

Metaphors of changing identities, resilience and cultural transformation for survival in times of crisis

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Abstract

This paper is an exploration of the literary representations of survival and coping strategies during times of socio-economic upheavals. Charles Mungoshi's short story entitled "The Hare" is critically analysed and the two major characters in the story are used to show the different ways people respond to crises in their lives. Such a dichotomous analysis results in the conclusion that agency is ubiquitous and survival is quite possible. Through short stories such as this one, it is made evident that African literature can assist readers to face their daily challenges and rise above adversity.

Keywords: Survival strategies, coping, Mungoshi, crises, short stories, African literature

Introduction

This paper is a critical reflection on how Charles Mungoshi's short story "The Hare" can be read as a literary illustration of the human capacity to be resiliently creative, innovative and protean in order to survive challenging times. The story is set in the Zimbabwean context of socio-economic difficulties spiralling to extreme levels, which resulted in the global "crisis" label from that moment in the late 1990s to late 2009. It is important to reiterate that the rapidly changing and turbulent times of the Zimbabwean crisis exposed many people to high levels of vulnerability. The multiple dimensions of the crisis manifested in extremely challenging times, characterised by change that was happening too fast for many people. Yet amidst all the challenges, the people's resilience prevailed in inspirational ways, which are demonstrated in this short story. The ordinary people's inborn quality of transforming to a different way of being to become better and intuitively protean at handling turbulent change, non-stop pressure and life-disrupting setbacks.

This paper seeks to validate the inspirational fortitude of the African spirit and the audacity of hope to rise above life's vicissitudes, by demonstrating the relevant fiction's representation of the rise of the survivor personality. It shows how resilient individuals transform the everyday and taken-for-granted cultural perceptions, and change their set of laid down values and standards to master change. It is about the representation of the capabilities of orienting quickly to new realities, and coping with immediate challenges.

Moreover, the paper is about defiant people taking resilient actions to spiral upwards, and also about means of sustaining a strong and healthy energy in non-stop change; bouncing back from setbacks and gaining strength from adversities.

Particularly interesting in this story is the individual transformation as well as the reaction and response of the two main characters to become new personalities; one who is a non-resilient victim and the other a resilient victor. Through this story, the effects of disruptive change during a socio-economic meltdown and their fictional representations are explored. In order to maintain this paper's titular relevance, which is about "changing identities", a character analysis approach to the story is attempted, ultimately illustrating that there is a lot that we can learn from the representation of the crisis-hit and institutionally weak Zimbabwean urban situation.

Individual metamorphosis and a resilient response for survival in "*The hare*"

She had become a *new* woman: yes. But she hadn't lost her love for her family. In fact, her *new* freedom to leave the house, to be among people, seemed to have given a *new* dimension to their life as a family. She had never had any money of her own to buy anyone in the family anything. *Now* she indulged herself. She bought fancy shirts and jeans for Nhongo – clothes he would never have dreamed of buying for himself. She bought colourful T-shirts for the kids and she occasionally took the family out to eat at some expensive restaurant in town, or some international hotel like the Holiday Inn, the Sheraton or the Monomatapa (Mungoshi, 1997, p.12).

The deft use of understatement by the author to register the transformation of an individual and the attainment of a protean personality is striking in the above quotation. What is immediately arresting is the pronouncement of a sense of change as a ubiquitous force; particularly the change that demonstrates the hope and desire for a better future and it is this betterment of oneself that is aptly captured here. A juxtaposition of the now and the then by the author is equally telling. A "new" and metamorphosised individual is presented – a survivor in times of crisis. It is in this resilient person, who has transformed her identity and become a better individual, that this paper takes a special interest.

In brief the story ("*The hare*") dramatises a couple's movement from good times to terrible times, and then finally to uncertain times filled with both pain and hope. It is a story about resilience and amazing dimensions of survival culture. Nhongo is an urbanite who married at the age of 27 and his wife Sara married at 16, before she could even finish secondary

school. She falls pregnant and Nhongo, being a man prepared for such eventualities, agrees to marry her, though many neighbours are mesmerised in how she managed to do it, because they think that she ensnared him. Timid, young, hitherto self-effacing and domesticated, Sara settles into being a housewife who is seemingly content to be looked after by her husband. However, Sara's mother, Kariwo, is not happy because in Sara she had hopes that she would have an educated child. Sara is "An unusually bright child, she had promise, unlike the rest of her children. Kariwo never recovered from the blow", (Mungoshi, 1997, p.7). Though noteworthy is that from the beginning Sara is described as "...quiet, obedient but with a subtle, stubborn streak that only a husband would discern, [and] had understood her mother's dream and wept quietly, while making herself impossible promises" (Mungoshi, 1997, p.7).

For many years Nhongo plays the role of the traditional male bread winner. The times are constant and calm, with few if any disruptive changes. He rises to the position of a section manager in a textile factory in the sprawling and promising town of Harare. Things go well for the couple; they now have four children; two are in boarding school, the other two stay with the parents, and they are all well looked after. Nhongo is rising in the community and manages to buy a car and a house and hopes to buy an even better one in the more affluent part of the city. For "Nhongo felt that nothing could ever touch his family. He had risen to the position of section manager in the textile company that he worked for in Harare. He was not one to take risks" (Mungoshi, 1997, p. 6). Sara, on the other hand, is seemingly contented, playing the role of a rather passive housewife.

However, things turn terribly sour when all of a sudden Nhongo is retrenched, "seemingly out of the blue..." (Mungoshi, 1997, p. 9). This is a huge blow to the family. Change starts to spiral them to dizzying heights of uncertainty and difficulty. Nhongo is baffled and finds it difficult to accept and understand it all.

A year later he was home. A loaf of bread cost three times what it had done two years previously. He had bought a car the year before the liquidation, and he owed the finance house a suicidal amount of money. He had to be very careful with the little they had given in terminal benefits. (It was criminal!) This wasn't the time to think of going into private business (Mungoshi, 1997, p.9).

Yet whilst Nhongo sees impossibilities and all doom, his wife Sara transforms her identity from passivity into a survivor personality. It is at this point in their life that the writer demonstrates the literary representation of today's disruptive realities and how people respond.

Having said so, the question then is how this story can be understood as an illuminating metaphor of resilience during times of crisis. Critical from the onset is a need to understand that in the story "*The hare*" there are two parts in the lives of these urbanites, Sara and Nhongo. The two parts - simply put - are "before" and "after" the liquidation of the company and Nhongo's subsequent retrenchment. Let alone the ensuing highly inflationary environment that threatens to engulf the family with seemingly no way out. Out of this turbulent and threatening situation is born the non-resilient victim who fails to change identities strategically (Nhongo) and also the resilient victor who is able to transform and bounce back from setbacks (Sara).

An understanding of how and why Nhongo fails to rise from his downfall is important. He is not born a failure. Neither is he improvident and short sighted. In actual fact, Nhongo is hard working and an organised man. He is "A careful, security-conscious, family man [who] strongly subscribed to the old dictum: God helps those who help themselves" (Mungoshi, 1997, p.6). This means that Nhongo is certainly a hardworking and focussed man. In addition, being a "Party-card holder", he is a calculative man who realises that in the politically volatile Zimbabwe of his days, one needs to be correctly connected and aligned so as to be able to make it. Being a party card holder means being a supporter of the ruling party ZANU PF, of which if one does not support the ruling party, there can be a real danger of torture, intimidation, death and harassment. Even when Sara falls pregnant he is not embarrassed. "He seemed to have been prepared. He had been saving money for such an occasion. And in less than a month, Sara's people and Nhongo's people had become brothers- and sisters-in-law" (Mungoshi, 1997, p.7). Therefore Nhongo is indeed an above average person who is capable of making it, provided all is well, constant and unchanging. Yet a catastrophe befalls him. What the author shows is that in Zimbabwe the crisis was not selective and the same applies to anyone who lives in the 21st century; there are a myriad crises which can easily befall one. Moments of misfortune and extreme setbacks are inevitable.

How does one respond to extreme setbacks? This question is important for us to understand Nhongo's failure to be resilient and thus survive during times of crisis. His failure provides appropriate background for us to understand and appreciate Sara's response as that of a protean and resilient survivor.

First is that Nhongo falls into the trap of the victim reaction. This victim reaction makes him fail to transform positively. He becomes a rigid, uncompromising and anti-protean victim. He plays the blame game and feels other people are to be blamed for ruining his life. When joblessness befalls him, prices of basic commodities skyrocket and his terminal

benefits become fast eroded; all he can voice is that "It was criminal!" (Mungoshi, 1997, p. 9). Nhongo becomes an enraged man who emotionally explodes and spirals downwards, mired in unhappy thoughts and feelings. He loses his balance and the once capable planner is transformed into a blamer and reactionary victim. He fails to rise to the occasion and engages in fruitless witch-hunting escapades and directionless anger. Faced with situations which demand a responsible response, instead;

Then Nhongo became angry. There was no specific, immediate object at which to direct his anger but it seized him, a burning in his chest. The whole point was: *it isn't my fault*. He felt, vaguely, that this wouldn't have happened at all if Sara had been there. Somewhere deep within his tangled unexamined feelings; it was all Sara's fault (Mungoshi, 1997, p.6).

Nhongo, in this frame of mind, cannot take steps to cope with what has happened and thereby overcome the difficulties facing him. By getting stuck in this frame of mind, he perpetuates a victim reaction and the author demonstrates to us some of the handicaps resilient people need to avoid. Victim-thinking like this keeps him feeling helpless, and by blaming others for his bad situation, Nhongo blocks himself from bouncing back. This non-resilient victim state in which he does not take resiliency actions is what the story warns us against. Negative emotions such as fear, anger, anxiety, distress, helplessness and hopelessness decrease Nhongo's ability to solve the problems he faces and they weaken his resiliency capacity.

Nhongo the non-resilient victim is guided by reaction rather than response. Reaction implies that one acts in the form of a reflex that mainly happens without any conscious thought or feeling of choices. On the other hand, a response (as seen in Sara) is what makes a resilient survivor. A response indicates that your actions after a threat or setback are guided by conscious choices (Siebert, 2005, p.3). To demonstrate the reactionary character of Nhongo, this is how the story begins:

Later that evening, after Sara had left for Johannesburg with her friends of the combis, Nhongo had driven angrily back home to Chitungwiza, and had packed a few of his clothes into a bag. He told the housemaid, Ella, to put the children into clean clothes and get them into the car. They were going home to the country, he said. So the two girls, Sekai, six, and Netsai, four, were bundled into the car in their street-dirty clothes, their dusty faces creased into moon-grins (Mungoshi, 1997, p. 1).

This is an outcome of Nhongo's reaction, one that does not yield any results. The economic challenges demand calculated responses rather than a reaction that is bereft of conscious choices. Instead, what prompts it further is "A strange, irresistible nostalgia to revisit the scenes of his childhood [that] had assailed him, to walk once more through the tall dewy grass, hunting for wild fruits found in Zimbabwe such as *matufu*, *hute*, *nzviro*, and *maroro*" (Mungoshi, 1997, p.1). Certainly this is by no means the survival culture that one needs to cultivate in modern crisis. Nhongo hides behind nostalgia, one which no longer seems viable, because the wild fruits he dreams of is a typical hunter-gatherer form of existence which cannot sustain modern existence. As he journeys from the urban setting to the rural areas, a description of the travel is littered with morose epithets like 'regretted', 'storm', 'menacing', 'haunting', 'monotonous', 'grotesque', 'deathly', 'maddeningly', 'ghostly', 'surreally' and 'unearthly' (Mungoshi, 1997, p. 5-6). These epithets indicate that this reactionary spatial escapade is not appropriate. The town where he wants to run away from is where he can possibly find solutions.

The above analysis demonstrates that the dimensions of the Zimbabwean crisis are multiple and varied. By first focussing on Nhongo as a non-resilient victim, ample background is given to clearly present the survivor personality in his wife, Sara. It is in Sara's response that this study takes special interest and by contrasting her with her husband, Nhongo, one recalls Wilhelm Nietzsche's famous statement, "That which does not kill me makes me stronger" (Siebert, 2005, p.5).

The resilience response we see in Sara is not an easy option, but really worth the effort. When her life seems as if it is collapsing into ruins, Sara manages to spring back and survive from the devastating circumstances threatening her family in an inspirational manner. She is only in Form three when she falls pregnant; she is actually still a teenager. When she discovered that she was pregnant, she was not amused and felt that her body had betrayed her. "Yet no thought of abortion or suicide ever entered her mind. From an early age, Sara had learnt to face her problems head on" (Mungoshi, 1997, p.7). Through this presentation we learn a lot about how to survive life's crises which come in different forms and sizes. Given the fact that Sara is a precocious child full of potential and in whom the mother had all the hope, falling pregnant certainly should have meant a lot. Teenage pregnancy has devastated many youths and social workers grapple with it on a daily basis in many communities. The determined, resilient and focussed response from Sara is an avenue of learning for today's troubled generation. Options are there and these are given as abortion and suicide, social ills haunting many contemporary African societies, but Sara does not go that way. She chooses to be a resilient survivor.

When faced with life's challenges and crises, Nhongo, the husband, plays the blame game and victim reaction. Yet for Sara, there is more to be hoped for and she chooses to be a happy survivor. She embraces her changing identity from being a teenage school girl to being a mother and wife. Whilst Nhongo remains rigid and stuck to the past of patriarchal superiority and domination, Sara's transformation enables her to see a better tomorrow. Moreover, where Nhongo is seen to be resisting change, Sara embraces that change. Whereas Nhongo wallows in self-depreciation after losing a job, Sara's self-appreciation is a positive survival mechanism which speaks volumes to us as readers.

Sara's unceasing and unwavering determination is equally celebrated by the author. She avoids self pity and blaming Nhongo for the pregnancy that results in her dropping out of school. Where others could possibly crumble, she manages to cope; instead of becoming bitter she becomes better. This unwavering determination is seen when she decides to continue with her studies, better herself and be a self fulfilled individual. "After their first two children, she had done a secretarial course, had even passed her intermediate exams, but had then abandoned the idea of ever getting an office job because she couldn't stand managers who would "look at my breasts all the time they are interviewing me" (Mungoshi, 1997, 8). Out of the single-mindedness of purpose, Sara is now able to make choices. She is not disabled by what has befallen her. A resilient survivor therefore is one who dares to dream, and takes action to see the fulfilment of that dream.

Most outstanding in the presentation of Sara, our heroine, is how she responds to the loss of income in the family following Nhongo's retrenchment. Instead of nagging, whining, playing the blame game and running away, Sara chooses to act. It is the serendipity and protean character of Sara that the writer celebrates. She is protean in the sense that she continues to embrace change, adapt to varying circumstances and reconstruct permeable boundaries. According to Siebert (2005), the psychiatrist Robert Jay Lifton created the word "protean" to describe people whose form changes according to the situations they are in. He derived the word "protean" from Proteus, the Greek sea god that is able to take many forms. The protean self therefore seeks to be both fluid and grounded, however tenuous that combination. Survival is the ultimate goal.

This protean nature in Sara is therefore a survival mechanism. At a time when many people yearn to return to a life of stability, constancy and little change, Sara embraces change and a new identity. She accepts the fact that constant change is real, necessary and desirable. She steps into Nhongo's shoes and takes up the role of bread winner. Sara begins to sell second hand clothes at the local market, makes new friends and joins those who commute regularly to Johannesburg, South Africa, shopping for goods to sell.

For Zhuwarara (2005), "she becomes the family breadwinner and Nhongo is unsettled by the fact that he is dependent on her. Even more galling to Nhongo is the fact that she has established a network of friends and acquaintances and is living an adventurous life that is well beyond his reach" (p. 96). Sara cultivates her unused resources and the potential that is in her. She is unfazed by the seemingly unknown and impenetrable world she is to venture into. Therefore she searches for a way out until "...someone had told her about *mupedzanhamo* [which literally means to put poverty to an end], the second hand clothes market in Mbare – on the other side of town. And one day, Nhongo came home to find Sara going through a pile of women's clothes. 'I would like to help,' she had said" (Mungoshi, 1997, p.10). These are the true marks of a survivor. Sara allows previously unused, inner capacities to develop, become stronger, more complex, wiser and skilled at handling challenges as they arise under turbulent circumstances.

One way of explaining Sara's ability to discover good fortune in setbacks is through the concept of serendipity. Serendipity is a major concept to illustrate resilience and survival during tempestuous periods. Siebert (2005) describes serendipity as something that comes from using wisdom to convert an unexpected event, accident, or mishap into good fortune. For this to happen, Siebert says that first something unexpected or accidental happens to you, such as Sara and her family losing their livelihood. The second aspect in serendipity is that your perceptiveness, good sense, and wisdom (sagacity), lead you to discover the third element – an unexpected benefit, gift, or blessing in what happened. The self confident, sociable and business-minded personality that comes out in Sara is a coping strategy born out of serendipity. The adversity and life-disrupting experience is converted into one of the best things that ever happen to her. It creates an opportunity for taking her life in a different and better direction than she had expected.

Sara's response (serendipity) is actually more than bouncing back and mere survival; while struggling to cope with the life-disrupting events in the Zimbabwean crisis, she finds new strengths and discovers unexpected opportunities. It allows her to discover her unexplored talents, as the narrator observes that, "it seemed, that Sara had been born with an instinctive sense of business" (Mungoshi, 1997, p.12). Even Nhongo, despite his disapproval, also concedes that "The worst of it was that Sara seemed to thrive" (Mungoshi, 1997, p.11). Highly resilient people like Sara therefore have a knack for finding a hidden gift in adversity. Mungoshi's *"The Hare"* therefore demonstrates that serendipity is a powerful, self created antidote to misfortune, despair, and feeling like a victim. This ability explains how some people like Sara (as opposed to Nhongo) not only recover and survive, but transform themselves into a better way of being because of the

bad experiences they have gone through. The starting point for converting misfortune into good fortune, as Sara's life demonstrates, starts off with resilience and fortitude. Sara's life in the institutionally weak and crisis hit Zimbabwean urban space is inspirational and teaches us a lot. She is resolute and sharpens her problem-solving skills against all odds.

When Nhongo begrudgingly and bitterly complains; "Is it just the money?" (Mungoshi, 1997, p.10); and "It's your bloody money" (Mungoshi, 1997, p.12), she calmly responds "Someone has to work" (Mungoshi, 1997, p.10). What this teaches us is that when one becomes highly resilient, one has an advantage. Like Sara, one can turn adversity or a disruptive event into a desirable development. When hit by an unexpected crisis, like that witnessed in Zimbabwe, you don't let yourself feel victimised; you go from being upset to coping, to thriving and serendipity with amazing speed. This brings about depth of understanding, inner peace, and wisdom – a new cultural being is born and shaped by the survival culture necessitated by the need to survive a crisis. As Sara transforms to the survival identity, "As always, she would be loaded with goods for resale and clothes or toys for the children. And always a tie, a shirt or underpants for Nhongo. And it was on this last trip that she had bought him these fancy shoes. Very expensive by the look of them" (Mungoshi, 1997, p.13). Above all, the trauma that has befallen her has led to wisdom and it has become a door to new and fulfilling life. Sara's resilience is a heroic path of pain, but one that is necessary for survival. Late at night, after a long journey from South Africa, "there she would be standing in the door way with her bulging bags, all smiles, tired but jubilant, smelling of new perfume" (Mungoshi, 1997, p.13). This statement illustrates the paradoxical nature of thriving under pressure. It is an oxymoronic mode of existence; of pain mixed with joy, and it spells out the urbanites' coping strategies for survival.

Another strategic principle enabling one to cope effectively with many pressures and live a healthy lifestyle is personal transformation. Accepting change is what differentiates Nhongo from Sara and Nhongo's static perception and this reaction needs to be explored further here. Nhongo cannot accept the reversal of roles that is taking place in their life as dictated by the crisis. Nhongo is a rigid, uncompromising and consequently vulnerable man; "he belonged to a proud tradition that said the hunting is done by the man of the house" (Mungoshi, 1997, p.13). This is a static identity that fails to take note of the fact that times are changing. Even the people around Nhongo can do better than this former section manager; "They called it jealousy. A husband's jealousy because a wife is proving that she can beat him at his own game, providing for the family" (Mungoshi, 1997, p.12). Nhongo subscribes to rigid boundaries and constructed realities instead of embracing

strong, permeable boundaries as well as discovered realities which are determined by present situations. Nhongo aims at being fixedly socially compliant where situations demand him to conform and also call for social involvement.

To further illustrate how Mungoshi lampoons this sorry state that does not allow one to be resilient and transform to a better being and protean survivor, the anecdote from the story "*The Hare*" comes handy:

An example of what Nhongo and his friends believed lay in the story of Jokonya. Jokonya was headmaster of the primary school which Nhongo's children attended. His wife was also a teacher at a nearby secondary school. Jokonya had sent his wife to University to do her B.A. and later her B.Ed. Now she was teaching. When she brought her first pay cheque, Jokonya took it and tore it in half. 'I can manage my family very well without a second cheque in the house.' Jokonya had told his wife. This was a bit extreme, Nhongo and his friends agreed, but Jokonya was only making a statement. A man should be allowed to have pride in his own home. The burden of running the household, the financial burden, should lie squarely on the husband's shoulders (Mungoshi, 1997, p.8).

The static viewpoint illustrated results in Nhongo's humiliation from his retrenchment and his embarrassment at having to depend on Sara for survival. This vulnerability is a result of economic factors that are characteristic of the Zimbabwean crisis and are compounded by the rigid adherence to conflicting values and beliefs in a society that is continuously changing. In such a context, the likes of Nhongo find themselves economically redundant and emasculated and Mungoshi cautions us that this is not the way to go if one has to be resilient and survive the crisis.

According to Zhuwarara (2005), times have changed and so are some of the conventional social and economic roles that men and women play in life, but Nhongo finds it extremely difficult to adjust and cope with changes. The socio-economic realities during times of crisis call for conformity and personal transformation. So if Nhongo is a case study of this failure to transform, Sara comes out as an example of the opposite.

An amazing quality in Sara, which is an extension of her protean character, is that she is willing to transform herself and her environment. As a transformed individual she leaves Nhongo bewildered, "trying to come to terms with a new Sara" (Mungoshi, 1997, p.8). Whereas in the past, "As far as Nhongo could remember, Sara had never had any real friends, people who would visit them, spend time with them and vice versa"

(Mungoshi, 1997, p.9), she now has "her friends of the combis" (Mungoshi, 1997, p.1). She is no longer the ordinary Sara, but a new, resourceful and strong-willed individual, a characteristic that is missing in Nhongo. To clarify what transformation as used in this context, Siebert (2005) explains transformation as:

Rethinking your purpose in life and the basis for your identity; looking for meaning in tragic, senseless loss; allowing yourself to have both painful and positive feelings about your loss and become able to choose which feelings you focus on; allowing yourself to discover that your struggle has led you to develop a stronger, better version of yourself than you expected could exist ... (p. 178).

The qualities enunciated above are the very tenets Sara now possesses and she forms alliances which enable her to make it when it becomes too challenging for too many. For example, whereas Nhongo guesses that it might have taken her at least six months to process a passport, she on the contrary says that it took her only two hours. Her new acquaintances make things better for her and this is a coping strategy that works for her. Sara thus comes across as an imaginative person, resourceful and resilient in difficult economic circumstances. The very tortuous difficulties which suffocate Nhongo transform her and create opportunities and enough space for her to redefine herself and to cater for her individual needs and those of the family. This metamorphosis, which makes Sara malleable, resilient and change-proficient, leaves Nhongo, the non-resilient victim, always wandering. He realises that:

He hadn't bothered to discover whether she might have preferred an adjustment to their lifestyle. He had never really thought of her alone, independent, without the children. Someone with her own individual needs. This new game, from which he was completely excluded, amounted simply to a new hand of cards, which differed from the ones he had dealt her only in that she was now the major player (Mungoshi, 1997, p.11).

These words from her own husband, despite the fact that they are said in anger, show that Sara is a changed person altogether. She has a new identity, a cosmopolitan and modern personality. Cosmopolitan in the sense that she is now always "talking of Mozambique, Zambia, Botswana, South Africa. And even Mauritius" (Mungoshi, 1997, p.10). The repetition of the word "new" further emphasises that Sara now has a new identity, that of a purposeful and resilient victor. Instead of crushing her, the crisis in her life, just like for many Zimbabweans, has propelled her to better heights. Instead of revelling in her new found independence alone, Sara further says to Nhongo, "Why don't

we go south together?" (Mungoshi, 1997, p.13). The family is still important to her such that she even invites Mr Magaso, the one who usually travels with her to her house, to to meet Nhongo. Nhongo has raised suspicious questions and she takes it upon herself to set the record straight.

Whereas previously it was the men who used to travel to South Africa, she dares challenge that because the new dispensation calls for more involvement by both sexes. VaJumo, Nhongo's father, is shocked to hear that Sara has travelled to South Africa. For VaJumo, Janana (as he called South Africa) was a place of death, "And those who finally made it back home brought nothing except their battered bodies, demented minds and crushed manhood" (Mungoshi, 1997, p.17). Yet the crop of women, the resilient ones like Sara, now tread into the formerly forbidden ground and make things happen, even better than the men before them. The women of such calibre are able to master change, thrive under pressure and survive the crisis.

As Nhongo reflects on Sara's transformation, he observes that "The change hadn't been sudden or revolutionary. No: it had been slow, and almost imperceptible ... The process had been so slow, so apparently natural, that Nhongo hadn't noticed (Mungoshi, 1997, p.21). In other words, the process of surviving a crisis is not a miracle that happens spontaneously, but takes time. Survival is a demanding task that requires a lot of energy and effort. Ultimately it can be argued that the story of Sara's resilient journey amply demonstrates how the literary texts like this story manage to participate in narrating, representing and reflecting coping strategies for survival. Even the non-resilient victim and sceptic Nhongo eventually begins to think deeply about Sara's coping strategies. Nhongo begins to ask himself:

Was everyone right and he wrong about Sara? What about the children? And the clothes that she bought him? And the shoes? And everything she did to make them a happy family? The cheap pictures and coloured prints she brought home, to cheer up the place they lived in? They touched him more than they embarrassed him ... he tolerated them in that he felt she wanted to improve their lifestyle. They seemed to mean a lot to her. And to him, they meant that she meant, even wanted, to stay. (Mungoshi, 1997, p.21).

From the above citation, we can see that whilst the Zimbabwean crisis was mainly an economic and political one, its effects permeated to the socio-cultural sphere of people's lives. Therefore Sara has to be resilient in fighting the economic crisis and also the cultural challenges shaped by rigid patriarchy. At the end, through Nhongo's

thoughts above, he begins to see sense in Sara's survival and coping strategies. Survival strategies, embracing change and adopting a resilient outlook can indeed shake off some dimensions of the crisis, but not without another cost as demonstrated by her many detractors like Nhongo. The change in Sara however begins to seep through to Nhongo and despite the fact that he still has a lot to contend with, he is beginning to credit Sara's tactics. Whilst Sara does not act in a socially compliant manner, she acts in socially responsible ways which result in her taking good care of her family.

Conclusion

"The Hare", set at the onset of the Zimbabwean crisis, shows us that the crisis has multiple dimensions and through the two characters, Nhongo and Sara, it has been made clear that survival is possible. The two characters are examples of a non-resilient victim who fails to survive and one who is a resilient victor. The qualities which qualify Sara to be a survivor include her acceptance of change so that she can work on it, her resilience, protean nature as well as serendipity. Despite the cultural barriers that threaten to stifle her, Sara fights, masters change, manages to thrive under pressure and bounces back from the setbacks occasioned by the multiple dimensions of the crisis. Her challenges can be understood, applied and appreciated from an individual, family and national level and the fact that she rises above them makes her an inspiration to the readers who also face different crises in their lives. Against all the odds the people like her journey purposefully and resiliently, refusing to allow external circumstances to condemn them to a life of misery. They are hopeful, meet life head on and the fiction here offers liberating and breakthrough stories to strengthen the reader's own innate resilient capacities for a happier, more successful, and better life.

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