power shortages so realised the traffic lights were down, though we were mystified by great concrete pillars sprouting electric cables like futuristic palm trees. These were, we suddenly realised, the traffic lights, stripped of precious lights and casings. In some cases the cables themselves had been pruned right down. We also quickly discovered that many street names had disappeared, to be melted down for their metal. Lacking road signs, we relied on memory and instinct, but there was an overwhelming sense of dislocation. Whenever familiar landmarks swam into view they became anchor-points in this alien melee of noise and chaos.



Figure 16 *The aunt's garden and pool.* 28 January 2004

We stayed with Gay's aunt again because most of our friends had left the country. The garden was still stunning but the rolls of barbed wire topping the high walls were new, as was the padlocked gate. The aunt was in her eighties and her husband in his late seventies. He was still working part-time at a school, collecting the fees. Inflation was so appalling that people arrived with small suitcases of money that he then weighed. Many remaining whites were retired and tied to the country, which did not pay pensions to emigrants. Most still worked to supplement their ever decreasing income but they were cheerful. One told us it kept them young and they liked being useful.

A supermarket visit was sobering. There were rows upon rows of empty shelves, punctuated by the odd pathetic cluster of boxes or packets. An apple, if you could find one, cost \$100. Bread was available but was as insubstantial as cotton-wool. A black market dealing in US dollars was flourishing, but this was far beyond the reach of most Zimbabweans. One of our few remaining friends told us how to survive. 'You get paid but you must get rid of your money almost immediately. It's devaluing in the purse, minute by minute. So you buy whatever the shop has. If it's cooking oil, you buy as much as you can. If it's flour or salt, you stock up. Then we swap and trade. And of course if we go to South Africa we stock up as much as possible. We get by.'

She has always been an optimist.

The aunt and uncle served us steak - I dread to think how much it cost - and invited their friends to meet us. At 11am the drinks trolley came out and the first gin sent my head reeling as those octogenarians proceeded to drink us under the table. With the smell of braai³⁸, the hot sun and our bloodstreams singing gin-songs, it was easy to be transported back to our youth.

But then the stories began. The aunt and uncle had had a home invasion just a few months earlier. They'd been beaten, tied up and locked in the bathroom where they listened to their house being ransacked, expecting any moment to be murdered. They were lucky not to be, and the housemaid found them the next day. There were other stories - a neighbour mugged, another shot. A grenade tossed over the wall during a party, killing several, including a little boy. The police were overworked and often did not come to crime scenes. It was said some were in league with the thieves. Even at the height of the civil war city life had never been knife-edge like this.

³⁸ Barbecue.

At 5pm we were locked in for the night: first the wrought-iron security doors, then the external doors. Then every internal door in the house was locked. It wouldn't save us, they explained, but at least we'd have warning if there was another invasion.

The following day Gay and I explored the suburbs. We were warned not to go into the city itself. There was joy at rediscovering our childhood homes but terror when we strayed onto an avenue where soldiers stepped forward, brandishing AK rifles.

'Back up! Back up!'

We reversed as fast as we could. Mugabe's residence was near and we'd already heard tales of shootings without hesitation. We drove with ears pricked at all times for the sound of the motorcade that ripped through streets when Mugabe went anywhere. It was essential to pull over immediately to allow the motorcyclists and motorcars with their screaming sirens to tear by.

But above all was the heartbreak of the desperation of people, so tangible you could almost taste it.

I went to the archives to do some research on Billie.

'That will be two hundred US dollars,' the receptionist told me.

'But I was born here. Look.' I produced my battered Rhodesian license.

'That'll be two Zimbabwean dollars,' said the receptionist.

A curator took me down to the research room. He was tidily dressed in trousers circa 1980s and a shirt with a frayed collar and cuffs. His feet were bare.

He spoke in an urgent whisper, all the way down, his lips barely moving, his eyes darting from side to side. 'We aren't paid enough to live. I cannot feed my wife, my children. I cannot pay for the school. Look, I have no shoes. Take me with you. I'll be your gardener. I'll clean your house. Take me with you.'

It was heart-breaking, and that all-too-familiar suffocating guilt and helplessness welled up.

I did not include these years in the novel although they are alluded to by several characters. However I felt it important to include this visit in the exegesis to provide context and understanding of the ongoing hardship and trauma of the country.

2015

I returned to Harare with my family to do research. The introduction of the US dollar some years earlier had halted hyper-inflation and the supermarkets were once more well-stocked though their goods were probably out of the price range for many Zimbabweans. The hopes of the previous elections had been dashed and many seemed grimly resigned to the situation.

‘We have no hope now,’ Sam, our driver told us. He’d been a manager in a top hotel but had been made redundant a few years earlier so his van was now his business.

We’d hired a driver because driving was now stressful with police fines, speeding fines and potholes. Traffic lights were back up but at the mercy of rolling electricity cuts that plagued the country. We’d also hired Sam because Zimbabweans desperately need work. According to some statistics, unemployment runs at 90%. Sam had two young sons and water to their flat was turned on only twice a week, yet he showed us suburbs with palatial homes and sprinklers that kept lawns bright green. We went to a private game park where the last few rhino each had two armed guards, and we heard about ongoing battles to keeping game parks from being appropriated by the government. At the time, Mugabe was exporting wild animals such as baby elephant to China.

Although we were a party of five adults we were cautioned not to walk at night - not even to pop down the street to a nearby restaurant. Our apartment had a full-time guard, high walls and an electric gate. People in the street, however, seemed as friendly and warm as ever and I was surprised, when talking to strangers, how many were now openly angry with Mugabe. The fear and care that the man in the archives had displayed seemed to have been eroded away by the compounding desperation of the years.

One night we had dinner with one of my few friends remaining in the country. She lives at the far end of the city and we used one of the multilane arterial roads to get there. As we were driving home I was thrown by the dense darkness that suddenly enveloped us. Then I realised that an electricity cut had left the entire CBD in darkness. We drove through that black night with an invisible city of many skyscrapers just in front of us.

Yet the city still has heart and functions as best it can. There are extraordinary people who are committed to getting Zimbabwe back on its feet. Each

year the Harare International Festival of the Arts (HIFA) is held which I think epitomises vision and hope.

In keeping with the spirit of my research, I've left Zimbabweans to have the last words.

Former street youth employed by HIFA:

'The reference I got from HIFA made it possible for me to apply for my first job. That was 3 years ago and I now have my own small business. My journey started with living on the streets and I now feel safe and like I know where my life is going. HIFA made that possible for me.'

Audience member:

'Living in Zimbabwe can sometimes feel like you're dealing with a painful illness every day – HIFA is a powerful medicine that makes me and thousands of others feel better and able to face the days and months ahead.'

Young orphan brought to HIFA as part of its community engagement programming:

'HIFA was the best day of my life. I met other young people, I danced, I sang, I felt happier than I thought possible. I rode in an elevator for the first time and met Oliver Mtukudzi. I will never forget it.'

(<http://www.hifa.co.zw/about/hifa>)

Three Houses – Langley Farmhouse

We have come to London to find Fanny Pearson's childhood home. I need to know where she came from to understand what she went to, so we are finally here in Harefield after a two-day journey of aeroplanes, trains and buses. It is a small town on the outskirts of London, a stone's throw from Heathrow, and we have just discovered the church. I consult the battered biography in which I have marked the paragraph giving directions to the family farm from St Mary's Church and, much to my relief, Langley Farm also comes up on the GPS. So it does still exist in the twenty-first century. Yet I'm also apprehensive, not knowing what to expect. A photograph taken in 1971 showed a still functioning farm with a trim farmhouse and well-ordered gardens. Will Fanny's home still look like that or will it have been sewn tightly into a quilt of housing-estate anonymity in the intervening years? What

if it has been demolished, its name now nothing more than a virtual coordinate on the hem of the vast sprawl that is London?



Figure 17 *Harefield Church* 28 April 2011

The church, however, is reassuring. Stalwart and stone-faced, it sits squarely in rural England, its walls lapped by fields as they have been for a thousand years. The bell-ringers are practising for Easter, which is just a few days away, and the tombstones in the graveyard, all gently tilting at different angles, seem to reverberate with the sound. Many carry the name *Pearson*. We are in the right place.

The instructions in the book are clear. Take the footpath up through Church Field to Harefield Heath. We can see a path running up the left-hand side of the graveyard.

“It’s over there.” Geoff waves his hand in the same direction while his eyes remain fixed on the satnav, but we are struck with indecision. Can one simply saunter up the path and traipse across the fields without so much as a by-your-leave?

A woman nearby is walking her dog.

“Excuse me,” I ask. “Is Langley Farm nearby?”

“Why, yes,” she says. “It’s just up through the spinney.”

Spinney. I have a sudden flash of the child Fanny - small apron grubby, braids unravelling - racing through the spinney, playing catch with her brothers. A child who just ten years later would disguise herself as a boy named Billie, and be the first white woman to venture into the about-to-be-fabricated Rhodesia.

“Can we go and look at it? Do people still live there?”

The woman is surprised. “You can go but there’s nothing to see. It’s empty and the council owns it now.”

My spirits rise. Empty is great news. We can poke around then, press our faces against windows and peer into rooms. We might yet feel the ghostly pulse of

family life through the grimed panes. Who knows, we may even find a door unlocked to better trespass into bygone days.

We follow the sun-baked mud path through the spinney and along a dappled track lined with foxgloves. The sound of the bells follows us and the hairs on my arms lift. Along this path Fanny would have hurried every Sunday, summoned by these very same bells. At the end of the spinney we come into rutted fields that are studded with nettles.



Figure 18 *The spinney* 28 April 2011

“My Great London Experience,” says Geoff as we stumble on the fallow turf and scramble over fences. “The farmhouse is just over there.”

X marks the spot on treasure maps; on our satnav it’s a chequered flag. My breath stills.

Much tinier than I’d ever imagined, the house is not just empty - it’s derelict and smothered in graffiti. The windows at ground level are boarded up and the top windows, latticed by bars, leer with the jagged edges of smashed glass. The front door is jailed behind a huge sheet of rusted corrugated iron held fast by brambles that swarm from step to lintel.



Figure 19 *Langley Farmhouse: finding Billie was never going to be easy* 28 April 2011

I feel a jolt of rightness that it should be so. Seeking Billie is not going to be easy – it is a quest I’ve already delayed too many years. How fitting, then, that I should thus be barred right at the beginning. This is not going to be a cosy adventure – her life wasn’t. The birth of nations isn’t.

Yet as I prowl the perimeter of the house Fanny feels close. The fruit trees are smothered in blossom. Beneath the muted sounds of distant traffic and aeroplanes I fancy I hear the ghost of childish laughter in the wind, and questions crowd in. How long did the journey to London take in those days? Did this country child become a maid or a prostitute to survive? She never told anyone how she and Edmond met. We have only two photographs of her from this period. One shows her plainly dressed at sixteen, her cheeks round with adolescence, her expression one of fixed seriousness. The second was taken a year later and shows a more fashionable Fanny, her chin tilted at a confident angle, her dress ornate. A chimneypot-shaped hat sits atop her head; no doubt it was very fashionable in its time. She is holding, of all things, a tennis racquet.

A blackbird sits on the wooden fence. The barns sag at their knees and are gap-toothed. How much and how little things have changed. Fanny might have yawned against the warm flank of the house cow which she milked before going off to her lessons at the village school. The link between her childhood and adulthood is so clear now. In Africa she and Edmond would set up a herd of dairy cows to supply the infant Salisbury with milk. They would lose this herd to the rinderpest plague a few years later, and with it their livelihood and all their hard-won wealth. Well, Africa is littered with tales of despair.

Before we leave, I pause to take in the green fields that undulate with Constable serenity to the horizon. The air is soft, laden with scents of grass and earth. A breeze tickles. Is anything quite so timeless as rural England? Easy to imagine medieval figures out there, planting by hand. Easy to picture harvests, and eiderdowns of snow, and Christmases returning year after year. It seems such a gentle scene, yet young Fanny ran away from it all and I do not think it was just to flee an unhappy home. There was something within her that not only catapulted her out of this country idyll but also drove her across the world in a wild adventure. She embodies that spirit which inspires humankind to scale mountains, cross deserts and shoot rockets at the moon. Anything for a lark, and I'm sure it was more fun, more exciting, than either servitude or prostitution.

Edmond had other reasons to travel to Africa. When he met Fanny he was in his forties, disgraced and destitute. This was unfortunate because the Panouse family was one of the most distinguished in France and he'd had a successful military career with excellent career prospects ahead of him. Then he destroyed it all. His marriage to a Jewish opera singer from the Netherlands appalled his family, but worse was to come when, on finding himself owing large sums of money, he transferred his fortune into his wife's name and fled France rather than settling his debts honourably. He was ridiculed in the Paris press and his mortified family disowned him. It did not help that when his wife died all the money disappeared with her.

Africa offered both an escape and a second chance. Edmond had already been ivory hunting there so the lavish – and entirely fictitious - promises of enormous gold deposits in Rhodesia proved irresistible. He could make a new fortune and return to France with his head held high.

Well, that was the dream, at any rate.

Château de la Panouse



Figure 20 *Château de la Panouse*. 30 April 2011

Two days later we are at the Château de la Panouse which is fifty kilometres from Paris, and we are guests of the current comte, Paul, and his cousin Phillippe. They have kindly said I can use their archives.

There isn't much, truth be told. All the papers pertaining to Edmond and Fanny are kept in one small box. Yet my hands tremble to hold letters that she wrote in widowed middle age, begging for financial help for her daughter³⁹. Here too are the few original photographs of their life in Rhodesia. I have looked at them so long and so hard in the biography. I think of Robert Carey, who wrote Fanny's biography and in whose footsteps I am following. He too must have felt this sense of wonder as he worked through the contents of the box - but he had several weeks and we have only one day and my French is rusty. Technology comes to the rescue and Geoff takes photographs of the documents which we will load onto the computer back in New Zealand where I can read them at leisure. Besides, I am trying to soak in the enormity of being in Edmond's family home and alternately scan papers and pace to the windows to look out over the beautiful park. We are down the road from Versailles yet I can hear a lion grumbling in the midday warmth and I am struck with

³⁹ Recalling Richard Holmes' assertion that letters that the biographical subjects have touched seem charged with personality.

how history does repeat itself in different iterations, with Edmond's brother's descendant, Paul, turning to Africa, just as Edmond had.

When Paul was in his early twenties, he decided to set up an African safari in the grounds to raise money that was essential to maintain the family home. Forty years on he has three safari parks in France, and the animals - not only from Africa but North America and Asia too - are kept in huge grassy enclosures. I am thrilled to handle paper that Fanny once held but I am also dying to go out and look at all the animals – it has been years since I last saw lion, cheetah, giraffe, zebra. Fanny shot a lion once.

Before we go out to view the animals we have lunch. It is like dining on the set of an Ivory Merchant production. The flagstones underfoot are uneven and the walls of the dining-room, many inches thick, are painted a faded, damask pink and are adorned with large oil paintings. It is sunny outside but the windows are small so the room is lit with candles which cast rainbows in the crystal glasses, and it all feels splendidly French and decadent.

Avid about art, Geoff indicates a portrait of a young woman. "That is a beautiful painting. It looks somehow familiar."

"There is one in the Louvre," says Paul, "another in the Uffizi. We don't know who the artist is nor who the woman was but we like it."

Paul is a big man with enormous energy and a zest for life. Phillippe, tall and thin, with the fine facial bones of a Franciscan monk, is quietly spoken and *tout est en Français*. He can understand English very well; he simply refuses to speak it. I can understand him when he speaks slowly and for much of the time he keeps his language simple. But as he warms to a topic, Gallic enthusiasm overtakes him and his words spill so fast I give up and just sit back saying, '*Mais oui*' and '*Bien sur*'. It is enough.



Figure 21 Avec Philippe et tout est en Français. 30 April 2011

Paul is vastly entertaining. He has been trampled by an elephant, bitten across the midriff by a hippo and kidnapped by poachers in East Africa. I am almost tempted to give up on his great-great-great uncle and tell his life story instead.

Neither comte has any time for their ancestor.

“He was a fool. A dreamer,” says Paul with a particularly French grimace.

“*Il était fou*,” says Phillippe with a dismissive shrug.

“*Oui*,” Paul reiterates. “Quite mad.”

I watch them closely. Can I distil some of this ‘Frenchness’ into Edmond? Billie’s biographer was largely dismissive of Edmond too but I think it was to do the man a disservice. This château reminds me that he moved in aristocratic and political circles I cannot begin to imagine – and that Billie could never have fully understood. Chopin taught the daughters of this family and they still have a few sheets of music written in his own hand. Edmond’s travels were impressive. I have visited the French garrison in New Caledonia where he was posted. What vastly different worlds he straddled, and he generally seems to have been liked and often admired.

“I’d just like to float an idea with you,” I say. “Some might think that to set up an African safari next to Paris was crazy. Others might think that refusing to speak English when you can understand it somewhat odd. What do you think?”

Both men stare at me in complete astonishment. “*Pas de tout!*”

I am still prompted by a need to defend Edmond and try another course. “If he had found gold, would he have been accepted back into the family?”

Paul pauses, salmon halfway to his mouth. “Perhaps,” he concedes. Then he gives another shrug. “But he didn’t.”

And that, of course, is the tragedy - for both him and for Fanny. They should have gone to New Zealand instead and tried their hand at sheep farming. They were both very hardworking and they might have made a fist of it. In those days there were many options: Canada, Australia, New Zealand or Africa. They chose Africa and paid the price.

Avon Farmhouse

There is still a small road called De La Panouse Way on the Avondale Ridge in Harare and my sister, Sally, and I were here to find the site of the old dairy farm Billie and Edmond ran. I knew their home had been levelled many decades ago but I was hopeful I might still find some trace of her.



Figure 22 *The corner of De La Panouse Way: an anomaly.* 5 May 2015

De La Panouse Way is a fascinating anomaly. Its name is set on the high walls of a beautiful house because Avondale Ridge is now a prestigious suburb. If you turn to your right, you see a road lined with affluent homes with a kink in it. If you stand at this kink and turn left, it is nothing but a red-earth track with the backs of houses on the one side and a surprisingly uncultivated property on the other. It has none of the manicured lawns and swimming pools of its neighbours but instead holds fast to earlier times: it has huge old trees and tangles of bush grass. This ‘kink’ – this strange intersect of past and present – seemed to epitomise my novel. Surely we were in the right place. I pressed my nose against the fence. History was tapping me on the shoulder. It was easy to see how someone might flee down the hillside to the church nestled not far from here. Billie did this on the night her house was attacked.



Figure 23 *Turn left for bush track* 5 May 2015



Figure 24 *Turn right, affluent homes* 5 May 2015

The gardener from next door was watching us so I explained I was trying to find a house of a lady who’d lived here over a hundred years ago. He lit up. ‘This is it!’ he said, waving his hand at the overgrown neighbour.

‘How do you know?’

‘Everyone knows,’ he said.

‘Does anyone live there now?’

‘Yes, a man with his family.’

There was a high gate but it was padlocked. The gardener, however, obligingly whistled loudly, and a couple of minutes later out came a young Zimbabwean man, very wary to find two excited middle-aged women standing at his gate. We explained we’d come from New Zealand to find this home and could we look around? He looked dubious so we showed him our passports; he might have thought us mad but clearly not dangerous because he unchained the gate and called his rather formidable dogs to heel.



Figure 25 *By the gate of Billie's old farm 5 May 2015*

I was thrilled it wasn't a currycombed garden. Whether it was the right site or not (and I'm sure it was), it didn't matter. This whole ridge had been their home. Billie's spirit was not far away and I was looking at trees she would have walked under. The house, an old Rhodesian villa, was derelict. Its new owner has an uphill battle to renovate it, but on seeing our enthusiasm he opened up with his plans for it. One day it will be something special for his young son. Of course, it wouldn't be easy in Zimbabwe, he conceded, but he was lucky he worked in the mines. He still had a job.



Figure 26 *No currycombed garden*: 5 May 2015

I stood in the ruins of a back yard and tried to imagine milking sheds, and kennels for Edmond's hunting dogs. It was surprisingly easy to picture it. I almost felt that if I closed my eyes and opened them again, there they would be. We walked through the ruined rooms of the house, and though it was not Billie's eyrie I could look out over vistas that she must surely have seen. This is what the biographer lives for: to walk in the footsteps, to inhabit the spaces, to feel the ghosts all around. I scribbled notes.

It is quiet – the traffic a distant hum. The beautiful house is in decay but the owner is full of plans and dreams to renovate. And it feels right; the old white ways giving (finally) to new life. Billie walked this earth. Maybe under these same trees. Here she too dreamed and prospered. Here, her dreams died. TIA.⁴⁰ I am hopeful for this young family. Towering, shady trees: msasa, jacaranda, bauhinia. Rich red earth, under which are the foundations of Billie's home. I have a sense of peace. Stillness. This is the closest I will get to her now. I can only hope I will do her justice.

⁴⁰ This is Africa. This acronym is used with grim/rueful irony.

The Creative Project

Writing Postmodern

‘Much postmodern fiction dramatises the search for a truth which self-evidently cannot be found; the signifier cannot relate to the signified’ (de Groot, 2010, p.125).

Metafiction recognises that language is not a passive medium that coherently reflects an ‘objective’ world. It is a complex system, generating its own ‘meanings’ and relationships. Patricia Waugh (1984) describes the dilemma of the metafictionist who, upon embarking on ‘representing’ the world, quickly realises that the world, as such, cannot be ‘represented’ (p.3). The observer cannot help but alter the observed. Yet fiction, she goes on to explain, offers cognitive functions that help us locate ourselves not only in the everyday and within philosophical paradigms, but also help explain the historical world while providing some comfort and certainty. However, no matter how visceral, how ‘real’ fiction may seem, is still entirely a verbal construct (p. 93). It draws attention to the fact that it is an artefact in order to raise questions circulating fiction and reality. I feel a particular need to tread cautiously when writing a contentious history in which people died or were dispossessed, where blood was spilt as acts of war or legitimated brutality, and metafiction provides a valid pathway.

Naming plays a significant and generally transparent role in postmodern fiction. Names, Waugh claims, ‘can describe as they refer, that which has been referred to has been created anyway through a “naming” process.’” (p. 94). Names like Kurt Vonnegut’s Billy Pilgrim and John Fowles’ Ernestina Freeman are self-proclaiming but there can also be more subtle layerings of names as in *Possession* (2009) wherein Byatt created a literary ‘chase’ for readers (Mullen, 2017). In my creative project, names are malleable and mutable. Some are historical actuality: Zimbabwe/Rhodesia, Fanny/Billie. Others emerge out of common practices: *nom de plume*, *nom de guerre*, a baby named by both birth and adoptive mothers. The characters’ names are signifiers, to be discussed in the Locating section.

Billie’s strand is historical, and Linda Hutcheon (1989) coined the term *historiographic metafiction* to define postmodern historical fiction that questions the authenticity of history but whose very own self-reflexivity and intertextuality problematises implicit claims to historical veracity (p.3). Historiographic

metafiction recognises that while the past does exist, our understanding of it is 'semiotically transmitted.' History becomes personal reconstruction, often fragmented and imbued with a sense of indeterminacy. To distinguish historiographic metafiction from historical novels, Hutcheon (1988) contrasted it with György Lukács' three defining characteristics of the latter. While Lukács proposes that the protagonist should be a type, Hutcheon feels that in historiographic metafiction the protagonist should not resemble any type. Secondly, Lukács is less concerned with the accuracy or truth of detail, provided the data is assembled in a manner that lends a feeling of verifiability. Hutcheon sees historiographic metafiction as either playing with the truth and lies contained within the historical record or using, but seldom assembling, historical data. Finally Lukács believed historical personages should be kept in secondary roles as if ontologically masking the boundaries between fiction and history. However, in historiographic metafiction, it is this ontological join itself that is the issue: how do we know the past and what can we understand of it now?

Jerome De Groot (2010) forwards the argument that in the wake of the destruction of 'grand narratives' and 'totalising explanations', and in the face of what Lyotard terms 'politicised incredulity', postmodernism is 'a crisis of legitimation as well as representation' (cited in de Groot, p.110). There has been so much self-excusing, self-explaining rhetoric caught up in both official and personal histories of Rhodesia/Zimbabwe that I felt it important that all representations of past events in my novel are transparently transmitted through narrators who have their own agendas, shortcomings and prejudices. These very personal narrations are a safeguard against any suggestion of objectivity, explaining or proselytising. Indeed the narrators' stories are not even 'my' stories for I have differentiated myself – as far as ever possible for a fiction writer – from my protagonists. Such demarcation is not necessarily clearly indicated in histories, biographies or, indeed, some historical novels.

A number of novels have engaged with poststructuralist theories of history, and the use of what Diana Wallace (2008) terms 'the hamstrung writer' (p.215) is a popular narrative device. For example *Possession* (Byatt, 1990), *Moontiger* (Lively, 1987), *According to Mark* (Lively, 1984), and *Flaubert's Parrot* (Barnes, 1984) all depict historians or biographers on historical quests while being painfully aware of their limitations. These novels interrogate the role and vested interests of the historian, the 'veracity' of evidence and the problems circulating the search for

definitive explanations. Each explores how suppressed and/or silenced histories continue to haunt the present, further confusing the quest. In both *Moontiger* and *According to Mark*, Lively plays with point of view, replaying a scene through the eyes of both participants to reveal the gaps, false disclosures and the fallibility of interpretation. Byatt employs multiple narrators in *Possession* as well as intertextuality as she advances the narrative through various modes of writing history such as academic texts, biographies, letters and fairy tales. A motif running through the work is that of ventriloquism - a metaphor for both the historian and the fiction writer. In *Flaubert's Parrot*, the protagonist discovers that a number of stuffed parrots in various museums could have belonged to Flaubert. In these books, the past is always shifting, always escaping.

My novel is historiographic metafiction in that it both inscribes then blurs the line between history and fiction. It is polyphonic, ambivalent and ambiguous, containing partial biography told as fiction (Billie's strand) and a story-within-a-story (Ruth's strand) that parodies historical writing. Clea's self-reflexivity, her remembering of past events and her inscription of Ruth's story draw attention to the artificiality of self/narrations and pose questions regarding the relationship between the artefact and 'real' events. These ripple out to reflect the ambiguity circulating around the 'validity' (that is, the 'accuracy/truthfulness') of the creative work itself, which in turn interrogates the role memory, personal standpoints, erasures et cetera can play in national histories in order to expose mythmaking processes and the creation/description paradox.

Shaping the Novel

Through many drafts and iterations, the shape of my creative project finally resolved into a novel, a novella and a short story: each has its own voice, setting and stylistic conventions but they work together to provide a subjective, feminine 'biography'. The project is perhaps analogous with the 'showstopper' in the television series *The Great British Bake Off* where contestants create complex confections in which each component (cake, biscuit, pastry etc.) contains its own ingredients, flavours and textures, yet they must fuse together to form a culinary work with an overarching theme and integrity. I began writing the strands simultaneously, but soon changed to writing them individually so as to preserve their internal integrity. Putting them together was a challenge since the strands had to be in 'dialogue' - informing, revealing and contesting one another. When talking about editing a film, Rosenblum

& Karen (1986) said that in its simplest aspect, cutting is about juxtapositions. Bearing this in mind, I wrote brief synopses of scenes, bookended with the first and last sentences. I printed these synopses off on cards – a different colour for each strand. Then I laid them out in grid formations. It was not easy as each strand was a different length so I tried to think of the novel more as a maypole dance, interweaving the different ribbons in dance rather than in algorithms. While each strand advances chronologically, the ‘biography’ of country is revealed in achronological, subjective fragments separated by vast gaps in the historical narrative, thereby opening up spaces to other suppressed and silent/silenced voices that are yet to be heard.

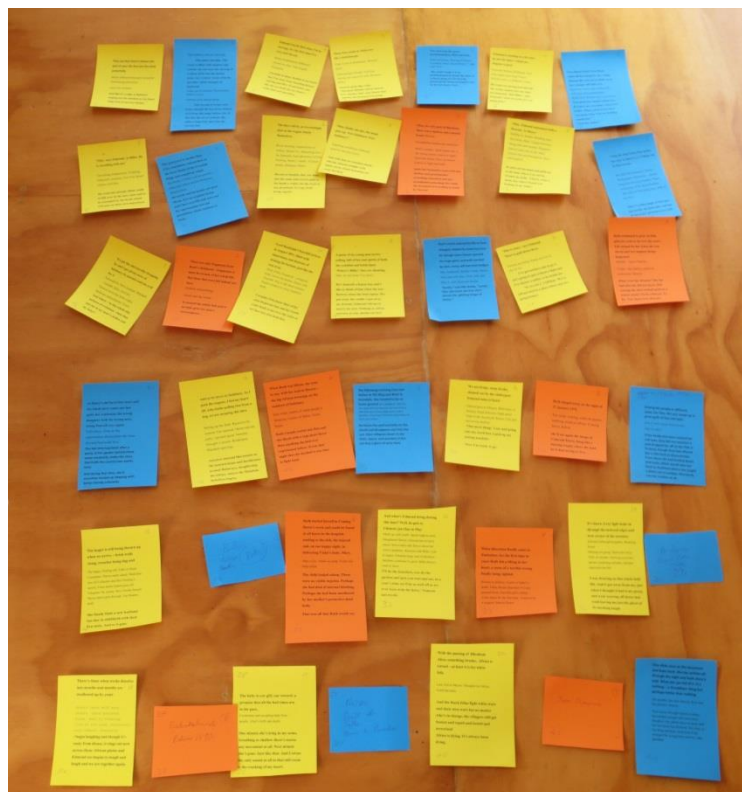


Figure 27 *Interweaving the strands* 11 November 2016

However, a maypole dance is centred about a pole which gives it form. Without some sort of structure, the interweaving strands led to a rather amorphous novel. To counter this, I divided the novel into sections based on the seven days of the week that Clea stays in Harare. Each section begins with the name of the day, its origin and quotes referring to the day. Each day also contains lines from the old, fortune-telling nursery rhyme *Monday's Child* which aids in unifying the sections. The quotes provide either thematic or ironic links to the strand sections. I still had a

prelude and, in the final pages, the three characters exiting the story together. As I had written the beginning of the Clea section rather like the opening of the play in which she raises the curtain to look upon the scene, I used play conventions of Enter/Entrance and Exeunt to open and close the novel – again with quotes that inform the novel’s themes as a whole.

An unexpected challenge of writing a novel within an academic framework was that it went against my preferred ‘pantser’ style of writing. Fiction writers fall on a continuum between ‘plotters’ and ‘pantsers’. Plotters (such as J.K. Rowling) plan their books before they begin writing, creating extensive files (synopses, character descriptions, diagrams etc.) to map out story arcs and characters. Pantsers (for example, David Mitchell and Stephen King), are so called because they write by the seat of their pants, sitting down each day to discover what they are going to write. The doctorate application process required elaboration on structure, plot, character and themes that would align well with a ‘plotter’ approach. Intellectually I found the application fascinating and I was happy to provide a theoretically sound structure and outline for the creative project. I described characters I thought would suit the project and included themes I expected to explore.

However, while the outlined project made rational and academic sense, when it came to the actual writing, plotlines and characters remained flat upon the page. The strands refused to conform, and at one point I despaired that I had talked the book into premature death. I wrote many thousands of words for each strand but progress was made only when I finally scrapped all that I had written, emptied my mind of what I thought ‘ought’ to be written and began again, groping instinctively in the dark. Perhaps this is where authors begin to talk of the muse, the creative process, because although I diligently charted many of my writing decisions and discussions within my academic journals, I still find it hard to fully account for how each strand eventually found its voice, how characters found their names and how I found my feet.

Writing Billie

Locating Billie

Billie’s story was the catalyst for the project and remains core to the creative work. Cary’s 1970s biography provided a solid account of her life, though seasoned with much speculation, and there were a few, very useful mentions of Billie in contemporary memoirs and newspapers. The plot was laid out in the events of her

life and my concern was how best to use this material, remaining faithful both to the ‘facts’ and to the actual woman towards whom I felt affectionate responsibility.

Initially, in good metafictional tradition, Clea was to be Billie’s biographer and I’d thought to write Billie’s ‘actual’ story as a stand-alone novella to reveal the gaps between Clea’s investigations and interpretations and the ‘real events’ of the 1890s. However, when I tried writing Billie’s life in the third person, past tense, this omniscient point of view carried the authoritative resonances of history. Rather than interrogating the canon, it seemed I was contributing to it. Billie left far too little of herself for us to ever draw real conclusions about what she was like so I next considered telling her story through her contemporaries’ eyes, wherein their accounts might complement and contradict one another. This approach is very effective in the epistolary *The Guernsey Potato Peel Pie Literary Society* (Shaffer & Barrows, 2008) in which a central (absent) character is developed through a series of letters discussing her. However this approach quickly became unwieldy within my book since it already had three distinct narrative strands. Worse, when I narrowed down the cast of characters, employing only a New Zealand suffragette to write of Billie in letters to her sister, I discovered I was becoming far more involved with this character than with Billie herself. Many thousands of words later, I sat down - literally with pen and paper - and began again. It was Billie’s story; she should tell it. As I began to write in first person, present tense, Billie finally came alive.

Locating Voice

The use of the first person voice is intimate, taking the writer (and reader) straight into the thoughts of the character. It is limited, since the ‘world’ and other characters can only be seen through the protagonist’s eyes so Billie’s transparently biased account of historical events creates tensions with ‘official’ records. During the course of the book, Billie matures from a girl of eighteen to a woman of twenty-eight and must remain believable within the confines of her nationality, her rural and working-class background and her limited education. On one hand it seemed a liberty to inhabit the mind of a woman who had once lived, who might have descendants and who certainly had extended family. On the other hand, it felt more honest because it is a patently imaginative construct even though many of the ‘facts’ are real.

However the present tense is contentious. Philip Hensher (2010), while admitting that the present tense can be effective in some circumstances, feels it is generally overused these days. He blames ‘a thousand low-level creative writing tutors’ who labour under the misapprehension that the present tense makes writing more vivid. In fact, he states, ‘in a literary context it quickly takes on a weird, transfixed, glassy quality – the opposite of vividness’. Phillip Pullman (2010) too expresses reservations about the present tense, finding it ‘claustrophobic, always pressed up against the immediate’ and compares it to a handheld camera that falsely gives the impression that everything filmed is urgent, is real. This, he feels, is an abdication of narrative responsibility and urges writers to ‘take charge of the story’, say what happened and let the reader know the consequences. He has no patience with narrations where ‘truth is always provisional, knowledge is always partial, the narrator is always unreliable and so on’ and advocates the full use of all tenses, enabling a wider temporal perspective.

Fiction writers are spirited in their defence of the present tense. Hilary Mantel explains she employed it for her Cromwell books because they unscrolled ‘like a film; it was in the present tense because I didn’t know what would happen next minute’ (cited in MacFarquar, 2012, p.17). She describes it as a humble, realistic tense where ‘the author is not claiming superior knowledge – she is inside or very close to her character, and sharing their focus, their limited perceptions. It doesn’t suit authors who want to boss the reader around and like being God’ (cited in Lea, 2015, p.2). Kevin Barry suggests ‘it is a case of trying to plant a voice inside the reader’s head, to make him or her hear the words as they read them...to make them read with their ears, essentially...It’s a mesmeric force’ (cited in Lea, 2015, p.1). Ursula Le Guin points out that while the present tense may seem more ‘actual’, in fact it distances the story, a strategy employed by ‘very sophisticated writers’ (1989, p. 38).

In Billie’s strand I have exploited the ‘falsity’ of the present tense by applying it also to the past and the future. Billie swings free of time, for all that the present tense is meant to locate her securely within it. She has memories but can also foretell the fates of both people and country that extend beyond her lifespan, and I have seeded dates and time indicators to alert the reader to this anomaly. This hauntological ghosting through time belies the seemingly corporeal vividness of the present. It also opens space to reveal the parallels, contradictions and consequences that occurred in the nation’s history.

Billie is described in her biography and in several contemporary accounts as having a cockney accent. Though raised in rural Harefield, she moved to the city when she was fifteen, an age where she would have acquired a cockney accent relatively easily and this would have helped her to blend in to her new environment. She is quoted as taking glee in talking about ‘me and me ’usband’ after she married the count. There are also reported - apparently verbatim - accounts of several of her adventures: the shooting of a lion (Cary, 1973, p. 23-24) and the attempted shooting of an intruder. I have included these, as written, in the novel.

Dialect can be intrusive so I included only a few markers to give Billie’s voice cockney cadences: double negatives, the substitution of the relative pronoun *what* for *who*, as well as the ingrained use of *ain’t* and *cos*⁴¹. I used a light hand with idiom and Victorian slang. To indicate youth and limited education, I employed a predominance of compound sentences to suggest naiveté and impetuosity. To demonstrate her growing sophistication as well as indicating a quick mind, Billie learns French and Afrikaans words as well new ideas such as evolution, mapmaking etc. Her speech is idiosyncratic in that she runs words together or links them: *ducksomethingorother, what’s-it-to-do-with-me* shrug. Her language is as adaptive and fluid as her identity.

In contrast, Edmond’s speech is marked by punctiliousness with regard to grammar and word choice as befits an educated, aristocratic man speaking in a second language. He never uses contractions and his vocabulary is more polished than Billie’s. There are some grammatical structures that echo their French roots and his utterances are occasionally peppered with French words. The other characters conform to speech habits consistent with their class and educational backgrounds. Lord Randolph Churchill’s pronouncements on Salisbury and Africa are taken from his *Men, Mines and Animals in South Africa* (1892) and I’ve taken the liberty of quoting some sentences verbatim.

The use of words such as *native*, *nigger*, *savage* and *kaffir* required care. In contemporary accounts all the words are used, though the first two more predominantly. *Nigger* did not appear to carry the same derogatory connotations as it does today. Hugh Marshall Hole notes:

In Rhodesia, the term, “boys” means grown-up natives who work for white people, the younger ones being known as “piccanins”. Time was when without any contemptuous implication we used to speak of all Bantu People (whether in their *kraals* or in employment) as “niggers” but we have become

⁴¹ I did not use ‘*cos*, feeling that the apostrophe operated as a visual break or hiccup.

so timidly delicate of speech that I fear I should shock refined ears if I used that good old word to-day (1928/1968 p.45).

Initially I tried to use the words neutrally and interchangeably to maintain historical accuracy even though I myself was uncomfortable when typing *nigger*. However, feedback indicated that it left the work open to misinterpretation by a contemporary readership. This feedback is consistent with some moves in America whereby modern sensibilities are now exercising limited censorship on classics such as *Huckleberry Finn* (Messant, 2011) and *To Kill a Mocking Bird* (Guardian, 2017). While I do not agree with moves to modify or restrict readerships when it comes to these books, I realise that my usage of terms leaves the creative work exposed to misinterpretation. Instead I used the more neutral *native* although during and after the chimurenga, Billie slides into using *savage* and *kaffir* to reflect her hardened attitude against the Shona. I also used these terms when appropriate to demonstrate colonial or racist attitudes.

As an aside, while the settler attitudes towards the indigenous people were overbearing and patronising at best, male attitudes towards women were not just patronising (even if kindly-meant) but largely dismissive. For example, Hugh Marshall Hole (1926) devotes a chapter to the role of the ‘natives’ in the settler community but deals with the women in only one page. He does not mention Billie at all except to say that the count was accompanied by ‘his English wife who, in order to circumvent the regulations against the admission of women, entered the country dressed as a boy —a disguise which deceived nobody’ (p.125). This ‘fudging’ of their relationship may have been Victorian discretion because it was Marshall Hole who married in them in 1894.

Fragmentary mentions of Billie and Edmond scattered through the various memoirs and histories helped me to flesh out the characters. For example, Hugh Marshall Hole describes Edmond as a ‘delightful personality’ (1926, p.124) who showed ‘great resource and pluck’ (p.125) during the uprising. In *Pioneers of Mashonaland* (Darter, 1914) I found mention of Billie’s first baby when the author described the bet that men had on whether Mary or Billie would be first to give birth and that ‘Billy lost by a head’ (p.166). This birth is not recorded in her biography so it must be concluded that the baby died at, or very soon after, birth for I could find no other mention of it.

One account went against the usually fond descriptions of the count and helped inform my portrayal of Edmond:

With him was Billy, and Billy was a woman dressed in jaunty knickerbockers. The old Count was very anxious to sell whisky to anybody, but waxed exceedingly wrath when Billy spoke to somebody. and that while she was pleasant to talk to, the Count was a 'Bombastes Furioso' (Darter, 1914: p.138).

The current Comte de la Panouse furnished me with the story of Billie blaming the monkeys for stealing her potatoes.

Locating Shape

While I conceived of Billie's story initially as a novella, it swiftly outgrew the conventions of that genre in length and complexity. Her personal narrative fits rather well into the framework of Christopher Vogler's 'hero's journey' based upon Joseph Campbell's analysis of storytelling (Vogler & Hauge, 2009). The 'hero's journey' underlies many great novels as well as forming the blueprint for Hollywood films. The story begins with Billie in her *normal life* and through Edmond she receives the *call to adventure*. There is the *near refusal* of this challenge when she visits her brother but she *accepts the challenge*. Edmond serves as her *mentor* and she *crosses the threshold* when arriving in Mashonaland where she encounters *tests, allies and enemies*. There are *rising challenges* and a *brush with death* when she escapes the Shona fighters but this is not ultimately a heroic tale. Billie does not *triumph* and the death of her baby is the final, tragic ordeal that sets her feet onto the *road back* as she and Edmond leave Salisbury to return to Europe.

Billie's biographical narrative also echoes the picaresque, with a low-born, somewhat roguish, adventurer making her way through various social milieus, mingling with characters from all walks of life yet all the while remaining on the margins. Her first-person narration enables an individualised and subjective commentary on the everyday life of settler Rhodesians to provide a microhistory that challenges 'totalising' narratives. Her episodic encounters with different characters such as Curio Brown, Ulysses and Churchill contain faint echoes of the *Canterbury Tales* and the *Decameron*. These encounters may also contain echoes of Derrida's spectres because they vanish out of the narrative though their foretelling haunts both Rhodesia and Zimbabwe.

Further, the original Spanish picaresque hero gave voice to liminal peoples and Billie's narrative restores the women pioneers to the historical narrative - problematising official canons that have depicted them, albeit in a cursory manner, as either heroic or complicitly rapacious. The *picaresque* generally reflects on his youthful adventures from the vantage point of old age with its accumulated insight to provide a complex, retrospective narrative (De Haan & Mierau, 2014; p.3) that allows the development of psychological depth of character generally reserved for the leading players within grand narratives. By freeing Billie from the constraints of time, I am able to present her story with the immediacy of the present coloured by both hind and foresight. The urbanscape of the picaresque novel ties into the psychogeographic concerns of the creative project and even the picaresque irony of an elite author penning the subaltern voice is reflected in my twenty-first century portrayal of a nineteenth-century woman.

There are further aspects of Billie's story that capture popular attention and imagination. It echoes the Cinderella fairy tale although her marriage is not the triumphant climax of her story and nor does it bring her riches. Her social standing may have been raised, but for the rest of her life Billie lived either modestly or on the fringes of poverty.

Billie's masculine masquerade also fits within a popular trope that has been employed in works ranging from Shakespeare through to the music hall. Cross-dressing has always fascinated in its subversion of social mores, its blurring of gender boundaries and its inherently homo/hetero erotic charge. In Billie's biography Cary intimated Edmond conceived the masquerade, but I could find no documented evidence of this and believe it was more likely Fanny's idea for she would have been well-aware of instances of cross-dressing in Victorian London. Apart from the popularity of woman impersonators on the stage, there had been widespread newspaper coverage of several high-profile court cases featuring women masqueraders. These women who donned masculine attire were generally from the working class and often did it out of economic necessity to procure better jobs or greater social mobility (Hindmarch-Watson, 2008). Cross-dressing has also been prevalent throughout history for varying reasons, enabling women to pursue careers otherwise closed to them, escape unhappy domestic situations, or join husbands, fiancés or brothers on various battlefields (Wheelwright, 1989; Scott-Dixon, 2006; Hindmarch-Watson, 2008).

The popularity of cross-dressing heroines in historical fiction has been enduring. Bryher (cited in Wallace, 2008; p.21) claimed male disguise gave liberty to women in eras when such freedoms were unknown and believed the cross-dressed heroine was as important a figure as the tragic queen. I myself used this trope in an earlier novel for much the same reasons as Billie did in real life - as a means to penetrate the (largely masculine) colonial space. I also used it as a means to subvert generalised depictions of settler women. Billie's story deviates from fiction, however, in that she entered the male space alongside her lover, and while it appeared her disguise did not deceive many, it was accommodated by men more ready to be amused than horrified. The heroine in Cynthia Stockley's novel *Ponjola* maintains her masquerade for some years in Salisbury, and Stockley took this opportunity to place the woman very firmly within male company and companionship. It became a means to explore the hypocrisies of the early settler community in matters concerning gender, sexual relationships out of marriage, and the imposition of Victorian mores on a reasonably lawless colonial society. It is tempting to believe that Billie's story inspired this novel, although breeches-wearing French Marie may also have had an influence.

In Billie's strand I aimed to capture something of the essence of the settlers in all their variance. The memoirs and fictions provided a wealth of useful detail regarding daily living as well as providing glimpses into the Victorian psyche, especially their attitudes towards the indigenous peoples. For example:

These pickaninnis —like the children of all Kaffir tribes — were very precocious and amusing. It is held by some that the brain is very active in the Kaffir child, but progression ceases at the stage of adolescence (Darter, 1914, p.98).

Several texts mention problems in approaching Shona women:

It was impossible to get near the women, for on our approach they fled, shrieking in terror, to their huts. ... We turned a corner rather unexpectedly, and came upon a bevy of naked damsels — about twenty of them. We approached smilingly, but the timid creatures rushed for the only hut near with such frantic haste that it was evident they expected dreadful things from us (Finlayson, 1893/1975, p.190).

This caution seems to have been general as Darter comments, 'The women we see are ugly and old, and perhaps the younger are hiding, due to the kaffir version of a white filibuster. Well, we have been called that by our own people, but ... this was not a man-killing episode' (Darter, 1914, p.77). However, Olive Schreiner's novel

Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland (1897) depicts more brutish behaviour on the part of European men.

Locating Other

Billie's ambiguous position within the colony (Edmond's lowborn 'consort' for the first few years) became a useful device in that she can remain 'other', thus enabling some objectivity towards her companions. As a woman – and especially since she is not part of the educated middle classes – she can interrogate the widely-held assumptions based on gender, race etc. However, as she is drawn into the colony with her move to Salisbury, her marriage and the polarising events of the 1896 conflict, much of that 'otherness' slips away.

Writing Clea

Locating Clea

Initially, this strand began in New Zealand with the protagonist meeting her adopted-out daughter (Lu), who required a life-saving bone-marrow transplant,⁴² and was written from both points of view. The protagonist was not compatible so she and Lu went together to Harare to find the father, which led to the protagonist telling Lu about her relationship with him in the 1970s, thereby depicting both personal and national histories. In addition, the protagonist was writing Billie's biography. It was a busy strand, and the more I wrote the more I discarded. The journal I kept marked my growing anxiety. In June, two and half years into the project, I wrote, 'I am filled with profound ill ease. I am paralysed. I cannot find a voice for the 1970s. I cannot find my feet in present-day Zimbabwe.'

Part of the problem lay in differentiating the protagonist clearly from myself in order to eliminate hints of memoir. By chance I met a woman who still identifies herself as Rhodesian, and I realised that I could separate Clea by giving her a different political standpoint. Yet this Rhodesian is essentially nice — I did not want to take her views and portray them in a way to invite 'liberal' derision. I was hampered too by anxieties of 'betraying' people I'd grown up with - friends who had fought for the country, friends who had believed in Ian Smith. I am not a youthful Doris Lessing intent on baring the admittedly grave flaws of the society that

⁴² I had in mind a metaphor of the sins of the parents visited on the child, which could be extrapolated out in the national history. This metaphor shifted to Ruth's story.

spawned us. Its history is complex, as is present-day Zimbabwe. I embarked upon this book as a means to find understanding – I sought empathy, not exposé. Yet despite my (naïve) intentions, I was growing to realise that this project is personal, is exposing, and that it opens myself, the project and the country to judgements I cannot control.

The other problem was narrative. There were too many threads: the mother-daughter relationship, the returning-emigrant/first-time-visitor dynamics, and the long-lost-boyfriend/newly-found-father complexities. There was too the discovery by the protagonist that she had a ‘coloured’ half-sister, Ruth. To cap it all off, the protagonist was researching Billie and pondering on the nature of biography. It was overwhelming and I could not even find the protagonist’s name. She went from Paula to Pia to Paige, and sometimes she was simply ‘??’ I was also floundering in medical terminologies: haploidentical, allogeneic, AML. Lu was very ill, but in the scenes I wrote she remained resolutely robust. Her mother might be sliding amorphously on the page but Lu was steadfast: tall, dark, and a writer of hot fantasy. Theirs was an uneasy relationship, with uneven exchanges and scenes that did not link.

In July I scrapped everything and started over. Above all, I had to find the character’s name. Until I had that I couldn’t locate her. I trawled websites of baby names. I am not sure what made me alight upon the name Clea, but *The Alexandria Quartet* (Durrell, 1960) had enthralled me several decades earlier with its reflexive, conflicting points of view, and *Clea* is the final book in the quartet. I also liked the close homophone with ‘clear’. In the beginning the protagonist is apparently transparent, but as the story progresses she becomes less and less so. A quick google of the name confirmed my decision. Clio or Kleo is the muse of history. She is also known as the proclaimer, the celebrator - and is often depicted holding a scroll.

Locating Voice

I still had problems, however, and wrote in September that while I felt sand under my feet, Clea remained murky. I knew by this stage that she was writing Ruth’s story, but that conflicted with her research into Billie. Contrary to my normally expansive writing style, I discovered an urge to streamline and cut back. A week later I had a breakthrough, paraphrasing *My Fair Lady* triumphantly in my journal with, ‘By George I think I’ve got it!’ I’d just read the first few pages of *Mrs Dalloway* (Woolf, 1925) with its present tense and the shifting deep points of view

that dissolved into one another. This was as I'd first conceived the creative work - one scene dissolving, film-like, into another.

Those few pages of Woolf were sufficient. I picked up my pen and, in present tense, wrote the first scene of the book, setting it in Harare with Clea looking out into a garden, memories dissolving into her consciousness. This felt immediately right, especially with the deeply subjective point of view. Beginning the story in Harare rather than New Zealand also fitted better into the psychogeographic framework. Over the next few days, however, I realised I was retrospectively shoehorning Lu into scenes. Clearly she did not belong, and with that she fell back to Australia to become a figure in the wings, pregnant rather than ill.

In contrast, Janey and Ally were immediate presences, but the biggest surprise was Stefan bloody Leibowitz elbowing his way into scenes. Likewise, snippy Mrs Anderson had not been planned. I had not documented the many twists and turns of writing Billie's strand so I made a more conscious effort with Clea's. Even so, I did not - could not - explain their sudden and definitive appearances.

Now that I had Clea's voice, I shifted the story into past tense. This differentiated it from Billie's voice but also -, given Zimbabwe's tumultuous and ever changing present – I felt it necessary to pin this strand to a past time. I was very aware that should Mugabe die, Zimbabwe could change dramatically and swiftly. The use of the present tense for memories contrasted well, carrying hauntological whispers of the past ever-present. It also carried, like a musical motif, resonances with Billie's historical strand.

Clea's voice is non-specific, a sort of transatlantic blandness, while Ally, Stefan and Mrs Anderson carry the cadences of Rhodesian/Zimbabwean accents. Only when speaking to Stefan does the odd 'ja' or 'hey' creep into Clea's speech. I have used the phonetic spellings *baas* and *medem* as markers to Shona cadences so readers do not 'hear' *boss* and *madame*. Yet these did cause anxiety because, as Ruzich and Blake (2015) point out, 'enregistered language acts are employed to do far more than impart local colour or flavour: the novelist's representation of characters' speech patterns draws upon readers' implicit valuations of cultural stereotypes' (p.537).

Locating Shape

The writing was now flowing at the rate of one to two thousand words a day. I was continually paring back, and the strand morphed into a novella as I compressed the

timeframe from several weeks to a matter of days. I had not written a novella before, the form Stephen King describes as ‘an anarchy-ridden literary banana public’ (cited in Tan, 2016, p.2), but I was attracted to the tighter focus, the small cast of characters, the limited subplots, the single setting.

Clea’s New Zealand background was too defining so I placed her in Paradosi (anagram for diaspora) Bay in a non-specific country. Apart from the fortunate homophone with paradise, paradosi also has the pleasing happenstance of meaning ‘by word of mouth’ which fits well with my ‘listening to’ memoirs and oral histories and my narrator-defined story strands. Clea’s life outside of Zimbabwe is of little importance and I wanted to keep her more as an ordinary ‘everywoman’. I wanted her observations about societies and histories to carry more global significance rather than be limited to a New Zealand context. It was interesting, therefore, to see emerging the contrasting worlds of her father’s landlocked life and her mother’s ocean one, with Clea herself unaware quite how much the salt water ran in her veins.

By mid-November Clea’s strand was almost complete, with just a few scenes to write. Each day I knew what I meant to write and would settle down to write them, but each time the story veered in a different direction. Is this what writers refer to as the muse? To inspiration? Try as I might, I could not get Clea to the archives to research Billie, and when she went to the graveyard she forgot it was for research purposes. In my journal I noted:

The problem is that the book will be what it is, will I it or not. I still have five final scenes to go. I’ve written five thousand words this week and none of them address the said scenes. I settle down to write one thing and another comes out of my hands. I’m in gentle despair.

I cannot write that which will not be written.

Yet later that day I wrote:

I’ve had a blinding insight. Billie is not Clea’s story – Ruth is.

A week later I noted:

Clea has been coming strongly for about four days now. I feel I’m finally slipping into her or she is taking charge. How to explain it? Fragments pop into my head when I am watering the garden, making the bed, and I rush to get them down. I start writing one thing and find I’m writing another. Stefan has pushed himself into the limelight. It’s getting longer and longer but there are still those last couple of key scenes. When I write them, they’ll be the keystones that will clinch the story.

The more I try to record the creative process, the more it eludes.

The final scene with Paul had not been planned. I had always wanted to show that though Clea had played no role in the war, still she had been somehow complicit. Her re-membling of her past is riddled with omissions and elisions, creating personal myths that echo national ones. Stefan is the only one to call her on her self-justifying reinventions which, like official canons, suppress or skew, consciously or unconsciously, events to appear in a better light. Clea's confession to Paul simply slipped out, but governments seldom make such admissions - and then often only many decades later.

Locating Other

Like Billie, Clea is a marginal character. War stories tend to focus on the combatants, with civilians relegated to minor roles, and as a teenager Clea is on the fringes of the war, with no role within it. Yet she is profoundly affected by it through her father's death and Paul's brain injury. Clea also experiences loneliness and helplessness as Paul becomes emotionally unreachable during his R&Rs.⁴³ Perhaps hardest of all on families are the silences when men cannot begin to articulate their war experiences and women do not know how to begin to support them.

In this regard, despite his minor role, Paul is a significant character. From the project's conception I knew he would be physically strong but mentally absent. Research did not reveal soldiers with his sort of brain damage, but a visit to our local brain injury unit confirmed there are instances of similar damage. While there, I viewed two videos of interviews with people who'd suffered brain trauma, which fitted well with my research methodology of 'listening'. My mother had had a brain tumour, so some aspects of Paul's behaviour are drawn from her decline. The documentary *The Man with a Seven Second Memory* (Murch & Treays, 2005) was also influential. Paul is an ambiguous figure, a reminder of veterans who sustain permanent, physical injuries, but also a reminder of those suffering from PTSD since no one knows what Paul thinks or feels. Soldiers often cannot speak of the trauma they carry (Van der Kolk, 2014; Badham, 2017).

Clea is also marginalised, in her case because she gave up her child for adoption. The stories of women driven to such traumatic lengths are still all too often

⁴³ Rest and recuperation. Soldiers were allowed back home for brief respites from the strains of bush warfare.

shrouded in silence. Two women spoke to me about their experiences and I read a collective biography (Bloch Jones, 2000), articles (for example, Henney, Ayers-Lopez, McRoy & Grotevant, 2007; Howe & Feast, 2001) and online (for example, Riben, 2015). Many women cite difficulties in maintaining intimate relationships with men. There are echoes of PTSD in a number of accounts. Reunions with their children are complex. Some mothers forge close relationships, others are grieved and/or disturbed by the lack of connection they feel. I have kept Clea's reunion with Lu ambiguous. I also did not go into much detail about the agony of giving up a baby nor its aftermath, trying instead to capture it as PTSD flashbacks. Like soldiers, Clea is rendered silent, riven with pain and guilt.

Writing Ruth

Locating Ruth

As previously mentioned, this strand caused the greatest anxiety and I discussed the issue of 'writing black' with Irene Staunton, a renowned Zimbabwean publisher. She does not believe whites can write 'black' nor that blacks can write 'white' convincingly. She suggested the character could have mixed parentage, perhaps a family living in Botswana where interracial marriages were acceptable. I liked the idea of the mixed parentage, but never having lived in Botswana and never having known such families, I was unsure I could bridge such distances. Fiction may not be 'real' but I always need to find points of identification - some echo or resonance with each character.

I lived in England for a year when I was six and later lived in Brixton, so I initially thought that perhaps the mother and Ruth⁴⁴ (whose name was there from the beginning – I don't know how or why) could move to England when the daughter was young. I thought perhaps the daughter could write letters to the father after returning to Rhodesia to fight in the Liberation War. There were a number of problems, however. This British setting detracted from the Zimbabwean psychogeographic focus, and I also struggled to link this strand to Clea's. Perhaps Ruth now lived in Clea's house? Perhaps Ruth's mother used to work for Clea's parents? Worst of all, the voice was all wrong as I experimented with different scenarios.

⁴⁴ I had Ruth's name from the beginning. Perhaps it was because the biblical Ruth made a choice between her tribe and her husband's tribe. Perhaps because it carries resonance as being an obsolete antonym of 'ruthless' (another lacuna). Perhaps because of its near alignment with (t)ruth.

I contacted Mercy Chipo Jumo,⁴⁵ and when I was in Wellington we met for lunch. Mercy listened as I stumbled through what sounded, even to me, like half-baked ideas, but when I suggested that Ruth, now turned guerrilla, was writing letters to her father Mercy gave a peal of laughter.

‘But, Zana,’ she said, ‘where would she post them?’

‘In a country store?’ I suggested.

This prompted more laughter. ‘There were no stores. Besides, it was too dangerous to carry letters.’

Clearly I had considerably more research to go.

When I asked Mercy what she thought about appropriation she replied, ‘If it’s well-written most people will just think, “Oh, that’s a nice story”. Only the academics will care. I think that anyone should be able to tell the story of Zimbabwe’s struggle or war from their own perspective. It was a war of many people(s) with varied interests and different experiences. It follows therefore that the narrative and the tone will be different depending on the writers’ reality.’⁴⁶

While out kayaking one still winter morning I suddenly realised Ruth is Clea’s half-sister.⁴⁷ The idea was so obvious I couldn’t understand why I hadn’t discovered this sooner. It linked the threads but, more importantly, it gave me a link with Ruth. I too had a half-sister - Frances, my father’s daughter from his first marriage about whom he never talked. We only met twice because Frances was much older, lived in Britain and died many years ago. She was always the ‘might-have-been’ sister, the lacuna in my father’s stories about his life. I gleaned snippets of her from dropped comments of distant aunts and I have a few photographs of her. If I were to write about her I would begin, ‘Once there was a little girl with long red curls and a Shirley Temple face.’ I would write her life in the third person and from a distance. If I were writing about my full sister, I would write it first person and it would be in close focus. Clea, I now saw, would write Ruth’s story - piecing it together from snippets her aunt recorded.

⁴⁵ I had read her Masters thesis comparing the experiences of (black and white) Zimbabwean women immigrants to New Zealand.

⁴⁶ I have Mercy’s permission to relate this scene and quote her.

⁴⁷ Another example of how solutions / realisations arrive out of the blue, making it hard to account for them.

Locating Voice

It was liberating to shift to third person and write the first scene in florid, almost fairy-tale language, signified by words like *tale*, *once*. I do not want to reveal Clea immediately as the author but aim to alert the reader to be wary, mistrustful - as perhaps we should be when national stories are related by an omniscient author. I hope the reader will 'hear' the false note and question it. Then, as the artifice melts away, I hope to lull the reader into accepting the narrative, only to discover Clea is in fact the author, filling in huge gaps in her own way.

It echoes the practices of historians, biographers and novelists and mirrors my own construction methods. Through writing, Clea comes to terms with what might have been happening during her teenage years - 'might' in that she has a growing awareness of the gaps in her knowledge about her own birth country and her ignorance of her half-sister. Thus the story becomes more 'real' even as it becomes more threadbare. The description of the attack on the camp is sparse and there is almost no detail on Gukurahundi as words literally fail Clea.

Locating Shape

This strand became a story-within-a-story, fashioned in the mode of the Pompidou Centre which has all its pipes and conduits on the outside. I aimed to show the construction lines, the seams. Clea's research tracks my own as she draws upon oral histories, YouTube interviews and novels. It is also meant to show how Clea's story slips into and shades Ruth's tale. Thus the distance between *Coming Dawn* and Ruth after he returns from an incursion is a reflection of the gap between Clea and Paul on his final R&R. When Clea simply doesn't know, it is admitted in the narrative.

The narration is third person, but unlike in the Clea strand there is no deep point of view. The reader is seldom privy to Ruth's thoughts. The transparency of the story-writing process, while illustrating the distance between Clea (the author) and Ruth (her subject) also serves as a metaphor for the writing of history. Ultimately the novel is about mis/representations, gaps and silences, and this strand exemplifies this.

Ruth's strand is considerably shorter than those of Billie and Clea. When I had finished writing it I was not sure whether it found its natural length, as the other strands had done, or whether this brevity was the result of inhibitions regarding appropriation mixed in with personal reservations about writing details of a war I did not fight. While I tried tackling this strand in a similar way to my approach with

Billie's, the differences were quickly brought home to me. Writing contemporary fiction is worrisome when authors step out of their worlds to inhabit those of Other. It did indeed feel like another form of colonialism, no matter what my motivation was. In the end, the only way I could write Ruth was as a white author looking speculatively in from the outside.

Locating Other

Ruth is clearly a liminal figure: she is of mixed ethnicity and race; she is an ex-combatant and part of the diaspora. She opens and occupies ambiguous spaces in a nation that, Kizito Muchemwa (2011) contends, is riddled with binaries: 'rural versus urban; people with totems versus those without; citizens versus non-citizens; black versus white; and Shona versus Ndebele' (p.395). Both she and Clea are tainted - 'coloured' as it were – just as Zimbabwe itself is by the legacy and fallout of colonialism. Ruth, like Clea, no longer lives in Zimbabwe and it may be that her children will lose connection with their African roots - just as Janey feels she has done with her antecedents' homelands. Yet the diaspora releases the exiles from the polarising 'discourses of autochthony, otherness and violence', and here Muchemwa sees a role in literature to challenge violence and to 'free itself of the stranglehold of Manichaeism in a search for reimagining the nation' (p. 394).

Revelations

Review

The aim of the book was to write a ‘biography’ of my birth country, told through feminine voices and depicting every-day, lived experience in order to provide alternative interpretations of a complex national history. I sought to listen to women who were not only silenced but who silenced themselves: Billie who left no written record of her life, Clea who gave a child up for adoption, and Ruth, a guerrilla fighter. These characters undergo experiences that change their lives irrevocably, and these experiences are closely aligned with disruptions within the history of Rhodesia/Zimbabwe. Despite being minor players, their individual stories are deeply woven into the fabric of the country’s history; they are a part of it for all that they are also ‘apart’ from it.

I wrote the novel within an academic framework to ensure rigorous research and receive informed feedback on a work that I feel I cannot see objectively or clearly because I am too close to it. The work requires further drafting and I am taking advantage in this section of revealing not only what I think I have learnt and what I feel the project might contribute, but also to indicate aspects I feel require more attentive mapping, or deeper, more nuanced interpretation.

Each strand is, in a sense, an act of trespass. Billie’s narrative strand is fictionalised biography. I remained true to the ‘events’ of her life over that ten-year span but I appropriated her voice and her thoughts. By using first person I signalled authorial intervention and invention as I hijacked Billie’s story to enter into the pioneer community and explore its complexities from various and varied standpoints. This strand was a means to come to a personal reckoning with the inception of my birth country.

Clea’s story too is a form of trespass since I have never relinquished a baby, but I wanted to acknowledge the anguish and ongoing psychological issues experienced by these generally very young mothers. Clea’s story is threefold for she is also a revenant figure for she returns to face her ghosts/demons and in doing so learns she must revise and reinscribe her personal history in the light of revelations and reinterpretations of the past. This is analogous to the underlying premise of the novel, wherein the national history is reinterpreted through minor feminine voices, but also pertains to the wider, palimpsestic nature of (postcolonial) history. Parallels

run through this strand: adoption/migration/colonisation, DNA/nurture, personal identity/national identity/belonging. Finally, this strand aligns with self-reflexive, metafictional practice in that Clea authors Ruth's narrative strand, thereby underscoring the themes and concerns of the creative work.

I approached Ruth's story with trepidation because of the tangled complexities circulating the appropriation of Other, but the option of writing an 'all-white' narrative was even less acceptable. Ruth is an ambiguous character who occupies and operates in - yet does not fully 'belong' to - different worlds. She is both symbol and inevitable legacy of her colonial past, manifesting the often invisible influences, confluences, complexities and contradictions that occur through contact between invaders and indigenous. Yet Clea too is colonial in that she is not European.

Ruth's mother, Hope, may be a minor character but she is significant. Her relationship with Ruth's father, Don, has resonance with colonial first contact: initial autonomy that brings extremely compromising consequences which are faced with extraordinary fortitude. She, like Clea, conceives a child out of wedlock, transgressing the socio-religious mores of both societies, yet Hope takes a very different path. Don parallels his grandfather's approach to Africa; there is the ambiguous relationship with Hope which began with clearly strong attraction but his ensuing silence leaves space in the narrative. He moves on, offering (some) financial recompense while Hope must pay the full price.

Ruth as a guerrilla fighter demonstrates personal agency, rejecting and transcending roles ascribed to her by both black and white societies. She is also a diasporic figure and moves between Europe and Africa – a loose inversion of Billie's journey – and her children remain the unknown factor for the future. There are analogies too between the sibling relationship and the nation's racial divisions. Clea is as much a product of their shared history as Ruth, but while they share the same father they lead patently different lives due to socio-racial privileging - though in the end both are displaced. Yet even as I write, I am aware of how uncertain my foothold is in this narrative strand, how flimsy my interpretations may be. Ruth's story highlights the gaping lacunae in my largely white narrative.

Silences, Meuses, Lacunae

The creative project began with gaps and silences which I intended to explore, then 'translate' into narrative strands that might together open spaces to 'truth' about the

country and its history. Over the course of the doctorate, however, *truth* became more and more vexed, more slippery. My truths were not necessarily those of my characters or my readers. What indeed is ‘truth’?

It was only in the final weeks of my study that I came across Heidegger’s translation and interpretation of the Ancient Greek word for truth: *Aletheia*. Literally translated, it means not-concealed and his ontology is grounded in ‘unconcealment’ - that is, making available, bringing out what was previously concealed, covered up (Critchley, 2002, p.1560). This, I believe, is the essence of the project. I have brought forth – uncovered— little known, forgotten or concealed stories and have told them in a minor, feminine key. What truths there may be in this ‘unconcealment’ are for readers to discern. In keeping with my ‘mother tongue’, I am offering, not claiming.

Silences formed the heart of the novel. There are the silent voices of women in the 1890s, the silence of soldiers, the silence of oppressed people and of oppressive governments. There is silence around babies born out of wedlock. Yet as I researched, as I wrote, I began to see the ambiguities of silence; voices may be silenced or may simply choose not to speak. Silence can be both weapon and defence. It can be complicit and it can resist; it can be impenetrable. Respect, care and caution are required when negotiating silence in its many forms.

In the 1890s, the voices of European men clearly dominated the narratives, and as both products and perpetrators of their imperial roots they appear to have ‘unseen’ women and indigenous people, been deaf to their voices except as insignificant players in their own rather grand chronicles. There were some, though, who did indeed *see*, who did *hear*, and these men have been given minor roles: Ulysses, the missionaries. In the novel Billie mediates her own story, but forges her own silences too: resisting and yet also complicit with her assigned roles both as Victorian (working class) woman (consort) and colonising settler. The Shona and Ndebele characters have almost no ‘voice’ in this strand because Billie too is both product and perpetrator of her times and would not have heard them. Instead I tried to stitch around the silences – a kind of crochet, as it were – by giving some details of their lives to alert the reader that their ‘ever-presence’ ran, at the very least, as an undercurrent to the colonial society right through to Independence.

Despite some memoirs and anthropological studies, silence still largely surrounds experiences of war, adoption and female guerrilla fighters. Initially I had thought interviews would be valuable as they would penetrate the silences as well as

ensure ‘originality’ but this approach proved complex. I found it difficult to locate people who wanted to talk and, besides, mindful of what Bessel Van der Kolk terms ‘speechless horror’ (2014, p. 43), I became progressively less keen to trample, self-serving, into these spaces. Instead I ‘listened’ to whatever fragments I could find in texts, in photographs, online. Then, using Clea both in her lived experience and as Ruth’s biographer, I tried to ‘write’ silence, indicating its different facets: denial in its many forms, trauma, shutting out, shutting down. Sometimes I tried to fill in the silences, sometimes to challenge them. Other times I ‘unconcealed’ them in as far as I indicated they were there but otherwise let them be. They are silences for others to speak.

I came to see gaps had their subtle differentiations. Meuses possess physicality in that we can lay our hands in the hollow right where the animal lay and can imagine it as it turned, as it lay down, as it slept. Yet, laying one’s hand in the meuse is not the same as laying a hand on the actual animal and there is always a lingering sense of regret, of having-just-missed, that haunts. While researching, especially when visiting locales, there is almost intimacy in walking where once the real people walked, looking out of the same windows over the same terrain. Herein lay the psychogeographic element of the novel where the land serves as a palimpsest. I aimed to show how history is embossed onto the land so that even as the city grows from tents to tall buildings, the pulse of other times beats beneath. When love (whether for people, land, beliefs etc.) becomes entangled with possession, it can be destructive. For example, in the novel, Curio Brown, the American specimen collector⁴⁸, loves and reveres the animals, even as he kills them. Land is heritage and conquest. It is also neither because it outlasts all those who scribe their tiny lives across it.

Lacunae are defined variously: small openings, pits or depressions, blank spaces, gaps, vacancies. Pleasingly, a lacuna can also be a hiatus, an absent section in a piece of writing, a missing parchment or manuscript. It is a gap in language where there is no direct translation and it is the intended, extended silence in a musical piece. Research for this project has been riddled with lacunae, and the difficulties have been enhanced by the huge physical distances, the extremely limited

⁴⁸ Curio Brown was a real person and wrote *On the South African frontier; the adventures and observations of an American in Mashonaland and Matabeleland*.

access to the Zimbabwe National Archives and my own personal prejudices and lacunae. Although Paul is a minor character, he is significant for he is lacuna personified: a symbol of absence; he is there and not there. He's a remainder and reminder of the costs of war: not only the fighters who died but also the victims who were killed or left maimed for life. He is there for the thousands of disappeared. War does not end with the ceasefire. There are holes in families forever. Missing limbs never regrow and psychological damage can endure for many years with grave repercussions.⁴⁹

I hope this creative project fills some of the silences and lacunae, accounts for some of the meuses. Equally, I hope it in turn creates its own silences, meuses, lacunae as each of the three protagonists flit between nations and spaces, their stories told in fragile bubbles in time.

Readings

Contrary to my usual writing practice, I circulated my first readable⁵⁰ draft not only to my supervisors but also to a few readers for their responses. Interestingly, Ruth was picked by the three non-Zimbabwean readers as the most compelling character despite (or perhaps because of) the shorter length and the limited dialogue and access to Ruth's thoughts. One reader cited this marginality and opaqueness as a strength, and this echoes Jerome Bruner's (1986) claim that good writers structure their texts to provide clues that excite the curiosity and fascination of the reader while leaving gaps that allow readers to formulate their own meanings. Bruner cites Wolfgang Iser's claim that it is 'the element of *indeterminacy* that evokes the text to communicate with the reader, in the sense that they induce him to participate both in the production and the comprehension of the work's intention' (p.24).

There was genuine interest in the little known stories of the women guerrilla fighters and I wonder if I (and my readers) might also be inherently attracted to the potent archetype of the woman warrior. There have been suggestions that I extend

⁴⁹ Chris Cocks wrote a searing memoir *Fireforce* of his war years as a way to combat alcoholism and depression. In it he records how many Rhodesian soldiers went on to become alcoholics and/or kill themselves either through suicide or in car accidents. In *The Body Keeps the Score*, Bessel Van Der Kolk, a Harvard psychiatrist specialising in PTSD, notes as common symptoms: profound detachment from loved ones and society in general, alcohol, blinding rages and flashbacks, furious driving and suicide. Alexander Kanengoni's *Echoing Silences* is an aching, painful novel depicting this dislocation of a returned guerrilla fighter who cannot fit back into society. On the radio I heard an Australian soldier, newly returned from Afghanistan, talking of the enormous problems of trying to fit back into 'normality'. He remarked that he had been trained for six months for war but had only received three days to prepare him for peace.

⁵⁰ There had been many previous drafts both as individual strands and composite novel.

this strand and I wonder if, having already committed trespass, I might as well continue. I wonder too if I've let Ruth off lightly because she hasn't been placed in morally compromising situations as the other characters are. Will it make the strand stronger if, as a guerrilla, she witnesses brutal attacks on defenceless villagers and stays (wisely?) silent - and thus, like Clea and Billie, becomes complicit with violence and injustice?

Mercy Chipso Jumo read Ruth's narrative and supplied the following as feedback, which relieved me greatly.

I read Ruth's story and found it interesting, gripping and sad, especially the disillusionment and the uncertainty of what became of Ruth's life in overseas. In my mind you painted a realistic and appropriate picture that a black or 'coloured'⁵¹ Zimbabwean might depict. I found the experience close to life - so real that it echoes different bits and pieces of people whose lives have touched mine in some way or another on my own journey of life. I loved the characters, names and symbols that suggest a link to other stories, biblical etc. Your choice of words are ok given the context and protagonist in that chapter.

Locating Self

I had enormous difficulty in locating myself within this project. Clearly it was driven by deeply personal motives although the use of fiction helped shift the focus away from my own story. The Clea strand was challenging, confronting. I could see no other way to accurately portray Zimbabwe today except from my own very limited, dislocated standpoint. Clea therefore had to be a migrant of the same age and gender. Changing any of these aspects would alter perceptions markedly and I wasn't sure I could capture those authentically. I separated her from myself as far as possible in every detail of her life: her inherent personality, her more privileged upbringing, her political ideals, her experiences. I explained over and over that Clea is not me, but having reached this point in the process, I realise that of course I am going to be associated with her whether I like it or not.

Ruth Ozeki addresses the issue of 'fictionalised autobiography', which occurs in both *My Year of Meats* (1998) and *A Tale for the Time Being* (2013). In the first novel her main character is, like Ozeki herself, an American-Japanese documentarian. Realising readers would equate the character with the author, Ozeki humorously made Jane six feet tall with green hair so readers could tell them apart (Palumbo-Liu, 2014). In the other novel, however, one of her two main characters is

⁵¹ Of mixed racial heritage. Used here as a political identifier and not as a derogatory label.

called Ruth and is a fictionalised self: living in the same house with the same husband, same job etc. Yet Ozeki writes in the third person and claims that 'Ruth' is a semi-fictionalised character who shares only a small facet of personality with the real Ruth (Sethi, 2013).

I wonder if this more playful approach will allow me to embrace similarities and use them. If I step into Clea as I might an avatar, can I give her more depth? While it appears that I have succeeded in conveying something of the depth of pain in Ruth's silences, Clea's anguish does not seem to carry the same poignancy. I am troubled too by her political naivety. I feel she is less likeable, less approachable than Ruth or Billie. Of course a major character does not have to be agreeable but is it because I haven't managed to engage with her empathetically as I did with the other two that ultimately she remains 'less'?

Conclusion/Contribution

This project has been with me for a long time. It could be dated back to my early twenties when I first tried to write of my birth country. It could be dated back to when I first discovered Billie. However, it was my acceptance onto the PhD programme that gave me the impetus and courage to make this long journey. I have finally researched and depicted the origins of my birth country and I've also finally written Billie's story, which has been with me for fifteen years. I have approached the Rhodesia of my teenage years from varied standpoints to view it with different eyes. I have also attempted to portray something of the complexities of present-day Zimbabwe from a revenant point of view. Through these three strands I hope I have offered alternative, hauntological, feminine interpretations of significant times in the country's history set against a psychogeographic depiction of Salisbury/Harare, which evolves from a handful of tents to a city of nearly 1.5 million during the course of the novel.

Necessarily, I have ventured into some of the silences and liminal spaces of colonisation, war and despotism and I have learnt much about silence in both national and personal histories. It has been used as a means to control and to erase, to obscure, to hide and to hide in. It can be both weapon and (self) protection. It corresponds with political and social blindness that either (wilfully) refuses to look or (unconsciously) does not 'see'. Very often silence is something in between, and today I still see manifestations of this all around me - both in New Zealand and the wider world.

I hope I have adequately captured something of the peoples of Rhodesia/Zimbabwe in their differences but also their similarities. The three narrative strands have generated wide casts of characters, but of course I still see the gaps. One novel, I realise, cannot do it all. It is a largely white narrative which I had hoped to avoid, but I am now comfortable with that position. Zimbabwe has fine black writers who are telling their own stories and I know my limitations.

The project has also extended me from a writerly perspective. Each strand has its own particular form (novel, novella and story-within-a-story) and possesses its own internal logic. Each has its own voice as I have endeavoured to create distinctive characters nested within stylistic conventions that best convey a sense of era and place as perceived by that character. Billie's and Clea's voices are intensely personal, but despite the distancing of the 'story within a story', initial feedback indicates that Ruth not only stands equal to the others she in some ways transcends them. Yet despite the strands' disparate functions and preoccupations, I hope that in their fusion they form something greater, more resonant, than the sum of their parts.

My goal was to write a 'biography' of the country, and I'd thought that through fiction I might be able to say something truthful. At the genesis of the project I aimed (like Toni Morrison) to defamiliarise overly-familiar historical narratives. I hoped (like Milan Kundera) to see what other novelists may not have seen. It has been a lesson in humility, especially in my quest for 'truth'. In the novel I have 'unconcealed' the 1890s settler colony and something of the experiences of female guerrillas and relinquishing mothers. I hope readers who do not know anything of the country may discover a little about Rhodesia's conception, of the death throes/birthing pangs of the civil war and something of an outsider's view of Zimbabwe today. I would also hope that those who have lived there or visited there might recognise something of what they know reflected in the work. While the creative work is fiction, it is the product of years of reading, travel and interactions that I have folded into knowledge gained from having lived in Rhodesia/Zimbabwe and having been part of the diaspora.

I have written in sand and the exegesis and creative work – the sum of my experience – I offer as my truth.

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Appendices

Appendix One: 'Archaeological' Sources

This is a list of sources not cited but of great use in world-building and background.

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Appendix Two: Fanny's Timeline

Compiled from Robert Cary's biography: *Countess Billie* and miscellany of sources. It is an example of timelines also compiled for Salisbury and Rhodesia/Zimbabwe to ensure accuracy in weaving these histories together.

26 April 1872

Fanny is born: 8th child. Blond hair, hazel eyes
 Father: Charles Luke Pearson. Tenancy of Langley Farm from Captain Alfred Tarleton. Broad shoulders, blond hair and blue eyes
 Mother: Eliza Edlin (prosperous farming family: Broadswater Farm) Married beneath herself.
 They had 10 children – 5 boys, 5 girls. Mother a great homemaker.
 Charles lazy. "He preferred to play cribbage and drink beer. He used to sit there in winter - all day – with his top hat on and is white cuffs rolled back. Very fond of home-made beer was Grandfather. Home-made beer and gambling)
 Water from a pump over the kitchen sink. When ran dry in summer, Fanny and siblings took bucket over to neighbours. No baths! Bucket of cold water in kitchen. (giggling and horseplay)

SCHOOLING

Dame school run by Miss Stringer in her cottage. 2d a week.

13 March 1881

Mother died suddenly aged 46. Fanny is 9 years old.
 Father fell apart. Drunk in village public house so sent to Bourne Farm with Julia, older sister, looking after him. Oldest sister Kate and husband looked after Langley Farm – scratching a living.

EDLINS

Fanny sent to Edlins where she was a "poor relation". After a fierce argument, she was dragged into her room and locked in. Brooded all afternoon. In evening, able to force open a window and escaped.

Late 1887/early1888

London. 15 years old. Probably found work as a chambermaid.

1890

Met Edmond. Either at the Water Building or Albany Chambers.

July 1890

Edmond booked First Class passage on S.S. *Hawarden Castle* – leaving end of that month. Fanny visited brother Walter on White House Farm, Harefield. He was concerned, especially as Fanny knew little about him other than kind and generous. She scornful of his suggestion they marry

30 July 1890

4pm. Small steamer left Tilbury. Fanny in steerage.

??? 1890

Arrived in SA. Edmond had 20 000 pounds from financiers. Rowland Buck, engineer engaged. In Kimberley they bought

wagons, oxen, trading goods, mining equipment, food. Joined forces with Stuart, a man he'd trekked with before and Charles Hancock. 5 wagons, 4 men in convoy.

Late October

Disguised as Billie, Fanny caught the construction train one evening with a kitbag, blanket and some food. She was going to ride it to Fourteen Streams, 15 miles (I don't think so. Nothing there) north on line for Mafeking. *My take: they were going to meet at Mafeking but the train turned around unexpectedly at Fourteen Streams*

3 Days later

Edmond set forth. On evening on the third day, they could see a small corrugated shed. Suddenly a figure in cord breeches and a brown jacket threw herself into his arms, sobbing. She'd waited 48 hours, all alone, not even a black passing. Had food and a water tank.

PIONEER ROUTE

Mafeking, a few hours for supplies. Assembly camp on the Limpopo River. Stuart fell sick outside Mafeking. Fanny nursed him. He taciturn. Powerful, active man, he died on the unending plain of Bechuanaland. Coffin out of packing cases. Shallow grave, wooden cross. Loneliness of the African desert. No one knew if he had a wife or family.

End November 1890

Fort Tuli. Take-off point for Mashonaland. Base headquarters of the Company's Police. Trim rows of white tents. Aldershot in Africa! Edmond outspanned away from the rest and told Fanny to stay in the wagon while he went to present his compliments and seek permission to cross the river.

On road at dawn. Reached Semalale at dusk (luckily). Fanny stayed in wagon. Edmond went to talk to Corporal Charles Divine. Good family. Delighted to have cultured Frenchman. They talked on politics, music, social round of London and Paris. As got dark, Divine invited him to dinner. Huge success (Fanny still left behind "Billie very tired"). Roast leg of mutton and hot rolls. Fat from sheep tails substituted butter. Vicomte greatly taken with flavour. Asked for a small tinful – a good present for lonely Billie!

Another dinner party a few days later. Billie allowed to this one. Paive D'Andrade and Manuel de Souza, representatives in Africa of the Companhia da Mocambique had been captured a few weeks earlier on undefined border of Chartered Company and Portuguese East Africa. Now being whisked away to Cape Town in company of Lieutenant M. H. G. Mundell.

D'Andrade, small, dark swarthy "like a dark-skinned dancing teacher" worked himself into a frenzy on recalling indignities. Mundell, in cords and butcher boots, would soothe him and turn the conversation. De Souza, a savage slave trader, was a placid half-caste dressed in a striped sleeping suit in different colours. He said nothing. Nor did Fanny. Edmond held court. Talked of his career as young naval officer, life in Paris, etc. Very

charming.

Date unknown

Did not stay long in Fort Salisbury. One wagon loaded with whisky, gin and wine but not allowed to sell. Territory to be 'dry'. Archibald Colquhoun, Administrator, had to enforce unpopular law. Told Edmond to go so he did to Mazoe. Met Thomas Rudland returning from fruitless expedition in Hartley Hills. Dying for something to drink. Fanny took pity on him and sold 1 gin, 1 whisky for five pounds. At least, at last they'd made a sale.

2 days later

Mazoe River. Six years earlier, Edmond had walked all over the basin collecting samples of alluvial gold from the affluents of the river. Experts had agreed very rich indeed.

MAZOE

Edmond and Rowland tramped valley, digging, panning and sampling. Fanny and Charles built camp. The Tattigora River flowed nearby. On bank, hundreds of lemon trees – thanks to Portuguese. Boys built huts. Fanny, vegetable garden. Made delicious concoctions for Ed and Rowland from lemons.

Hancock fascinated by her knowledge of fruit and veg but they weren't saying anything.

Disheartening. Samples from 2 foot cutting would expose the reef, often as much as 4 feet wide. Sometimes visible gold!

Excitement intense – then the reef would peter out. Sometimes pick it up again, hopes rising. Gradually realised they would need machinery and capital.

Edmond wrote to Syndicate headquarters, Kimberley explaining more money needed, equipment must be sent up. But letter from Rutherford Harris (Managing Director, Syndicate and local Secretary of Chartered Company) said they wouldn't squander limited resources. Edmond must work harder.

In Feb 1891, 'Matabele' Wilson, trader and prospector came to Fort Salisbury from Mazoe Valley. Irish community depressed as St Patrick's Day only 2 day away and still 'dry'. Tried getting Major Forbes in charge of police to lift ban. Said no but sensed heart wasn't in decision. So he went out to Edmond and struck a bargain. 75/- a bottle and Wilson set off in pouring rain with 2 crates on 27 mile journey back to Salisbury. Gwebi River up but he made it as getting dark. Delivered crates and went for bath (covered in mud). Returned to find party in full swing. Patrick Forbes swaying on heels in group of young officers.

August 1891

Lord Randolph Churchill. Had formed his own Syndicate in UK so raised hopes. Thought he might be seeking out mining properties – changing their fortunes. But after visiting Mazoe and Hartley Hills, his mining engineer H. C. Perkins wrote, "Nothing has yet been discovered ... of such extent, depth and quality as would justify the formation of a syndicate or company, and a large expenditure of capital to purchase and to work it."

Edmond very hopeful. Churchill wrote. "We rode on to the camp

of the Count de la Panouse, where we were hospitably received and passed the night. The following day a ride of thirty miles brought us to another camp of this syndicate, where the same kind reception awaited us; but, unfortunately, no realization of the somewhat glowing accounts we had received as to the valuable prospects of this property. A mass of old working surround the camp, and two shafts have been sunk some considerable depth, but at present without cutting the vein at all." Cookies delicious.

FANNY IN MAZOE

Friends had prophesised he'd tire of her after a few months. His affection growing, however. She's pretty and affectionate. Wonderful homemaker (like mother?). Made clothes for them on sewing machine

Early 1892

12 young policemen came for supper. Fanny cooked and made them laugh with her adventures. Wouldn't speak about London. Neither did the Count about his background. Speculations. Married to a Paris actress. Fanny maybe nurse to his children or a skivvy in the hotel. Fanny shot a lion. "He was a very old lion" (Cary, p.23/24) Rumours that count killed 103 elephant in one season. Also got so close to elephant, fired straight up and recoil cut open his cheek and knocked him out. Harris distrusted Edmond, thought him lazy. No money from Syndicate then. Needed other backers. Saw advantage in repegging claims (p. 24/25)

Feb 1893

Invited to attend meeting in Police Officers Mess. Together they decided to form The Salisbury Club. He was asked to be a founding member. Despite poverty and a domestic life, agreed and subscribed 10 guineas. Elected to the Committee of seven.

25 March 1893

The Rhodesian Herald reported Empire State reef showing every sign of producing high grade quartz. Not fooled. Edmond taken to court. \$2.19.0 owed butcher William Martin. 2 days later, summons of Charles Maddocks and Company for \$160 – goods supplied. Next day \$42.16.0 owed to McDougall and Company, Auctioneers.

8 April

Took chair at committee meeting in absence of Hon Charles J. White.

28 April

All three cases heard. Went against Edmond 'with costs'.

5 May

Write of execution was secured for recovery of debt to Maddocks.

8 May

Assistant Sheriff made a *nulla bona* return to the Court. Edmond

- bankrupt. Showed no concern or shame. Many in his situation. Temporary embarrassment.
- 15 May** First General Meeting. Attended and also proposed Maurice Heany should be elected member.
- 1893** Struggled on in Mazoe Valley with growing hopelessness. Later that year decided to lease Avondale Farm from James Kennedy. (p.27-29)
- 23 July 1894** Married by Father Nicot, Jesuit Mission at Chishawawasha, 14 miles NE of Salisbury in small, thatched church.
- 25 July** Visit from Magistrate, Hugh Marshall Hole for civil form of marriage. (Felix/Phillip p.31)
- July 1895** 150 cows. Sheep, pigs, chickens, goats. 100 bottles of mild a day and 100 lbs butter sold at 5/-
Opened butcher shop in Pioneer Street with Joseph Norton, Porta Farm on Hunyani River. Now a man of property and successful member of business community. Contributed to fund to fence the Cemetery (31). Very popular. Genial, amicable. Kind. Example p.32
- March 1896** Rinderpest in Bulawayo but no panic in Salisbury. Thought high plateau safe. Suddenly, middle March, signs showing. I33) Edmond and Fanny ruined.
Matabele uprising.
Decided Edmond would go to Chimoio, railhead, to pick up crates of goods for Mashonaland. Only needed wagon, donkeys and determination.
- Mid-April 1896** Set out on 230 mile journey. Got to Umtali 2 weeks later. Town appalled Rhodes had said wouldn't bring rail to town. (36) No interest in rinderpest or rebellion.
Crossed border into Portuguese East Africa.
- Early May** Arrived Chimoio. Set off again 2 weeks later in convoy with 2 other men. Crates, bags of flour, rolls of cloth.
- 16 June** Transport rider, Robert van Rooyen dragged from cart and butchered near Hunyani River
- 17 June** Nortons murdered: Joseph, wife, daughter, nurse and 2 farm assistants. Farm 18 miles from Salisbury.
- 20 June** Marandellas, 45 miles from Salisbury. Met Group. Mazoe patrol p 37

Mazoe Patrol Pl 37 -43

Fanny's experience P. 44-45

Stockade	P.45. Edmond joined Volunteers as a trooper, despite having been an officer earlier in his life.
Mid July	Mounted corps returned from Bulawayo so garrison went up to 350 white men and 150 friendly blacks. Time to go out of laager.
17 August 1896	380 Mounted Infantry under Lt.-Col. E.A.H. Alderson arrived in Salisbury from CT, via Beira. Salisbury Field Force (Edmond) disbanded. Talk of Chartered Company compensating those who lost cattle, nothing likely to happen until rebellion cleared up.
Late 1896	Boarding house in shabby part of town. Intruder p. 47-48
14 October 1896	Final indaba at Matopos.
Mid November 1896	Lord Grey, wife and daughter moved from Bulawayo to Salisbury. Held an At Home in Government House. Ad in <i>Rhodesian Herald</i> . P.48 Following evening, Panouses invited to dinner. P.49
April 1897	Edmond involved in local politics. P.50-51 Tried working hard. Seen working in garden p. 50. Lord Grey noticed. Boarding house not a success though
May 1897	Wagon and donkeys so back to transport work. This time, Fanny with him. No home but wagon. P52
Mid 1898	Year on the road but no money. Forced to resign from Salisbury Club – no subscription. Someone offered to pay! P 53 Little known how they kept themselves at this time
December 1898	Fanny pregnant
27 August 1899	Birth at Greenwood House, small nursing home. Alice Rhodesia
14 September 1899	Died at Greenwood House, 18 days old
By 1900	They had gone!
1900-1902	Lived in Hayes – Fashionable
June 1902	Moved to France. First Monaco. Then Antibes
1904	Villa Bel-Aria, Boulevard Joseph Granier, Nice
23 June 1904	Henriette Pauline Blanche born. (Fanny 32, Edmond 59)
1911	Visited Clans. Built own Villa Blanchette for summers
1915	Became their permanent home

1916	Edmond fell sick
June 1917	Eugene (Raoul's son) wrote to Edmond
24 July 1918	Edmond died (Fanny 46)
June 1919	Fanny falls ill
September 1920	Blanche goes to Switzerland for school
1922	Fanny sells Villa Blanchette, lives in apartment in Rue Cafarelli
1931	Blanche runs away from the convent. Fanny to Paris to help her
1933	Blanche marries Ernest Favre. No mention of children
1937	Fanny moves to Val de Blore, 12 miles from Clans, taking in boarders
June 1940	Returns to Nice as Occupied Zone
1945	Returns to Val do Blore and boarding house.
Date uncertain	Old Person's Home at Roquebillieres
June 1964	Fractured hip.
November 1964	Mme Guitard finds Billie in home
20 November 1964	<i>Rhodesia Herald</i> story of Billie
26 April 1965	Fanny's 93 rd birthday
15 July 1965	Fanny dies