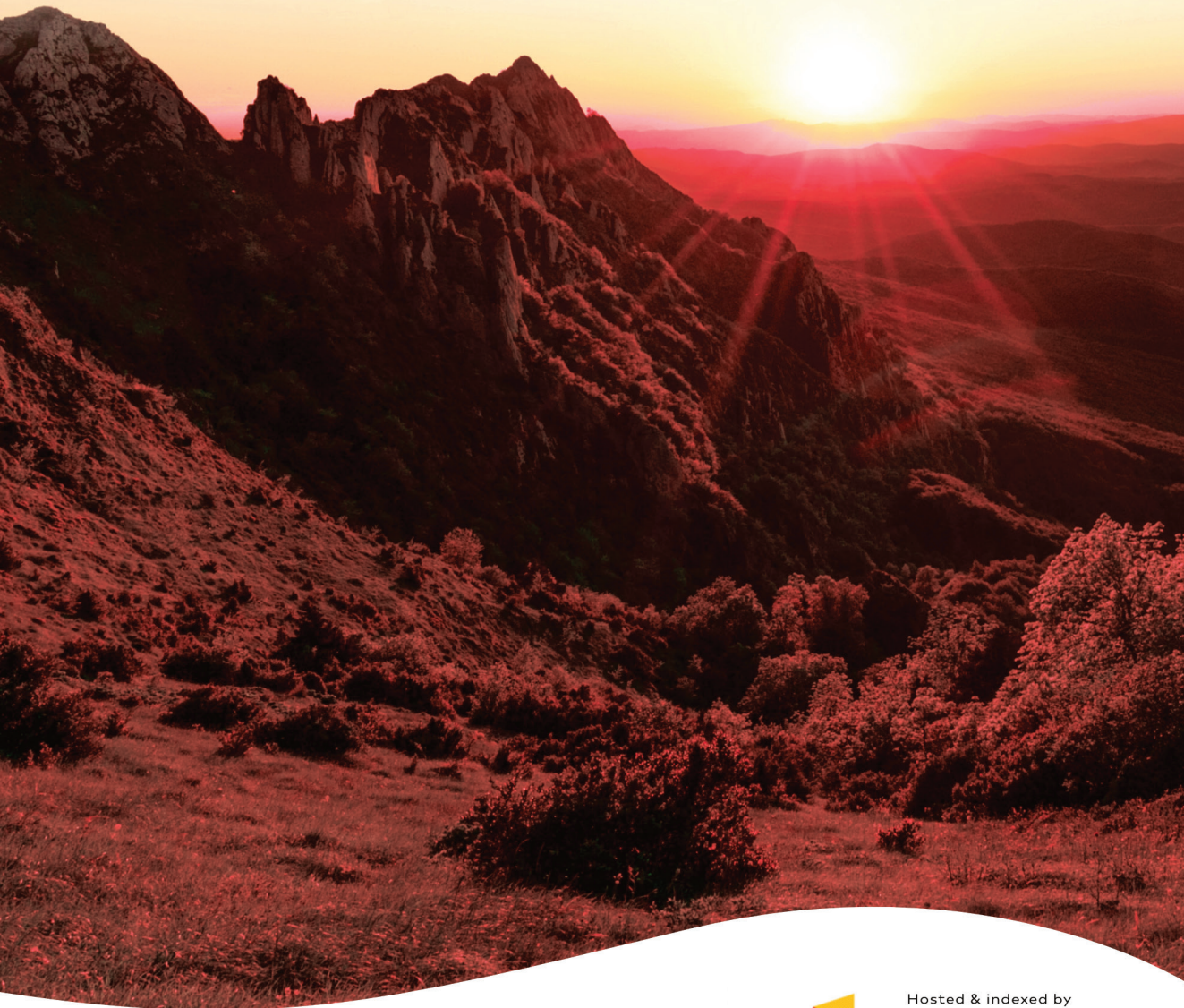


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Politics and the disease metaphor in Shimmer Chinodya's *Harvest of Thorns* (1989) and Valerie Tagwira's *The Uncertainty of Hope* (2006)

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Abstract

This study examines the intersection of politics and the disease metaphor in Shimmer Chinodya's *Harvest of Thorns* (1989) and Valerie Tagwira's *The Uncertainty of Hope* (2006). By juxtaposing two novels situated within distinct yet interconnected socio-political contexts, the liberation struggle and the post-independence era, the study explores how Zimbabwean writers conceptualise and critique political realities through the metaphorical language of disease. Guided by postcolonial theory, the analysis investigates the ways in which the selected texts employ metaphor, symbolism, and narrative strategies to illuminate the relationship between political intolerance and various forms of social suffering. Through close textual analysis, the study demonstrates that literary narratives function not only as reflections of systemic injustices but also as critical interventions that expose the broader human consequences of political dysfunction. The findings reveal that both novels metaphorically construct political intolerance as a form of social and psychological dis-ease that undermines individual well-being, erodes communal cohesion, and perpetuates cycles of marginalisation. In this regard, disease operates as a powerful symbolic framework through which the authors interrogate the effects of authoritarianism, exclusion, and socio-economic deprivation. By framing political intolerance within the discourse of disease, the study highlights the intricate relationship between governance, social wellness, and public health outcomes. It further demonstrates the capacity of literary texts to generate interdisciplinary insights into the challenges confronting postcolonial societies. Ultimately, the study contributes to scholarship on Zimbabwean literature by illustrating how the disease metaphor serves as a critical lens for understanding the enduring consequences of political instability while simultaneously advocating social justice, democratic accountability, and collective resilience.

Keywords: Zimbabwean literature, postcolonial theory, disease metaphor, political intolerance, public health, community wellness

Introduction

Although political intolerance and related social pathologies have been extensively examined within History, Political Science, Peace Studies, and Sociology, literary scholarship has paid comparatively limited attention to the interface between literature, politics, and health, particularly within the Zimbabwean context. This study addresses that gap by examining politics as a disease metaphor in Zimbabwean fiction through a comparative analysis of Shimmer Chinodya's *Harvest of Thorns* (1989) and Valerie Tagwira's *The Uncertainty of Hope* (2006). The two novels are situated within distinct yet interconnected historical moments, the liberation struggle and the postcolonial period, and therefore, provide fertile ground for exploring how literary texts interrogate the enduring consequences of political intolerance across different socio-political contexts.

The study proceeds from the premise that literature functions not merely as a reflection of social reality but also as a critical site through which the effects of political violence, exclusion, and oppression may be interpreted and contested. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013) argues that literary texts play a significant role in exposing and critiquing the socio-political contradictions of a nation, making these novels particularly valuable for understanding Zimbabwe's evolving political landscape. The originality of this study lies in its interdisciplinary approach, which brings together literary studies, political analysis, and public health perspectives to illuminate how political intolerance affects both individuals and communities.

Political intolerance, broadly understood as the unwillingness to recognise or accommodate divergent political beliefs, constitutes a major threat to social cohesion and democratic governance. Halperin et al. (2009) contend that intolerance emerges from entrenched suspicion, fear, and hostility between groups holding competing ideological positions. Similarly, Gibson and Duch (1993) maintain that perceptions of threat, coupled with closed-mindedness and elite-driven repression, often intensify intolerant attitudes and behaviours. Within elitist conceptions of democracy, political elites may actively suppress dissenting voices to preserve existing power structures, thereby institutionalising cultures of exclusion and intolerance. Hurwitz and Mondak (2001) further distinguish between generic intolerance, which is indiscriminate and unconditional, and discriminatory intolerance, which specifically targets groups and denies them fundamental political rights. Such manifestations of

intolerance have profound implications not only for political participation but also for collective well-being.

Central to this study is the concept of disease as both a literal and metaphorical condition. Byrne (2001) and Schneider (2019) conceptualise disease as “dis-ease”, a state of disturbance that extends beyond physical illness to encompass broader social and psychological dysfunctions. This understanding resonates with Sontag’s (1978) influential argument that disease metaphors frequently serve as vehicles for representing societal anxieties and structural crises. In the present study, disease functions as a metaphorical framework through which political intolerance is represented as a social pathology with far-reaching consequences. Drawing on Richards’ (1965) theory of tenor and vehicle, political intolerance constitutes the tenor, while disease serves as the vehicle through which its destructive effects are communicated and understood. In this sense, the metaphor does not merely describe political dysfunction but actively constructs it as a condition requiring recognition, intervention, and transformation. As Schön (1979) and Videla (2014) observe, metaphors play a critical role in problem-setting by framing social issues in ways that stimulate reflection and behavioural change.

This study, therefore, examines how Chinodya and Tagwira deploy the disease metaphor to expose the consequences of political intolerance and systemic injustice. It argues that political violence, exclusion, and authoritarian practices operate as forms of social and psychological dis-ease that undermine community cohesion, destabilise social relations, and generate conditions of chronic stress and trauma. Such conditions are increasingly recognised as important determinants of public health (Chikandiwa, 2020; Mlambo, 2018).

By foregrounding the relationship between political instability and human well-being, the selected novels reveal how governance failures extend beyond the political sphere to affect mental health, access to social services, and community resilience (Ndlovu, 2021). Political intolerance exacerbates broader social determinants of health, including poverty, displacement, marginalisation, and restricted access to healthcare (Moyo & Jere, 2022). The study demonstrates that literary narratives not only critique oppressive socio-political systems but also illuminate the profound human costs of intolerance, thereby offering important insights into the interconnected domains of governance, social justice, and public health.

Methodology

This study employs close textual reading and interpretive thematic analysis of two Zimbabwean novels, guided by postcolonial theory, to examine political intolerance as a disease metaphor. The interpretivist approach, a qualitative research paradigm, was adopted because it enables the researcher to generate nuanced interpretations of what is read, understood, and experienced through literary texts.

Interpretivism recognises that meaning is socially and historically constructed rather than objectively fixed, and that interpretation is inevitably shaped by cultural experiences, historical contexts, ideological positions, and prior knowledge. Meanings derived from literary texts cannot be entirely separated from the socio-political environments within which both the texts and readers are situated. The approach is appropriate for analysis of literary studies because it accommodates multiple interpretations and acknowledges the complexity of textual meaning. It further provides the flexibility to examine representations of violence, oppression, and political intolerance in literary works without imposing rigid or predetermined analytical categories (Merriam, 1998).

The reading and thematic interpretation of political intolerance in the selected Zimbabwean novels remain the prerogative of the researchers, who engage critically with the texts to uncover underlying meanings and ideological assumptions. Bryman (2012) and Harrison et al. (2017) argue that interpretivism is fundamentally concerned with understanding the dynamic interaction between human beings and their social environments. Guided by postcolonial theory, this study utilises interpretivism to explore the relationship between individuals and the political and administrative systems that shape their lived realities. The approach also accommodates reader response and reflexivity, allowing the researchers to engage critically with the texts while recognising their own interpretive positions. Through this lens, literature is viewed not merely as a reflection of social reality but also as a site where political experiences are represented, negotiated, and contested.

The interpretive thematic analysis undertaken in this study treats the selected novels as living cultural documents that engage with the theme of political intolerance across different historical periods. One text is situated within the colonial and liberation-war context, while the other is in the post-independence era, thereby providing opportunities to examine both continuity and change in representations of political violence and exclusion. Bowen (2009) argues that

both printed and electronic documents constitute valuable sources of qualitative data, while Rapley (2007) maintains that document analysis requires systematic examination and interpretation to elicit meaning and generate understanding.

In this regard, *Harvest of Thorns* and *The Uncertainty of Hope* are examined as literary documents that portray various manifestations of systemic political intolerance. The novels were purposively selected because of their sustained engagement with political conflict, social injustice, state power, and human suffering.

The analysis is informed by postcolonial literary theory, which provides the conceptual framework for identifying and coding themes such as political violence, sanctions, war, repression, exclusion, and partisan resource distribution as manifestations of political intolerance. These themes are interpreted within the broader context of Zimbabwe's colonial and postcolonial experiences. Furthermore, the study draws on Richards' (1936, 1965) theory of metaphor as articulated in *The Philosophy of Rhetoric*. Richards' distinction between tenor and vehicle is particularly useful in understanding how figurative language operates within the selected texts. In this study, political intolerance functions as the tenor, while disease serves as the vehicle through which the destructive consequences of intolerance are represented and communicated.

The disease metaphor is, therefore, employed as an analytical tool for exposing the pervasive and corrosive effects of political oppression on individuals, communities, and the nation. By conceptualising political intolerance as a form of social and psychological dis-ease, the study illuminates the ways in which literature critiques systems of domination and advocates social transformation.

Although comparative insights emerge throughout the discussion, a dedicated comparative analysis is undertaken towards the conclusion of the study to trace continuities and discontinuities in representations of colonial violence, liberation-war trauma, and postcolonial state repression across the two novels.

Understanding and justification of the postcolonial literary theory

This study adopts postcolonial literary theory as its principal analytical framework for examining political intolerance as a disease metaphor in Zimbabwean literature. Patel (2022) characterises postcolonial literature as a critical intellectual movement concerned with interrogating the enduring effects of colonialism and the various mechanisms through which colonial power continues to shape 'colonised' societies. African literary texts are frequently examined through postcolonial perspectives because they engage directly with

historical experiences of conquest, dispossession, cultural disruption, resistance, and nation-building. Adigun (2019) argues that African literature emerged partly as a response to colonial domination and as a means of articulating African experiences from indigenous perspectives. This observation positions African literature as a significant discourse through which writers critique both colonial and postcolonial systems of power.

Zimbabwean literature occupies an important place within postcolonial studies because it reflects the political, social, and cultural transformations that have characterised the country's colonial and post-independence histories. Similarly, Yang (1999) defines postcolonial literature as literary works produced by writers from previously colonised societies whose narratives engage with questions of identity, power, resistance, and historical memory. Within this framework, the postcolonial novel is often viewed as a symbolic representation of the nation and its struggles.

As a literature of resistance, African fiction frequently challenges the ideological assumptions of colonialism while exposing the contradictions and failures of postcolonial governance. Postcolonial criticism, therefore, evaluates literary texts in terms of how they represent indigenous experiences, challenge structures of domination, and reclaim marginalised histories and voices. Central to this theoretical tradition is Edward Said's (1978) concept of orientalism, which examines the unequal relationship between the coloniser and the colonised and how colonial discourse constructs the colonised as the "Other". Said further argues that writers from formerly colonised societies often appropriate the language of the coloniser to challenge imperial ideologies, a process commonly referred to as "writing back". This notion is particularly relevant to Chinodya and Tagwira, whose novels utilise English to interrogate systems of oppression, exclusion, and political violence within Zimbabwean society.

Walton (2023) further conceptualises postcolonial theory as an Afrocentric mode of reading that evaluates the extent to which African literary texts either reinforce or contest colonial epistemologies that portrayed Africans as culturally, intellectually, and morally inferior. Such a perspective encourages writers and critics to revisit history, recover suppressed narratives, and challenge inherited structures of domination. Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* remains a seminal example of this endeavour, illustrating how storytelling can expose the disruptive effects of colonialism on African societies while restoring African agency and historical consciousness. Similarly, Chinodya's *Harvest of Thorns*

and Tagwira's *The Uncertainty of Hope* engage with questions of liberation, national identity, political power, and social justice. Whether consciously informed by postcolonial theory or not, both authors examine the continuities between colonial forms of violence and exclusion and their manifestations in the postcolonial state.

The application of postcolonial theory in this study is, therefore, justified by its capacity to illuminate the historical and political conditions that give rise to political intolerance. The theory provides a critical lens through which the liberation-war narrative of *Harvest of Thorns* and the post-independence narrative of *The Uncertainty of Hope* can be analysed as texts that expose colonial violence, postcolonial disillusionment, structural inequalities, and authoritarian governance. Political intolerance is consequently understood as part of a broader legacy of domination that continues to affect the body politic and undermine social cohesion. Within this analytical framework, the disease metaphor functions as a vehicle for diagnosing and critiquing social and political pathologies. It enables the study to conceptualise political intolerance as a form of social and psychological dis-ease whose origins may be traced to both colonial and postcolonial systems of power. The metaphor thus serves as a strategic interpretive tool for exposing inherited patterns of misgovernance, exclusion, and violence, while simultaneously foregrounding the need for healing, justice, and democratic transformation.

A brief Synopsis of Chinodya's Novel *Harvest of Thorns*

In *Harvest of Thorns* (1989) Chinodya largely reveals the political circumstances that characterised Zimbabwe before and after attaining self-rule from Britain, its erstwhile colonial master. Set in the liberation and post-liberation era, the novel explores thematic issues associated with the Chimurenga genre of Zimbabwean literature. Chimurenga is Zimbabwe's Shona language, which means 'struggle' or 'fight' for the independence of Zimbabwe from Britain's colonial rule. Led by Benjamin and other freedom fighters, the text highlights violence, struggles, and sacrifices which perpetrated the suffering of people in the protracted revolution that eventually brought them freedom. Many people lost limbs, while others died during the fierce struggle. It is worth noting that despite the sacrifices and participation in the liberation struggle, people like young Benjamin and other fighters do not benefit from anything, nor do they attain recognition as heroes, rendering independence a 'defeated victory' as suggested by the metaphorical title. Although the story promises hope, it is

also laden with gruesome discrepancies of the war fought by the very youthful Benjamin, who is hardly eighteen when he joins the guerrillas in the bush. In a typical bildungsroman, Benjamin does not enjoy his boyhood as he transforms into adulthood sexually and politically amidst the smell of gunfire in Rhodesia, then ravaged by the “disease” of political intolerance.

Political Intolerance

The Disease Metaphor in Harvest of Thorns

Set during the liberation struggle and the early years of independence, Shimmer Chinodya's *Harvest of Thorns* portrays political intolerance as a pervasive social disease that infiltrates every aspect of communal life. The novel presents political violence not merely as a historical reality but as a pathological condition that spreads fear, suspicion, trauma, and moral decay throughout society. Through symbolism, metaphor, and episodic narration, Chinodya illustrates how intolerance contaminates both the body politic and individual lives, transforming governance into coercion, community into mistrust, and survival into a daily struggle. Read through a postcolonial lens, the novel exposes the destructive consequences of colonial domination while simultaneously revealing the human costs associated with violent resistance. As Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013) observes, Zimbabwean liberation narratives often reflect the contradictions and complexities embedded within nationalist struggles.

Political intolerance in the novel manifests most visibly through violence and death. The liberation war transforms ordinary spaces into sites of fear and suffering, where human life becomes increasingly expendable. Benjamin's recollection of witnessing a man brutally murdered for allegedly “selling out” demonstrates how political conflict normalises violence and desensitises communities to human suffering. The mutilation of the victim's body and its disposal under a hedge symbolise the erosion of human dignity within a society afflicted by political extremism. Similarly, repeated accounts of civilians and combatants being shot, wounded, or killed reinforce the pervasive atmosphere of insecurity generated by war. Ephraim's near-fatal gunshot wound and Yeukai's brother surviving after seven bullets are removed from his body illustrate the devastating physical consequences of political conflict (Chinodya, 1989). Within the disease metaphor framework, these injuries function as symptoms of a broader societal pathology whose effects extend beyond individual victims to affect entire communities.

The symbolism of poison and witchcraft further reinforces the metaphor of political intolerance as a social disease. Following the illness of Comrade Torai Zvombo after consuming mushrooms allegedly provided by Mai Tawanda, fear and suspicion quickly escalated into violence. Rather than seeking evidence, the community constructs narratives of betrayal and witchcraft that culminate in Mai Tawanda's death. Chinodya writes that "Mabhunu Muchapera struck Mai Tawanda first" and that the alleged traitor "was beaten until she died" (Chinodya, 1989, p. 205). These events reveal how political paranoia creates conditions in which rumours acquire the force of truth and violence becomes legitimised. The accusations that Mai Tawanda used "rat poison" or "ground glass" in food (Chinodya, 1989, p. 212) symbolise the moral contamination of a society consumed by fear and ideological absolutism. Read through postcolonial theory, such episodes illustrate how colonial violence reproduces cultures of suspicion and intolerance that persist even among those fighting for liberation.

The treatment of Mai Tawanda also exposes the gendered dimensions of political intolerance. Her vilification as both a traitor and a witch reflects broader patriarchal tendencies to scapegoat women during periods of national crisis. As Nnaemeka (1997) argues, African literary texts frequently reveal how women become symbolic repositories of communal anxieties and political frustrations. In *Harvest of Thorns*, conflicting explanations surrounding Mai Tawanda's alleged crime demonstrate how propaganda and conspiracy narratives are mobilised to justify violence. The suggestion that her husband had not died of tuberculosis but that she had somehow contributed to his death through witchcraft further reinforces her construction as a dangerous outsider. Such narratives reveal a diseased social order in which prejudice, fear, and misogyny converge to legitimise exclusion and punishment.

The novel also presents economic sanctions, displacement, and structural deprivation as manifestations of political intolerance. Chinodya links the liberation war to broader socio-economic disruptions, including mine closures, unemployment, and the deterioration of livelihoods. As one character observes, sanctions have contributed to the closure of mines and the disappearance of employment opportunities previously available to black workers (Chinodya, 1989). While sanctions emerge within a broader struggle against colonial domination, they nevertheless produce significant hardships for ordinary citizens. The disease metaphor is therefore extended beyond physical violence to encompass social and economic suffering. In this regard, political intolerance

operates not only through direct coercion but also through conditions that undermine human welfare and community stability.

Chinodya's episodic narrative structure further emphasises the interconnectedness of personal suffering and systemic oppression. Historical allusions to land dispossession, particularly references to Cecil John Rhodes and colonial land appropriation, position political violence within a longer history of injustice. The comrades' confrontation with Msindo concerning "our land Cecil John Rhodes grabbed from our people" (Chinodya, 1989, p. 164) foregrounds land as a central source of conflict and a powerful symbol of colonial dispossession. From a postcolonial perspective, the liberation struggle emerges as what Fanon (1963) describes as a "literature of combat", driven by the desire to reclaim territory, dignity, and self-determination. Yet Chinodya simultaneously demonstrates that the pursuit of liberation carries profound human costs, particularly when violence becomes normalised as a political instrument.

Harvest of Thorns represents political intolerance as a destructive social disease that permeates political, economic, and interpersonal relationships. Through recurring images of violence, poisoning, decay, suspicion, and death, Chinodya exposes the corrosive effects of colonial oppression and liberation-war conflict on both individual well-being and collective social health. The novel reveals that political intolerance compromises not only physical safety but also psychological stability, social cohesion, and moral integrity. By deploying the disease metaphor as a vehicle for political critique, Chinodya transforms the liberation narrative into a broader reflection on the enduring consequences of violence and the challenges of achieving genuine social healing in postcolonial societies.

A Brief Synopsis of Tagwira's Novel *The Uncertainty of Hope*

Set in Harare in 2005, Tagwira's *The Uncertainty of Hope*, portrays the city on the verge of total collapse because of economic problems and systematic political violence perpetrated by the sovereign government against the poor citizens. The pathetic situation in the city marked by rampant marginalisation of the workers, corrupt- riddled governance and gender-based violence contributes to diminishing the hopes of 'Hararians' as hinted at by the book title. Tagwira's protagonist and round character, Onai Moyo, is a symbol of the suffering of the masses. Her unbearable experiences at the hands of her husband, Gari, compounded by the 'Operation Murambatsvina' which destroyed her source

of livelihood, represent the brutality of the new leadership in the independent Zimbabwe. The novel captures the suffering of the wider populace of Zimbabwe from professionals, vendors and dealers, because of the 'disease' of political intolerance.

The Disease Metaphor in The Uncertainty of Hope

Valerie Tagwira's (2006) *The Uncertainty of Hope* presents political intolerance as a pervasive social disease whose effects extend beyond politics into the economic, psychological, and physical well-being of ordinary citizens. Set in Harare during the socio-economic crises of the early 2000s, the novel depicts a society on the brink of collapse because of economic decline, state repression, corruption, and political exclusion. Through the experiences of Onai Moyo and other marginalised characters, Tagwira exposes the devastating consequences of authoritarian governance and systemic violence. Read through a postcolonial lens, the novel demonstrates how the promises of independence have been undermined by new forms of domination that reproduce many of the exclusions associated with colonial rule. The disease metaphor functions as a powerful analytical framework through which political intolerance is represented as a contagious social pathology that erodes human dignity, communal solidarity, and hope.

One of the most striking manifestations of political intolerance in the novel is *Operation Murambatsvina* ("Operation Clean Up"), which serves as a metaphor for state violence, displacement, and social destruction. While officially presented as an urban renewal programme, the operation is portrayed as an assault on the livelihoods and survival strategies of the urban poor. The destruction of homes and informal businesses symbolises the dismantling of social networks and the erosion of community resilience. As one character observes, "People's homes have been destroyed, and they are being unconvincingly smothered by propaganda, promised houses in the near future" (Tagwira, 2006, p. 184). The operation thus becomes emblematic of a diseased political system that seeks to eliminate perceived undesirables rather than address structural socio-economic challenges. The imagery of destruction evokes not only physical devastation but also psychological trauma and collective disempowerment. Through this metaphor, Tagwira exposes how state power can become a source of social illness rather than public welfare.

The novel further employs the metaphor of sanctions as a form of political disease. Government narratives consistently attribute Zimbabwe's economic

decline to external sanctions, thereby deflecting attention from internal governance failures. Through characters such as Gari, Tagwira demonstrates how official discourse encourages citizens to internalise explanations that locate responsibility outside the nation's borders. However, the text simultaneously reveals that corruption, mismanagement, and political intolerance constitute the deeper sources of national suffering.

The disease metaphor, therefore, exposes a politics of denial in which external actors are blamed while internal pathologies remain unaddressed. In this regard, political intolerance is represented not only through overt violence but also through ideological manipulation and propaganda that obscure the structural causes of social decline. Such representations resonate with Raftopoulos and Mlambo's (2009) argument that Zimbabwe's crises are simultaneously political, economic, and ideological in nature.

The depiction of Matapi Flats provides another illustration of political intolerance as a form of social decay. The overcrowded and deteriorating living conditions symbolise the persistence of colonial spatial inequalities in the post-independence era. References to "colonial inheritance," "overcrowding during the war," and "dilapidated tower-blocks" (Tagwira, 2006, p. 52) create images of physical and social deterioration. From a postcolonial perspective, these spaces represent the continuation of exclusionary structures established during colonial rule. The unhealthy living conditions endured by residents suggest a political system that remains indifferent to the welfare of marginalised populations. Disease imagery is, therefore, embedded not only in bodily suffering but also in the decaying urban environment, which functions as a visible manifestation of broader governance failures.

Tagwira also employs flashback as a narrative technique to demonstrate the cyclical nature of political violence. References to the 1998 food riots and confrontations between civilians and the police reveal the persistence of state-citizen conflict across different historical moments. The imagery of "running battles with the police," "overturning a police car," and warnings not to "get killed" (Tagwira, 2006, p. 132) evokes a society characterised by chronic instability. Such scenes suggest that political intolerance has become normalised, transforming public spaces into sites of contestation and fear. The indiscriminate use of force by state agents further reinforces Farmer's (2004) notion of structural violence, whereby political and economic systems generate conditions that undermine human well-being. In this context, violence functions as both a symptom and a perpetuator of the disease afflicting society.

The novel additionally highlights the impact of political intolerance on children and other vulnerable groups. The admiration expressed by Onai's child for "a demolition man" or "a policeman" (Tagwira, 2006, p. 145) reveals the psychological consequences of growing up in an environment saturated with violence and coercion. Rather than aspiring towards constructive social roles, children become fascinated by instruments of destruction and authority. This mirrors Benjamin's experiences in *Harvest of Thorns*, where exposure to violence during childhood shapes perceptions of power and belonging. The deaths of children during *Operation Murambatsvina* and the destruction of orphanages further underscore the extent to which political intolerance threatens the most vulnerable members of society. The disease metaphor thus extends beyond physical destruction to encompass intergenerational trauma and the erosion of social values.

Political intolerance is also represented through propaganda, exclusion, and the politicisation of essential resources. Individuals who criticise government policies are labelled '*vatenges*' (sell-outs), a designation that delegitimises dissent and justifies persecution. The case of a teacher forced to flee the country after being branded '*Mutenges* *chaiye*' (real sell-outs) demonstrates how intolerance silences alternative viewpoints and restricts democratic participation. Equally significant is the politicisation of food distribution, where access to necessities becomes contingent upon political affiliation. Onai's fear that she may be removed from a food queue because of perceived political loyalties illustrates how partisan politics infiltrates everyday survival. The exclusion of citizens from food aid on political grounds represents a particularly destructive form of social pathology because it weaponises basic human needs for political ends. Such practices expose the moral decay of a system in which citizenship rights are subordinated to partisan interests.

The novel further associates political intolerance with displacement, migration, and the fragmentation of communities. The violent deaths of commercial farmers and the subsequent flight of families such as the Johnsons symbolise the breakdown of social cohesion and the insecurity generated by political conflict. The departure of skilled professionals and productive citizens reflects the wider consequences of a society increasingly characterised by fear, uncertainty, and exclusion.

Through these representations, Tagwira demonstrates that political intolerance functions as a disease that destroys both individuals and institutions, leaving

behind a fractured social order. Ultimately, *The Uncertainty of Hope* reveals that governance failures have profound implications for public health, social justice, and human development. By portraying political intolerance as a pervasive form of social dis-ease, the novel underscores the need for equitable governance, democratic accountability, and the protection of fundamental human rights as prerequisites for societal healing and collective well-being.

Politics as Disease Metaphor: A Comparative Reading of *Harvest of Thorns* and *The Uncertainty of Hope*

The comparative analysis of Shimmer Chinodya's *Harvest of Thorns* (1989) and Valerie Tagwira's (2006) *The Uncertainty of Hope* (2006) reveals a remarkable continuity in the representation of political intolerance as a metaphorical disease that afflicts Zimbabwean society across both colonial and postcolonial dispensations. Although the novels are separated by historical context and authored by writers of different genders, they converge in portraying political violence, exclusion, propaganda, displacement, and socio-economic marginalisation as pervasive forms of social dis-ease. Their respective depictions demonstrate that political intolerance transcends specific political epochs, mutating into new forms while retaining its destructive consequences for individual and collective well-being. The selection of both male and female authors further strengthens the analysis by illustrating a shared literary consciousness regarding the enduring effects of political intolerance on Zimbabwean communities.

A significant point of convergence concerns the relationship between political conflict and economic suffering. In *Harvest of Thorns*, colonial sanctions and the liberation war contribute to economic stagnation, unemployment, and social insecurity. Msindo's son is unable to leave military service because economic opportunities have collapsed, highlighting how political conflict constrains personal agency. Similarly, in *The Uncertainty of Hope*, economic decline, company closures, and unemployment, exemplified by the experiences of Gari and Silas, expose ordinary citizens to extreme vulnerability. In both texts, political decisions produce economic hardships that function as symptoms of a diseased political order. The disease metaphor, therefore, extends beyond physical violence to encompass structural conditions that erode livelihoods and diminish human dignity.

The novels also establish important parallels regarding land, displacement, and political violence. In *Harvest of Thorns*, the confrontation between comrades

and figures such as Baas Mellecker reflects the historical struggle for land dispossessed during colonial rule. The question, “Do you think this is his farm; don’t you know this is our land Cecil John Rhodes grabbed from our people?” (Chinodya, 1989, p. 164), foregrounds land as a central source of political conflict. In *The Uncertainty of Hope*, the death of Mr Johnson and the displacement of his family echo similar struggles over ownership, belonging, and power. While the historical contexts differ, both novels suggest that unresolved land grievances continue to generate social tensions and political violence. The disease of intolerance thus manifests through recurring cycles of dispossession and displacement.

Another notable similarity lies in the representation of state violence as a mechanism of social control. The armed conflict of the liberation struggle in *Harvest of Thorns* finds its postcolonial counterpart in *Operation Murambatsvina* in *The Uncertainty of Hope*. Although one is framed as anti-colonial resistance and the other as urban renewal, both result in displacement, suffering, and the disruption of ordinary life. The comparison highlights a disturbing continuity in which violence remains central to political authority despite changes in political leadership. From a postcolonial perspective, the novels expose the paradox whereby structures of domination survive the transition from colonialism to independence, reproducing many of the oppressive practices they were initially intended to dismantle.

The texts further converge in their critique of propaganda and political labelling. In *Harvest of Thorns*, Mai Tawanda becomes a victim of suspicion and misinformation, while in *The Uncertainty of Hope*, dissenting individuals are branded “*vatenges*” or sell-outs. In both cases, political narratives are deployed to delegitimise perceived opponents and justify exclusion. Such practices reinforce a culture of fear and silence that undermines democratic participation and social trust. The disease metaphor is particularly effective here because propaganda functions much like an infection, spreading through communities and contaminating social relationships.

Gender emerges as another important comparative dimension. Both novels foreground the disproportionate burden borne by women during periods of political instability. Female characters experience violence, displacement, economic insecurity, and social marginalisation, often while carrying primary responsibility for family survival. By highlighting these experiences, Chinodya and Tagwira broaden discussions of political intolerance beyond conventional analyses of race and class to include gendered forms of suffering. Their narratives

reveal how political crises produce distinct vulnerabilities for women while simultaneously exposing their resilience and agency.

Ultimately, the comparative reading demonstrates that political intolerance operates as a persistent social pathology across both colonial and postcolonial Zimbabwe. While its manifestations evolve, from colonial repression and liberation-war violence to post-independence displacement, patronage politics, and economic exclusion, the underlying consequences remain strikingly similar. The novels suggest that independence did not eradicate the structures of domination inherited from colonialism; rather, many were reconfigured within new political arrangements.

By representing political intolerance as a disease affecting the body politic, Chinodya and Tagwira call for transformative forms of governance grounded in justice, inclusion, accountability, and human dignity. Their works collectively stress the necessity of addressing not only political and economic inequalities but also the broader social and cultural conditions required for sustainable societal healing and collective well-being. women.

Conclusion

Grounded in postcolonial literary theory, this study demonstrates that political intolerance remains a persistent and evolving challenge within Zimbabwean society, transcending the colonial and post-independence divide. Through a comparative analysis of Shimmer Chinodya's *Harvest of Thorns* and Valerie Tagwira's *The Uncertainty of Hope*, the study reveals how Zimbabwean literature consistently represents political intolerance as a metaphorical disease that permeates the social, political, economic, and psychological dimensions of communal life. The novels expose multiple manifestations of this social pathology, including political violence, sanctions, displacement, propaganda, racism, exclusion, and authoritarian governance, while simultaneously illuminating their far-reaching consequences for individual and collective well-being.

The analysis has shown that the disease metaphor functions as a powerful literary and ideological device through which writers diagnose societal dysfunction and critique systems of domination. By framing political intolerance as a form of social and psychological dis-ease, both novels highlight the ways in which violence, fear, mistrust, and political manipulation undermine social cohesion, destabilise communities, and compromise human flourishing. The study further demonstrates that the effects of political intolerance extend beyond the

political sphere to encompass broader public-health concerns, including trauma, insecurity, displacement, and the erosion of social support systems.

In bringing into dialogue Zimbabwean literature, political violence, metaphor studies, trauma studies, public health, and postcolonial criticism, this research contributes an interdisciplinary perspective to the understanding of political intolerance. The comparison between *Harvest of Thorns* and *The Uncertainty of Hope* traces important continuities between colonial violence, liberation-war trauma, and postcolonial state repression, revealing how structures of domination often survive political transitions in reconfigured forms. Ultimately, the study stresses the centrality of democratic governance, social justice, political stability, and institutional integrity in fostering societal wellness. It argues that sustainable national development depends not only on economic growth and political independence but also on the cultivation of inclusive political cultures capable of promoting healing, dignity, and collective well-being.

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