

**DECONSTRUCTING THE ACCIDENTAL BODY IN ALBINISM IN PETINA
GAPPAH'S *THE BOOK OF MEMORY*, TARA SULLIVAN'S *GOLDEN BOY* AND
JENNY ROBSON'S *BECAUSE PULA MEANS RAIN***

MASTER OF ARTS IN ENGLISH LITERATURE THESIS

ENERST NKHOMBOYASWEKA LONGWE

**UNIVERSITY OF MALAWI
CHANCELLOR COLLEGE**

FEBRUARY, 2020



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MASTER OF ARTS IN ENGLISH LITERATURE THESIS

By

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Submitted to the Department of English, Faculty of Humanities, in partial fulfilment of
the requirements for the degree of Masters of Arts in Literature

UNIVERSITY OF MALAWI

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FEBRUARY, 2020

DECLARATION

I, the undersigned hereby declare that this thesis is my own original work which has not been submitted to any other institution for similar purposes. Where other people's work has been used, due acknowledgements have been made.

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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

The undersigned certify that this thesis represents the student's own work and effort and has been submitted with our approval.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to James, Uchizi, Trancy and Rhoda.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I cannot deny myself the pleasure of publicly thanking the Almighty God for letting me come this far. I owe all the strengths of this work done to my family Mr John and Mrs Chrissy Longwe, my siblings Onanji, Trancy, Think, Uchindami and Sibongile.

Special thanks go to my supervisor Dr. Ken Junior Lipenga for the guidance and support during my study. And also on a special note thanks should go to the English department and all members of staff academic and non-academic.

My friend and brother Kumbukani Kasuli Zgambo and to all my classmates Bridget, Towera, Zaitun, Atanazio, Rodrick and Vincent. You guys are amazing.

Special thanks should go to Mr James Mkandawire and wife Lusungu Mkandawire who opened doors of their house for me during the entire period of the study. You indeed created a unique environment for my study. Your children Jemima, Praise, Christobel, Anne (Pilirani) were a marvel to be with as they offered support, encouragement and laughter.

Thanks should go to the Research Director and the entire staff of Invest in Knowledge for financial support towards the study. Without you I was nothing.

These people need to be acknowledged; Timothy Chirwa, Kondwani Mkandawire, Chimwemwe Chirwa, Lucy Longwe, Emmanuel Phyoliro Mhango, Elderege Mazuwa Banda, Kondwani Munthali, Mtende Nthara, Dr Sunduzwayo Madise.

The most important person in my life, Uchizi Khoswe, my darling, words are failing out how I can describe you. You have endured, supported and been there for me, God bless you.

ABSTRACT

In spite of the substantial amount of work on albinism in the last decade, misconceptions about albinism still abound. The veneration and condemnation of albinism and albino body image in African society as abnormal bodies is so profound, and provides a central element within the analysis of subjectivities and their constructions that runs throughout this study. This study deconstructs representation and narrativisation of accidental bodies in albinism in the fictional texts of Tara Sullivan's *Golden Boy*, Petina Gappah's *The Book of Memory* and Jenny Robson's *Because Pula Means Rain*. My central argument is that these selected texts demonstrate how accidental qualities can be altered without affecting the functional unity and coherence of the object (in this case albinism) and therefore its categorical identity. The texts draw on the dominant discourse to deconstruct and interrogate the social and literary narratives of the accidental bodies. In so doing, the study constructs new dialogues and discussions of accidental bodies in albinism that counters the historical narrative to which this topic has been condemned. By analysing these accidental bodies with reference to Foucauldian concept of "abnormal" and Lenard Davis' concept of "normalcy", I contend that this means that their skin colour cannot deny them humanity; personhood and a sense of being as portrayed in dominant cultural narratives.

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CHAPTER ONE

1.1 Introduction

My task which I am trying to achieve is, by the power of written word, to make you hear, to make you feel—it is, above to make you see. That—and no more and it is everything (Conrad 1).

The critical concept of deconstruction constitutes one of the most radical and influential strands of poststructuralist theory. In deconstruction, advocated by Jacques Derrida, “the existence of multiple textual readings” undermines the traditional view that literary works contain a fixed and unified core of meaning that can be deduced by rigorous explication of their linguistic and formal structures (Padley 153). Derrida’s project shows how textual interpretations are unstable. Deconstruction reveals the indeterminate nature of a text and shows how any number of interpretations can be applicable. By applying Derrida’s deconstruction project to accidental bodies in albinism, the danger of a single story, as argued by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, can be eliminated. This thesis embarks on deconstructing the “accidental body” within novels that have albino characters under disability studies by using interpretative readings of these texts. The study proposes that albino body in the African setting is an “accidental body” since the characters/persons with albinism feel black inside as witnessed in fictional works that feature persons with albinism (characters).

In his book *Of Grammatology* (1976), Jacques Derrida argues that “we can only make use of language by allowing the system to control us in a certain way and to a certain extent” (158). In studying literary theory, Derrida’s thoughts suggest how our reading of literary texts should be done. Derrida points to a certain complicity between writing and reading, in that a text needs to be read in order to be or become a text (35). This implies that writing and human communication generally entail the risk of misunderstanding. The same can be extended to interpretation of how subjectivities of persons with albinism in Africa are shaped and re-shaped through local moral conceptions. Societal ideas and explanations of albinism at the local level in Africa are conceived in terms of family history, social relations, economic status, and moral-religious positions. This puts the notion of albinism under multiple interpretations because language operates on the basis of differentiation as argued in Derrida’s concept of deconstruction.

Deconstruction accounts for how a text’s explicit formulations undermine its implicit or non-explicit aspects. It brings out what the text excludes by showing what it includes. A literary text is seen to have no boundaries with regard to meaning. The nature of textual meaning reflects the fluid and mutable nature of human identity. In albinism, identity is not a fixed category because it lacks the centre. People desire a centre because it guarantees being as presence. When being is absent it is accident not essence.

Given Africa’s unique history, in which the body features as a primary battleground for human rights and liberties, questions of the body on one hand and negotiations of individual and collective identity on the other, are usually and productively construed as one and the same. In the literary texts featured in this thesis, character bodies with

albinism are examined, marginalised, injured, mutated and discriminated—and they feel ashamed, bitter, torn and exhilarated. The body forms a central plot of narrative in persons with albinism. As such this study is in line with Daniel Punday’s argument that “character bodies are the basic building blocks of narrative events” (15). Petina Gappah, Tara Sullivan and Jenny Robson use character bodies to construct and deconstruct their narratives. This is enhanced by narrative prosthesis by disability scholars Mitchell and Snyder.

1.2 Accidental Bodies in Albino Identity

This study uses “the accidental bodies” in relation to albino identity. The concept of the accidental body is drawn from Aristotle’s ontology. Aristotle in *Metaphysics* explains that, “accidents are what exists in and is said of another” (8). Accidental beings have been noted in the literature for some time now, the *locus classicus* being Matthews (1982), who observes that—Aristotle’s picture of an accidental unity is that of an ephemeral object—an object whose very existence rests on the accidental presence, or compresence, of some features, or features, in a substance (224). As such, albinism, then, is the attribution of corporeal deviance not so much a property of bodies as a product of cultural rules about what bodies should be or do.

Aristotle’s logic reflects the basic distinction in the way reality is structured and reflects the basic way we view reality. The fundamental distinction is between substance and accident. To agree with Aristotle, Peter Coffey says a “substance is whatever is a natural kind of thing and exists in its own right” (276). Accidents are the modifications that

substance undergoes, but that do not change the kind of thing that each substance is (Coffey 278). Accidents only exist when they are accidents of some substance. Many would say that each individual human could not fail to be human; if so, then the basic modal characterization counts the property of being human as an essential property of each human (Coffey 285). The study then draws conclusion from Aristotle's modal ontology to say that; if melanin is an essential property of a normal body, then lack of it is an accidental property of a normal body, hence albinism is an accidental property of a normal body. This accidental property has been constructed by the society hence the study trying to deconstruct that cultural ideology by placing albinism as a narrative self.

Although the body has recently emerged throughout humanities and the social sciences as an object revealing the power and limits of representation, the study of narrative has almost entirely ignored human corporeality (Punday 3). Daniel Punday argues in *Narrative Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Narratology* that "body narrative is a concept constructed by modern day critics based on assumptions about identity, desire, movement and place that depend on modern ways of thinking about corporeality" (15). This study is in line with Punday that "character bodies are the basic building blocks of narrative events" (15). In this study, Petina Gappah, Tara Sullivan and Jenny Robson use characters bodies to construct their narratives.

The body is, for the poststructuralist feminist Rosi Braidotti, neither biological nor sociological category (44). Instead, she conceptualises it as an interface, a threshold, a field where intersecting material and symbolic forces converge; a surface where multiple codes of sex, class, age, race and so forth, are inscribed (Braidotti 44). Lipenga and

Ngwira argue that (in such narratives) the authors deliberately place the albino figure (as a character) in the midst of others, drawing attention to his/her social being and how this is conditioned by dominant perceptions in the society (1474). In this way, it can be argued that these authors “give voice to those whose narratives have been excluded from the public domain and civic discourse...they convert private problems into public issues, thereby making collective identity, and collective solutions possible” (Van den Hoonaard 28). In this study we enter into the private lives of the characters with albinism.

Starting from Michel Foucault and Norbert Elias, the conceptualization of the body has gained a new critical perspective aimed to consider its cultural and political implications (Schlebinger 1). Albinism, body image, disability and physical appearance are important areas of research in African fictions that have been investigated in isolation of each other. Although researchers have examined body image and disability and how physical appearance can reduce negative body image judgements, a few studies have been conducted to investigate body image and its intersection with albinism in literature. Recent works in postcolonial study ask the question “how disability is figured in the global postcolonial history of the modern” (Barker and Murray 65) and to aim to highlight specific located examples of disability in cultural contexts.

Our experience and understanding of the body is shaped by the psychosocial and socio-cultural contexts of which we are part. Dan Goodley argues that “the body is the place where self and society interact” (56). In the same line of argument, Foucault describes the body as “docile” and as a “direct locus of social control” by culture (231). In *Golden Boy* by Tara Sullivan, there is such interaction when Habo (protagonist with albinism) is born. Asu his sister laments:

Everyone was arguing about what you were. The old men thought you were a ghost of the ancestors. That stupid *mkunga* (the midwife) was wailing on about demons. I think father figured you were the son of one of the white men who come to climb Mount Kilimanjaro or take a safari (29).

The society interacts over the body image of Habo, with various characters coming up with their own version of what albinism is all about. Lipenga and Ngwira contend that “because of the difference in skin colour, a lot of people in many African societies regard people with albinism as mysterious beings” (1473). Notwithstanding a way of reading and a mode of writing, this study challenges the interpretation of the albinism in literary texts as accidental bodies. This will be against the backdrop of conventional notions the dominant narratives ascribe on albinism through the human self, the external world, and of language and meaning.

1.3 Literary Representation of Albinism

Etymologically, representation can be understood as a presentation drawn up not by depicting the object as it is but re-presenting or constructing it in a new form or environment. The study further tries to bring about a new understanding of the potential of this figure in literary representation. The study agrees with Lipenga and Ngwira’s assertion that “the African novel, permits a mode of knowing that enables a much-needed emphatic appreciation of the social othering of the albino figure” (1474). Literary representations of the body from Africa as well as narrative strategies of writing the body have lately begun to receive wider critical attention.

My central argument is that the selected texts demonstrate how accidental qualities can be altered without affecting the functional unity and coherence of the object (in this case

albinism) and therefore its categorical identity. This means that their skin colour cannot deny them humanity, personhood and a sense of being as portrayed in dominant cultural narratives. Petina Gappah, Tara Sullivan and Jenny Robson in their works stress the importance of voice, authenticity, interpretive authority and representation as a mode in which characters with albinism exercise agency. These writers defamiliarise language and re-articulates traditional images, symbols and myths attached to albinism. Gappah, Sullivan and Robson write, using post-modernist techniques, without reference to any identifiable literary tradition, which allow them to create space for forging a unique style of writing in the context of albinism. This uniqueness lies in the manner in which they foreground language, presence and voice in characters with albinism. This style is presented not as a direct deconstruction of accidental bodies in albinism, but as a recovery of the repressed discourse of albinism.

In his interview on the “Imaginary Albino” with CBC radio show, Mullins argues:

From the 19th century freak show to the East African black market in body parts to the modern cinema, the image of “the albino” has seized the popular imagination. Popular culture attributes many qualities to “the albino;” an outsider; a magical being; a human embodiment of evil. In some cultures, albinism is associated with mystical or prophetic power or even ghosts. The albino body has long been an object of ridicule and fascination; of fear and fetishism (posted 24th November, 2014).

Garth Mullins highlights how dominant cultural narratives have led to stigmatization, discrimination, marginalization and systematic exclusion. In Africa, people with albinism are usually born into black African families; hence they tend to identify with black rather white community (Phatoli et al, 1). Nevertheless, because of their differences they do not

fit neatly into either the black or white groups (they have accidental bodies) and tend to be subject to various myths and stereotypes. This study's argument is that in African community/setting albinism is more than the skin colour. Therefore, through the fictional works of Petina Gappah, Jenny Robson and Tara Sullivan, the study seeks to deconstruct the accidental body attached to albinism.

This study is a departure from this traditional representation of albinism in the works of art by trying to use various narrative techniques that give various perspectives to representation of albinism in literary works. In her 2009 TED Talk, "The Danger of a Single Story," Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie explains that when one group is defined by one story, they are reduced to one-dimensional caricatures; they are objectified. The danger in a single story is that whoever is conveying the story are the ones in power, and these power-holders determine the way in which those with the single-story are perceived. They purposefully and skilfully nuance both the oppressor and the oppressed in these texts. This can be extrapolated to albino narratives in fiction. Lipenga and Ngwira contend that "the novel accords agency to the albino figure by making him/her the narrator and/or protagonist of the story" (1474). This makes the reader to understand the story from the albino's figure perspective. By deconstructing the accidental bodies ascribed to albinism this study establishes discourses that determine how the body has been culturally constituted.

Literary disability theorists have persuasively shown how disability is often used within creative productions as a storytelling "crutch," termed "narrative prosthesis" by Mitchell and Snyder (2006), which represents *other* conditions of disempowerment, lack or

deviance. This study aims at providing the “narrative prosthesis” of albinism. Mitchell and Snyder, argues that “it is only through an analysis of the writers representations of disability in contextual cultural and socio-historical terms that this enabling relationship becomes apparent, allowing our critical understanding of our texts to move beyond narrative prosthesis to disability counter-narrative” (206). This is what Petina Gappah, Jenny Robson and Tara Sullivan are doing, by using the body of characters with albinism to weave a disability counter-narrative.

1.4 Narrative Prosthesis: Narrative Technique

Albino narratives in fiction actively and critically involve us in dialogue in which many questions are posed but for which not all answers are directly supplied. Mitchell and Snyder use the notion of “narrative prosthesis” to signify a narrative technique that attempts to compensate for a lack in the text, or that serves as “a crutch which literary narratives lean for their representation power, disruptive potentiality and analytical insights” (49). This thesis will use “narrative prosthesis” as a conceptual framework in analysing representation of albinism in disability theory. People narrativise particular experiences in their lives, often where there has been a breach between the ideal and the real, self and society (Reissman 3). These breaches encompass the day-to-day experiences of those who inhabit socially marginalised spaces (Reissman 3). A good example is Memory in Gappah’s *The Book of Memory* who gives us “the breach between the ideal and real self” for new windows as “identity foreclosure” (Van den Hoonaard, 547) through her prison writings.

The concept of narrative prosthesis is apt for exploring portrayal of the people with albinism as a section of society that is attacked and shunned because of their appearance.

Elizabeth Grosz, in an essay “Intolerable Ambiguity: Freaks as/at the Limit”, describes how the idea of the freak appeals directly to “our most fundamental categories of self-definition and boundaries diving self from otherness” (12). Similarly, Foucault talks about the idea of otherness, highlighting how it operates as a binary logic, dividing society into two groups. They are stigmatized not only because they have pale skin and low vision; but also because of mystification of the totality of their albinistic appearance.

Due to the society’s tendency to other the person with albinism, Lennard Davis concept of “normalcy” and Michel Foucault’s concept of “abnormal” become useful in the study. Davis’s concept presents a theorization of the cultural construction and maintenance of the boundary between the hearing and the deaf, disabled and abled, normal and abnormal (3). In this construction the study focuses on disabled and abled, normal and abnormal as in relation to the people with albinism against those without albinism the abled and normal. Davis demonstrates that a normal body is a theoretical premise from which all bodies must by definition fall short (Davis, 7). We can see how this point manifests with the example of Emmanuel from *Because Pula Means Rain* who wonders;

What must it feel like to look down at your body and see skin dark and brown like the skin of all those around you? Warm, rich brown, not pink and freckled and strange (23).

The above quote refers to the way Emmanuel views his body as abnormal and strange from the rest. The tactile and visual image in this quote has different associations for Emmanuel and the reader. Above all there is an element of normative desire which I will

discuss later in chapter two. The normative desire comes in due to a feeling of abnormality in the characters with albinism.

Michel Foucault's concept of the "abnormal" is also very crucial to this study. Foucault sets the stage for his inquiry into the emergence of the abnormal individual in society. Michel Foucault (1977) demonstrates that normalization is a means through which people measure their own and others conformity to social expectations of appropriate behavior and acceptable embodiments. According to Foucault a norm is an average standard created by the human sciences against which people are measured: the sane man, the law-abiding citizen, and the obedient child are all "normal" people (Foucault 13). But an idea of the "normal" also implies the existence of the abnormal: the madman, the criminal and the deviant (Foucault, 16), and recently the albinos are the reverse side of this coin. An idea of deviance is possible only where norms exist. For Foucault, norms are concepts that are constantly used to evaluate and control us: they also exclude those who cannot conform to "normal" categories as is the case with this study. As such it is necessary to understand the concept of "albinism" in literary representation.

1.5 Defining Albinism: African Perspective

According to *Webster's New World Medical Dictionary* (2003), albinism is an inherited condition at birth, characterized by a lack of pigment (melanin) that normally gives colour to skin, hair and eyes. Albinism occurs in all racial and ethnic groups throughout the world. Charlotte Baker, in "Writing over the Illness: The Symbolic Representation of Albinism" argues that "albinism manifests itself in the whiteness of albino skin, making it

a condition that is loaded with symbolism and meaning in terms of racial difference” (115). Habo in *Golden Boy* adds, “Someone with the wrong colours. My skin is white, and my hair is yellow, and my eyes are pale bluish colour” (231). In African setting albinism is not only about the skin colour but symbolism and meaning attached to it in reference to accidental body.

“Albinism,” as deployed here, is a politically, historically and culturally constructed category; a contested idea, whose ultimate destination remains unsettled. Baker argues that in “Africa representation of the albino body has been overlooked. To be born an albino in Africa, is a curse” (115). This statement echoes Habo’s sentiments as he says, “I don’t know why they think being an albino is lucky! It’s awful! Normal people point at you when you arrive. They whisper when you leave. Everyone treats you differently, and you get hunted like an animal! That’s not good luck! That’s a curse! A curse! (232)”. This is an indication of the stigmatisation of persons with albinism as represented by the many denigrating labels that circulate widely in Africa.

In Africa many people are affected by albinism, but people with albinism in Africa stand out in stark contrast to those around them due to being among black people (Ntinda 15). Their distinctive appearance has a powerful impact on their lives from birth to death (Lund 2001). In African communities where traditional explanations concentrate on fortune of illness or deviance rather than on biomedical explanations, deviant appearances impact on socialisation (Lund and Gaigher 2002). Due to African cultures which embrace supernatural based explanations rather scientific explanations, the presence of people with albinism is regarded and treated differently from other parts of the world and thus people

with albinism in African countries are at high risks (Lund and Gaigher 2002). African albinos endure segregation and discrimination throughout their lives, and in some cases they are killed after birth to avoid discrimination (Masakhwe 2009). In *Golden Boy*, Habo retorts that "...I feel the tearing pain of not fitting into my own village, my own family since the day I was born" (232). In *The Book of Memory*, Memory's family was asked to leave their new village as soon as the headman heard about her condition (253). All this relate to the concept identity, belonging and acceptance that Gappah, Sullivan and Robson are examining in their works in relation to albinism.

Stigmatisation and "othering" of people with albinism is particularly salient in African communities because of the experience and contradiction of being a black person in a white skin which the study term as "accidental bodies". Phatoli et al, argue that "people with albinism face teasing, staring and ignorant questions about their condition" (2). The continued existence of discriminatory beliefs and practices in relation to albinism can be partly explained in terms of the concepts of "othering" and "stigma". Erving Goffman describes stigma as "an attribute that is deeply discrediting, and is socially constructed on the basis of what society regards as being different or deviant" (13). In the same line of thought, Hawkesworth (2001) indicates that the faces of people with albinism are visually affected by their condition. Nothing is more visible than the face and to be defined by society as facially disfigured, indicates an aesthetic aversion towards who have a different appearance or deviate from specific conceptions of the so—called "normal" body.

1.5.1 Albinism in Disability Studies

According to Mitchell and Snyder, when disability is used as a negative metaphor, the assumptions are that a disabled body is a problem that needs to be fixed (10). To be

crippled, literally or metaphorically, is a problem that must be solved. Mitchell and Snyder's work provides a framework for questioning and discussing disability metaphors and the use of disability as a prosthetic tool in multiple forms of discourse, including speech, writing and performance.

Disability is a social enigma. Ronald J. Berger in *Introducing Disability Studies* explains that "throughout history people have felt compelled both to stare at the disabled people in their midst and then turn their heads in discomfort" (1). Albinism per se is not a disability. It is an inherited condition where a person is unable to produce normal colouring of the skin, hair and eyes (lack of pigment). People with albinism have common features such as a very light and pale skin, white or sand-coloured hair and very light brown or blue eyes. The absence of pigmentation makes a person with albinism very sensitive to the sun. There is a growing recognition and acceptance in Africa that people with albinism should be considered disabled (Franklin, et al 1). Disability is ascribed to the evidence of physical or embodied expression, and it is interpreted within a dichotomous framework of bodily differences; healthy, complete and normal versus diseased, deficient and deviating (Waldschmidt et al 25). The experiences of disabled people are so far related to those with albinism. Franklin, et al contend that "disability is the umbrella term for impairments, activity limitations and participation restrictions, referring to the negative aspects of the interaction between an individual (with a health condition) and that individual's contextual factors (environmental and personal factors)" (2). Lipenga and Ngwira contend that "albinism is what some classify as a visible disability because it resides in the fact that the character with albinism is treated differently based on the appearance of his/her skin" (1477). This study resonates with Lipenga and Ngwira since

the social attitudes toward albinism are often similar to those experienced by other disability and minority groups. In *The Book of Memory*, *Golden Boy* and *Because Pula Means Rain*, these attitudes include a lack of understanding, fear of unknown, and the prejudice based on appearance.

Rosemarie Garland-Thomson posits that “disability is a cultural trope and historical community that raises questions about the materiality of the body and the social formulations that are used to interpret bodily and cognitive differences” (2). This is in line with albinism because much attention is paid to the physical appearance of the body. In this study, I explore how disability studies can be theorised within African ways of being and thinking, drawing on a socio-cultural and postcolonial paradigm.

Anita Ghai critiques the western universalising discourse by arguing that it “ignores the harsh realities of disabled people’s lives in countries, which are caught in social and economic marginalisation” (96). Due to social and economic marginalisation, in Malawi, Tanzania and other developing African countries there is a strong belief that body parts of people with albinism can make a very good luck charm. This is well elaborated in Tara Sullivan’s *Golden Boy*. Anita Ghai contends that “disabled bodies risk becoming disembodied because of construction around them that threaten to create a total invisibility of the disabled individual” (*Forms* 147). In addition, Dan Goodley argues that “the body is the place where self and society interact” (56). In this study, Petina Gappah, Tara Sullivan and Jenny Robson portray the lived experience of characters with albinism; their bodies and interaction with their environment.

Sullivan's *Golden Boy*, set in Tanzania, centres on the life of Habo, the protagonist. Habo is an albino boy, thirteen years old who is on the run from a man who is hunting him down for his limbs for "muti". He runs to Dare Salaam where albinos are treated as humans and not killed for rituals as in Mwanza. As he moves from one place to another Habo reflects on why he is different from the rest of his family member.

As for Robson's *Because Pula Means Rain*, is a story about Emmanuel who lives with his grandmother in Kedia Heights, Botswana. Emmanuel is also an albino boy who finds it difficult to adapt to this condition, and constantly looks for means in which he can be a normal child like the rest of his friends. Emmanuel is ostracised by his community because of whiteness. He is neither black nor white, and thus, from his colonised position of isolation, he interrogates different ways of dealing with his double negation. As the plot of the story further develops, Emmanuel realises that neither the old traditional ways of his people, nor the ways of his devoutly Christian grandmother are going to heal his otherness (he wants a miracle). It is from this point onwards that Emmanuel starts to create a synthesis of the two belief systems to create his own unique "third space".

For Gappah's *The Book of Memory*, we encounter Memory, the protagonist, an albino woman writing from Zimbabwe's Chikurubi prison, her personal life narrative. She is in prison because she is suspected to have killed Lloyd, her foster parent. While in prison, Memory re-writes her story, explaining her growth in Mharapara Street until she was sold to Lloyd by her parents because they could not cope up raising an albino child. Unlike Habo and Emmanuel, Memory enjoys good raising, freedom of movement and good education under the tutelage of Lloyd. I agree with Melissa Metz that Petina Gappah, is

struggling with a female adolescent “coming into her own”—the conditions that society expects from her in terms of femininity and identity as a whole is “not in accord with her deepest nature” (2). Though set in different African countries the three novels share same experience and are centred on the albino characters.

Characters with albinism symbolically have been portrayed as prisoners in their own skin which create accidental bodies. Michel Foucault argues that “prisoner represents a danger to the body of society and must be excluded, studied, observed and treated if and before they are readmitted to society as normalised citizens” (210). And this is what we see in *The Book of Memory*, as Memory is in prison when we begin her narrative. This shows that there is a limited understanding of the experiences and perspectives of people with albinism in an African context and a lack of attention to the particular needs of this group. Ngwira and Lipenga articulate that “the last decade has seen increased attention to the treatment of people with albinism in several African countries, particularly the peril they find themselves in due to stigma and superstition” (1472). Killing of people with albinism are common in Tanzania, Malawi and Mozambique, where body parts are used in witchcraft rituals because of superstition that they can bring riches, success, power or sexual conquest. Children and women with albinism are the most vulnerable group. The study argues that albinism in African society, is a condition that makes the affected person a valuable commodity in parts of eastern and southern Africa. In *Golden Boy*, there is an account of how people with albinism are hunted and killed for their body parts, like elephants and rhinos. The protagonist, Habo for instance is being hunted by a man known as Alasiri for his body parts like a wild animal. This study has delved in

deconstructing this perception that the African society has as it regards of people with albinism.

In the three novels, the authors make use of multiple points of view, interior monologues, first person narration, and most technical devices associated with modernist stream—of—consciousness style such as memory flashbacks, italicised words, and peculiar punctuation. These devices function as a way of revealing inner thoughts and feelings of the characters and to disclose their memories of the past. As Memory in *The Book of Memory* says; “...I reflect on my life, to rework the events that brought me here, to rearrange and reimagine them in an endless cycle of what-ifs” (13). This was her voicing of her desire to communicate and write her thoughts down.

The novels in the study take a bildungsroman form. A bildungsroman is a type of novel that chronicles a character’s moral and psychological growth. The narrative and thematic concerns of their stories revolve around the development of the narrators as an individual. These novels begins with protagonists who feel alienated and alone, but ends on a positive note with the protagonists finding a sense of belonging or self-realization. Petina Gappah, Tara Sullivan and Jenny Robson in their character and characterisation use the freak image on albinism to create a deep awareness about the need for diversity. Memory, Habo and Emmanuel face the harsh reality of being called “misfits”, “freaks”, “alien” and “outcasts” and are too often ostracised; denied their basic rights. Sometimes they are ridiculed and denied social identity.

Structurally, this study contextualises concepts that serve to ground the proceeding discussions, historically, politically, socially and textually. Chapter one provides an overview of the deconstruction and linking into the accidental body in albinism as a site that needs deconstructing. In this chapter I explore disability theory and its connection to albinism and also the texts under the study. The veneration and condemnation of albinism and albino body image in African society as abnormal bodies, provides a central element within the analysis of subjectivities and their constructions that runs throughout this study. By analysing these accidental bodies with reference to Foucauldian concept of “abnormal” and concept of “narrative prosthesis”, I contend that these paradigmatic models serve to literary deconstruct accidental bodies in albino narratives. In chapter two I develop a contextual focus by looking at representation and narrativisation of albino characters in fiction. Here, I present narrative constructions of narrative prosthesis, and frame the texts as a space in which minority voices, language and presence can be critically analysed. The main discursive body of the study is comprised of two chapters; three and four that explore an array of separate yet interlinked concepts present throughout the narratives. Chapter three explores cultural hegemony as antagonism to albino body image. This is framed by the notion of albinism as a social construction in which it is present in normative body discourse. Drawing on the contexts depicted in the novels, the chapter seeks to explain how and to what extent culture influences negative constructions in the society. It questions the individual subject per se in issues of normative desire, identity and belonging, gender and sexuality, space and displacement as constituent elements throughout the narratives. Chapter four develops the discussion of myths and stereotypes and negative body imagery in relation to the three characters in the novels at hand. The study concludes with a final chapter in which I bring together the

various issues of accidental body image, corporeality, and subjectivities through the notion of albino narratives. The conclusion allows me to consider how dominant social paradigms produce accidental bodies in albinism. The texts draw on the dominant discourse to deconstruct and interrogate the social and literary narratives of the accidental bodies. In so doing, the study constructs new dialogues and discussions of accidental bodies in albinism that counters the historical narrative to which this topic has been condemned.

CHAPTER TWO

2.1 Breaking Through The Barriers: Representation And Enabling Narrators

If the word “text” is understood in the broadest sense—as any coherent complex of signs—then even the study of art...deals with texts. Thoughts about thoughts, experiences of experiences, words about words, texts and texts (Mikhail Bakhtin, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, 1986).

People know and comprehend the complex world in which we live through the act of naming it; thus through language and representation. The term representation embodies a range of meanings and interpretations. In this study the emphasis on representation of accidental bodies in albinism derives from narrative prosthesis. In this kind of narratological analysis, the main focus concerns the question of how the text is imbued with disability discourse that colludes with the oppression of the disabled in narrative (Padley 168). In all the three novels the focus is very much on the albino body, on its importance and adequacy, and a key site for identity construction. This chapter posits that albinism is a representation, a cultural interpretation of physical transformation or configuration, and a comparison of bodies that structures social relations and institutions. A common analogy is drawn in *The Book of Memory*, *Because Pula Means Rain* and *Golden Boy* between the transparency of skin and the associated sensitivity. Whereas dark skin is often interpreted as impenetrable and concealing, light skin is portrayed as revealing and open to interpretation (Baker 3). Hence, just as the albino skin is open to damage from the sun, it becomes vulnerable to the gaze of others and therefore the albino

individual is rendered open to their judgement and to the imposition of identity from without.

Rosemarie Garland-Thomson argues that “people who are visually different have always provoked the imagination of their fellow human beings” (1). This has led Charlotte Baker to contend that “the striking appearance of the black albino has for centuries been a source of fascination, and even today, a plethora of misconceptions about albinism exists (1). Garland-Thomson postulates that “by its very presence, the exceptional body seems to compel explanation, inspire representation and incite regulation” (1). This thesis seeks to explore the gaze that people with albinism encounter when in public space.

In *Golden Boy*, Habo attests to this fact of being viewed different by the people around him as he says;

Then a woman with bright hair and sky eyes sees me, and her mouth goes round. She says a startled sentence to the man beside her, and he turns to stare, too. That’s when I know for a fact that I’m the freak I’ve always been called. Even to the strangers, I am strange (10).

Being stared at makes Habo to feel highly uncomfortable and look away. If someone is staring us down and we grow uncomfortable, we may infer we are of a lower status. Staring is a vivid form of human communication. It starkly registers intense interest and endows it with meaning. That ranges in form of—from domination, adoration, curiosity, surprise, allegiance, disgust, wonder, hostility to reverence (Garland-Thomson 59). As such, staring is an embodied and relational visual exchange that carries complex cultural and historical meanings.

Staring has also been depicted in *Because Pula Means Rain*; Emmanuel talks about how people look at him as a stranger: The girl looked at Emmanuel and said to his mother; “Mama, look! It’s a pink man! Why is he pink, Mama? He looks funny. Is he a ghost?” (21). This draws curiosity from onlookers which makes Emmanuel to feel uncomfortable at being pointed at which further showed his abnormality and difference.

Mitchell and Snyder in *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and Dependencies of Discourses* argue that, “while other marginalized identities have suffered cultural exclusion due to a dearth of images reflecting their experience, the marginality of disabled (as we see with our characters) has occurred in the midst of the perpetual circulation of images of disability in print and visual media” (13). Their argument functions as a type of prosthetic response to the structure of disability which is something that needs fixing, some flaw in the natural order, often thematised through disabled characters. And this is what we see in characters with albinism. Petina Gappah, Tara Sullivan and Jenny Robson present their material in a sound and practiced approach to the business of reading-as-analysis.

In *The Book of Memory* by Petina Gappah, Memory tells us the reader that:

The story that you have asked me to tell does not begin with the pitiful ugliness of Lloyd’s death. It begins a long-ago when the sun seared my blistered face and I was nine years old and my father and mother sold me to a stranger (3).

Memory tells this story from Chikurubi Prison where she has been condemned to death for murdering Lloyd her foster father who took her in when she was nine years old. She narrates that her story does not begin with the death of Lloyd but can be retraced sometime back when she was sold out to a stranger as her parents could not keep her as

an albino child. Petina Gappah's *The Book of Memory* is Petina Gappah's deliberate effort not only to tell her story, but also to contribute to the creation of 'corrective' images of albinism (Lipenga 30). Memory is in prison not because she is an albino but because she is being accused of murder. She takes advantage of her incarceration to give us a story that explores the representation of albinism and to bring about a new understanding of the potential of this figure in literary texts. As disability studies scholar Lenard Davis explains in his work on normalcy, in conservative disability narratives "when one speaks of disability, one always associates it with a story, places it in a narrative" (3). Embedded in the lives of the ordinary, the marginalised, and the muted, personal narratives responds to the disintegration of master narratives as people make sense of experience, claim identities and "get a life" by telling and writing their stories (Langellier 699). Using Lipenga's words, we can say that "the book is both a personal project and an act of disability activism" (30).

Joanne Neille argues that "narrative inquiry is based on the premise that individuals organise and tell stories as a way of making sense of their lived experiences" (74). In this way, experiences are assigned meaning, and the construction of spatial and temporal boundaries, fragmented memories are reconstructed in order to form a coherent whole. A large body of literature exists on the value of narrative inquiry as a means for exploring lived experiences. Providing individuals with opportunities to tell stories of lived experience, implies an acknowledgement of the reality of experience and in so doing, the individual is provided with a sense of voice and agency (Neille 87). Similarly, David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder assert "disability in literature generally requires a narrative

explanation of its origin or narrative of its eradication, whether through cure or social exclusion” (10).

The idea of narrative in literature/albinism points to cross cultural and interdisciplinary issues. “We are able to read presents moments in literature and, by extension, in life as endowed with narrative meaning” (Brooks, 94). Narratives both oral and written are an aesthetic entry way into African experiences “as they are” (Brooks, 94). Narratives about albinism, such as the one discussed from here, are like private diaries open to public scrutiny, inviting us to enter into conversation with them and to react towards them. For instance, without being asked by her lawyer to re-narrate her story to Melinda Carter, a journalist from Washington DC, United States, we wouldn’t have known the story of Memory, an albino protagonist in Petina Gappah’s *The Book of Memory*.

As Jonathan Culler has suggested, a fundamental premise of narratology is the narrative has a double structure: the level of the told (story) and the level of telling (discourse) (1981). The definitions of representation are rather similar to those of a sign or semiotic, embodying both that which signifies and the relationship between signifier and signified (12). Petina Gappah’s *The Book of Memory* is a narrative of albino plight in Zimbabwe and other parts of Africa that focus on individual self. Memory’s retelling of it helps us to see the true self of the albino character in fiction. At the same time, it permits us to theorise albinism as a critical study area in literature. The point of departure of an albino seeing of her world is different in many ways from our own. As such, we may add that, “to tell a story is to claim a certain authority, which listeners grant” (Culler, 89).

By looking at albinism from a perspective of disability theory, one can try to explain and understand the plight of albino characters in narrative fiction. From this perspective an argument can clearly be made that it might be useful to compare and contrast views on “albinism” with ideas and perceptions of disability theory, in order to glean new insights and novels perspectives. Thomas Couser argues that, “disability, as a trope, serves to conflate narrative and character even when it does not generate narrative, it may imply a backstory” (603).

All the three novels are written as first person narratives. These writers have selected first person narratives to give a reliable picture of their experience or the situation as whole, as well as to bring immediate emotional appeal for the readers. More important about these novels first person narrative is to show how the story’s events altered the protagonist’s life or helped he/she overcome a significant internal and external conflict. From the onset of both novels we discover the paradox of our protagonists. At the start of *Because Pula Means Rain*, Emmanuel starts his narrative on a positive note by telling us that he likes the August wind.

The same positive statements are uttered by Habo as he says “...but now that the sun is setting I can enjoy the feeling of the wind whispering over me (1)”. It is only *The Book of Memory* that opens with a negative statement saying that “the story that you have asked me to tell you does not begin with the pitiful ugliness of Lloyd’s death” (3). If we look at the opening of all the novels we can suggest that there is a problem to our characters which open up a can of “narrative prosthesis” to their ableism problem.

Tara Sullivan's *Golden Boy* gives us such an account as Habo constantly looks at his albinism.

Why do I look like this when my parents and my brothers and sister are a deep, warm brown? I don't know what to think. But whatever it was that my father thought, he thought it hard enough that he left and has never come back. Was he a superstitious man? Did he believe, like the old women in our village, that I'm an evil spirit? Or was he a practical man? Did he believe a white man was my real father, not him? I've wondered that, too, though it's a dishonorable thought. I wonder it every time I hear people mention Americans or Europeans, the tourists that come to Arusha to go on *safaris*. (36).

Habo presents to us his problem which he charts throughout the novel that he was born different from the rest of his family members. He starts by questioning his identity and then draws an analogy between his body and the bodies of his family members. It is the non-pigmented skin that marks him apart and therefore albino skin is most often seized upon for its symbolic value in fictional representation. The skin that would generally be considered a boundary is broken down and becomes inefficient as a membrane of separation, as a divide between the individual and the world (Baker 3).

He finds himself in a liminal space because he can neither identify himself with the whites nor with the Africans. And most intriguing to the narrative is that his family is displaced because of him; soon after his birth his father abandons them and everything they owned is taken away from them as he says:

This leaving is not like leaving for the river or school. This leaving is the kind of leaving you do at gravesite. It's a leaving that is also giving up.

Our home is no longer our home. Our farm is no longer our farm. I make the mistake of looking back one more time (12).

The implication is that albinism is a stain on the reputation of the family, a sign of failure or weakness. Habo's father abandonment is a reaction to fear. Fear of what the society will say about his family and him. His leaving left the family vulnerable and eventually led to loss of home.

Clare Bradford narrates that "home and the loss of home constitute a recurring motif in colonial and postcolonial literatures, encompassing psychic and physical experience, as well as a being an integral point where cultures meet and identities formed" (104). What Habo narrates is the loss of their home which formed their identity and culture. *Golden Boy* is a text that seizes upon the symbolism of home and homelessness to construct a de-historicised, un-complicated and un-dynamic narrative of the subaltern. Flannery O'Connor argues that "displacement is what enables the writer, character or reader to negotiate the passage from the physical to spiritual, from visible to visionary, or to put it in terms more germane to a textual analysis, from literal to the literary" (41). The displacement of Memory from Mufakose Township to Summer Madness and finally to Chikurubi prison is what enables her to negotiate the passage through an act of collective memory. Habo, the central character of *Golden Boy*, also suffers multiple dispossessions in his narrative.

The characters with albinism in the three novels look at their displacement or dislocation with an entirely new and different point of view. However, they both deal with

displacement as an opportunity to get freedom from the barriers of their past life, and start a new life in a new context with determination and motivation. In *Because Pula Means Rain*, Emmanuel pick out displacement as an opportunity to live a better life by getting rid of the old values and traditions which was the main cause of his misery and despondency. Sometimes Emmanuel dreamed about going to Gaborone where his albinism won't be noticed because it's full of thousands and thousands of people to take notice of him (BPMR 3). When Sindiso asked him to accompany him it was dream come true for him. Memory, in *The Book of Memory*, gaze at displacement as an attempt to reject her past. She sees displacement as an escape from the haunting memories of her previous life and relations. These characters are doing so in trying to be normal as other people in society.

The notion of normality in these novels revokes Michel Foucault concept of 'abnormal'. The concept of 'abnormal' stems from the noun norm. Norms are an average standard created by human sciences against which people are measured: the same man, the law-abiding citizen and the obedient child are all 'normal' people (Foucault 112). But an idea of the normal implies the existence of the abnormal. For Foucault, norms are concepts that are constantly used to evaluate and control us; they exclude those who cannot conform to normal categories (163). Albino body is cast as deviant and inferior; excluded from full participation in public as well as economic life; defined in opposition to a norm that is assumed to possess natural physical superiority. The novels examined in this study depict the albino body as vulnerable, inadequate or failing; an insistent negativity that signals a failure to affirm albinism for its own sake as a legitimate identity. Identity

markings in albinism have been cemented by the use of demeaning and derogatory language.

Language is an incredibly powerful tool, and can be used to create a sense of empowerment, pride, identity and purpose. The language that people use reflects what they think and can influence how they deal with situations. Language is very crucial in this study because it carries meanings and connotations that revolve around albinism.

2.2 Language, Autonomy and Voice

Language is one of the aspects that has been looked upon in disability studies, because “language becomes the medium through which a hierarchical structure of power is perpetuated” due to superior oppression (Ashcroft, 7). According to Baker there is a challenge in the language used to describe albinism and people with the condition (3). Occasionally, the dominant language is that of those who are able-bodied, which leads to a sort of silence of the abnormal or disabled other, since “the word leads to knowledge, which provokes questioning, which generates change” (85). This is something the normative do not want, and the disabled voices are, hence, not represented. The albino body is also used as a medium through which something else is portrayed: their voices and agency.

Doyal and Gough (1991) have identified autonomy as “one of the basic human needs of all persons”. They define autonomy as “the ability of a person to understand herself, her culture and the expectations of herself as an individual within that culture; the

psychological capacity to formulate options for herself; and the objective opportunities enabling her to act on those options” (53). Voice is central to Gappah’s conception of female autonomy and emancipation. Kizito Muchemwa isolates three meanings of voice, namely; “speech’, ‘the power to articulate’ and ‘authority to speak oneself, others and the world” (4). In *The Book of Memory*, speech is associated with possession of language that allows characters to engage in significant speech acts. In this novel, characters are categorised and identified along a continuum of having speech and being speechless. Memory as opposed to Lameck (also an albino character) has a speech in the novel. Possession of a speech, in this instance by Memory, is an indicator of presence and privilege, unlike Lameck, who lacks speech, is in need (want) and also absent (an invisible man in society).

Agency is a concept that is generally understood as a capacity to act or cause change. Agency demonstrates the ability to make decisions that affect the story. The person who—or thing which—acts or causes change is termed an agent (Bronwyn, 65). A character’s agency pushes, creates and changes the plot. The more agency that a character has, the more control they have over their destiny and the more ability they have to alter the course of events. Davies Bronwyn quotes Benson (1990), that agency as “rational control of oneself with the emotional non-rational being defined as not-self” (57). In the three novels, there is an element of agency on the protagonist to act against those who stigmatize and cause them pain and suffering. The study (re)conceptualizes the notions of ‘power’ and ‘agency’ within the context of albinism by interrogating the extent to which Sullivan, Gappah and Robson depicts albino characters, action and voice as acts of agency.

The Book of Memory can be described as a “psychological exploration of feminine abjection” (Nwakanma 39). Unlike the other albino characters (such as Lameck) that are pathetic, disoriented, objectified; Memory is a woman who refuses to be defined by her sexuality and albinism. She has ambitious desire to secure an alternative destiny than simply being ridiculed or feeling sorry for her albinism. Memory’s struggle is to achieve individual agency.

Lloyd fosters Memory to generate a positive image about herself and how she wants others to treat her. He argues:

It is your choice, Mnemosyne. You can spend your life feeling sorry for yourself, or you can simply choose not to. You can invite people’s pity or you can refuse to be an object (56).

Memory uses her body as an element of agency (material agency). She recounts that in grade two, a boy slapped her in the face and because of the absence of colour in her skin, and his hand had left an outline on her face (56). From this incident had come the children’s fear and the saying that “*ukamurova anotsuka ropa*”—if you hit her, they said her blood rises to the surface. So no one touched her.

When she is in prison too, Memory uses her condition to her advantage. Her skin and crime caused other prisoners to shrink into themselves as they walked past her (28). Her long unbroken stares made others uncomfortable. And when she touched a chameleon, a creature associated with witchcraft and black magic, the news spread throughout the prison and made her safe from all the bullying, at least from other prisoners (29). The

emphasis is placed on material agency whereby Memory uses her body and other bodies (chameleon) as a way of showing agonistic relationship between the self and the other and between self and society.

Habo, in *Golden Boy* uses his agency to fight back Alasiri, who wants to kill him when they arrive in Mwanza. Habo sprang into action:

Anger bubbles up in me like boiling water...I'm not a game animal. I'm not a thing. Black spots dance in front of my eyes, and without thinking. I shove myself out of the corn cave, stand up, and hurl one of the sacks at his head...the sack I threw hits him in the chest and he slashes at it with the knife, reflexively. "Fine! I'm out, you stupid monster!" I have no idea what I'm saying. My anger is a haze at the edges of my vision, and I shout with all breath in my lungs. "What are you are going to do now? Kill me? Are you going to kill me? Well, I won't let you!" (*Golden Boy* 96).

Sullivan weaves a story that are articulated through a teenage boy voice and centers on the experiences of Habo, as an albino character who is in constant flight because a man (Alasiri) wants to kill him for rituals. Although the texts engage with the experiences of Habo, as an albino boy and the subsequent narrative of the plight of people with albinism in Tanzania, Sullivan gives prominence to the experiences of women and how their perceptions are affected by these historical developments. It is upon this background of stigma and subjugation associated with albinism and disability that the albino characters attempt to create space for their survival; a space that they could use freely to make decisions about their lives. Thus, Sullivan seems to suggest the possibility of albinos using their positions, as marginal as they may seem, to construct their 'selves' as subjects of their own narratives.

Just like Memory, Habo too because of his condition attracts the white tourists to Kweli's shop. The shop has made three sales and that makes Habo very happy as he laments: "...I feel pretty good about myself. If those people hadn't been curious to see me, the shop wouldn't have made any money today... instead of driving people away, my strange looks pulled people into Kweli's shop. It's a way that I, and only I can give back to him for all the kindness he's shown me" (248). Voice is central to Gappah's and Sullivan's conception of autonomy and emancipation of albino figures in fiction.

People who are different from the norm in any way frequently have these differences exaggerated by the way in which the language is used to describe them. In children, this sometimes leads to name-calling, focusing on the differences. Memory recalls: "there was a brutal honesty how the children regarded anyone different" (12). There are also ways in which well-meaning people unintentionally use language that leads to inappropriate stereotyping, classifying or labelling of people with disability (Foreman 17). Language influences the way we think and act, hence the debate on the usage of terms such as integration, mainstreaming and inclusion.

Simi Linton argues that disability studies amplify and magnify the human voices and the daily realities of the disabled (2). Language is one of the aspects that has been looked upon in disability studies, because "language becomes the medium through which a hierarchical structure of power is perpetuated" due to superior oppression (Ashcroft, 7). According to Baker there is a challenge in the language used to describe albinism and people with the condition (3). Linton posits that dominant culture puts forth a view of disability as a deficit (162). He argues that through language we can reassign meaning to

the bodies that have been deemed inferior. This is something the normative do not want, and the disabled voices are, hence, not represented. The albino body is also used as a medium through which something else is portrayed: their voices and agency.

In *Golden Boy* Sullivan blends Standard English and *Swahili* in his narrative. The same applies to Jenny Robson's *Because Pula Means Rain*, in which there is Standard English and a mixture of *Setswana*. *The Book of Memory* makes use of Standard English, Pidgin English and *Shona*. Gappah, Sullivan and Robson mixes the narrators speech with vernacular words, proverbs, metaphors and songs and use code mixing to create a distinct register. Most of the times the authors break grammatical rules to make a disjointed narrative voice which effectively renders the misadventures of characters with albinism.

2.3 Writing Cure: Writing as Therapy in The Book Of Memory

The work of memory in all its forms, from historical essays to personal reminiscences, legal testimonies and imaginative recreations, posits a past reality that is recalled outside the person's subjectivity. Petina Gappah in *The Book of Memory* uses a narrator who is equipped with conventional cultural filters of generational distance, age and gender, class and political affiliations, on whose authority the truth of the past can be revealed (*The Book of Memory* 4). Memories are narrated by someone in the present. I contend that in this novel there is an element of what Berdenstein calls an "acts of memory": acts that reveal memory to be a cultural activity in the present of the characters by which they constitute themselves as subjects in the process of identification (353). This is evidence in the way how memory narrates or rewrites her story.

As part of her appeal Memory's lawyer, Vernah Sithole, insists that she write down what happened as she remembers it. Memory here recalls:

It was Vernah's idea that I should tell my story to you...she told me I should write down every detail that I could remember, that I should record everything that could make a sympathetic case. It is important for the appeal...because the death penalty is mandatory in cases of murder, and we have to find extenuating circumstances (10).

The death penalty is a mandatory sentence for murder and Memory is both literary and metaphorically writing for her life. The importance of writing has been present in the psychological practice for many years. Self-narrative activity is a process connected with creating identity, in which a person by constructing a story about himself or herself gains a bigger sense of continuity and consistency of his or her own self (McAdams, et al. 2006). Narrative formation which is present in writing about one's own experiences enables the organising of traumatic experiences. Frederick Nietzsche argues that "all writing is autobiographical regardless of the explicit subject matter and regardless of whether we call it fact or fiction" (15). *The Book of Memory* represents the merging of "fact" and "fiction," "testimony" and "fantasy". It posits an ideology which is both literary and socio-political. Through writing the fractured pieces of her past are starting to enter her consciousness.

The lawyer suggests she should write her account to Melinda Carter, an American journalist, because she has made a career out of exposing miscarriages of justice (11). She believes that through her writings she could make a sympathetic case that will be very

important for the appeal (10). What Vernah is asking Memory is to allow her memory glide back in time, to re-enter all the scenes in her life and account every detail of it. In remembering these details, Memory narrates how it started a long time ago when she was nine years old. Memory wrote about many different scenes and circumstances from her past, focusing on what she could see, hear, smell and touch and the emotions that accompanied her as re-entered those memories. In the end Memory no longer experiences bad dreams. The Chimera (ghost) no longer pulls her down to the water; it speaks no more with her mother's voice.

This writing process is a form of healing for Memory. Memory says; "I am writing to keep myself alive" (87). She could understand now that the dreams were not dreams, but faint imprints of buried trauma fighting memories of her mother (262). At the end of her narrative Memory is relieved, released and unburdened by her past. Claire De Boer argues that "by writing our old story, we find ourselves in the midst of a new story, one in which we have the freedom to be our true selves" (ix). Petina Gappah deliberately privileges writing over possession of speech as a deconstructing tool in Memory. Possession of speech is an indicator of presence and privilege; lack of it is a sign of want and absence. It is the lack of the power of speech and its psychological effect on individuals that is the focus of *The Book of Memory*.

Memory lacks voice or speech in two ways in the novel, the first instance is that she is an albino a condition that renders her a misfit in the society. Secondly, she is in prison, a repressive state institution. The only way her voice could be heard is through writing.

In this study writing cure is not only isolated to *The Book of Memory* but also to *Because Pula Means Rain* and *Golden Boy*. Emmanuel also relates how writing a poem earned him respect and admiration from his fellow students. He retorts that “I wrote a poem about August once...and afterwards Thabang and his friends came up to me, standing quite close” (2). The writing of the poem made Emmanuel to have a voice and to be recognised by others who undermined him. The phonocentrism in Robson and Gappah’s fiction is revealed in the importance the narrator and characters attach to the spoken word. The spoken word is invoked in the written text as a direct expression of the speaker’s intention and presence. Since the characters with albinism in these fiction lacks voice, the writer transposes their word from the medium of speech to that of writing.

Habo, however does not express himself through writing as the rest of the major characters in the study. He resorts to sculpture which Kweli teaches him when he freed to Dar es Salaam from Alasiri the albino hunter. According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, sculpture is “the action or art processing carving, modelling, or welding hard materials into works of art”. In *Golden Boy*, sculpture is representational art, imitating various forms of life. And one of the important sculptures that Kweli asks Habo to make is the face of evil (218). The statue of evil which Habo makes is in line with his condition as an albino in its subject-matter, imagery and symbolism. He carved an elephant that has been poached with no tusks, a man with a hunting knife and his family in the background. This is how Habo view of evil:

Do you want to know what I know of evil? Do you want to see it? Here!
Feel what it’s like to be an albino! (232).

Habo visualises how cruel is the world towards the people with albinism. The statue of evil that he carves gives him a voice to express how evil are the people that surround him. He does this by bursting into tears as he says:

With each sob I fear the tearing pain of not fitting into my own village, my own family, since the day I was born. The feeling of being a stranger in my own skin, because of my skin, wrings my heart like laundry. When I finish crying my laundry heart feels wrinkled and bruised, but clean (232-233).

In that instance, crying is not only a human response to sorrow and frustration; it is also a natural way to reduce emotional stress. Habo stresses on the pain of being an albino and all the stigma and discrimination that comes with it. He invokes a feeling of acceptance and belonging. Individuals, who feel like they belong, gain security. This not the case with Habo, who feels alienated in his own community.

On writing about memories, Petina Gappah includes dreams as a narrative prosthesis for Memory. Memory narrates: “I still feel afraid now, sometimes, but it is mostly in my dreams that fear comes to me and I find myself drowning before I startle myself awake” (8). Gappah uses the dream to reveal several things about Memory; her repressed desires, her wishes and fears for her future and past, and also to set the mood and reveal flashback. This resonates well with *Because Pula Means Rain*, as we see Emmanuel dreaming about Masego and the spiritual world. In *Golden Boy* dream foreshadows what will happen to him as he will be hunted by Alasiri like a wild animal. He narrates that “in my dreams I’m being stalked by a huge lion. I am running down the never ending road,

alone, and I can hear the whisper of its movement through the grass as it stalks me” (31). The lion symbolically represent Alasiri, the hunter who like the lion stalks Habo to kill him and harvest his body parts as he did with the elephant he had poached in Serengeti National Park.

Later, we see this dream into reality as Alasiri starts to hunt for Habo to kill him and sell his body parts to Governor Msembo for good luck charm during the elections. “He is the hunter I told you about, the one that killed an elephant (235). “He is also the one who tried to kill me in Mwanza. He’s the reason I ran away” (235).

The Book of Memory can be considered as a “feministic fiction of subjectivity”, exploring the social, political and psychic features of a woman’s consciousness (Lessing 109). Petina Gappah wanted to encompass “connections between the dynamics of gender relations, the post-colonial struggles, the nature of love, insights, and limitations of psychoanalysis, and the crisis in literary representation” (Liberating Literature 110). The theme of an alienated female artist takes writing as a healing therapy attempts to create order out of literary chaos that most writers concentrated can be generated when analysing *The Book of Memory*. One of Zimbabwe’s celebrated writer, Vyonne Vera (1999), in *Open Spaces: An Anthology of Contemporary African Women’s Writing* has argued that “when women write, they not create their own stories but by the act of writing they gain authority over their own lives” as Memory does in *The Book of Memory*. Gappah’s positive use of albino image in Memory is a metaphor to deconstruct body politics and body authority in the contemporary African society.

The standpoint of this study is that narrative operates in the realm of livelihood related to human phenomena. More important to these narratives is memory that is explored by the major characters in the study. Memory is used to indicate the history of characters with albinism, their suffering, their silence and the existence of a rich tradition ableism orature. By exploring representation of characters with albinism in African novels, the study has highlighted the body, norms and power. Albino writers have struggled to find a voice and as a result of the lack of writing by albinos, there has been a consequent failure to deconstruct the recurrent misrepresentation of the albino in literature (Baker 6). Equally, when knowledge is absent, representation becomes a substitution of the unknown and even critics and writers who on the surface appear to have researched the condition are frequently revealed as being misinformed or as tending to generalize.

Petina Gappah's *The Book of Memory*, Jenny Robson's *Because Pula Means Rain* and Tara Sullivan's *Golden Boy* thrive on the juxtaposition of binaries (such as presence/absence, normal/abnormal, centre/margin, life/death, white/black, speech/writing etc) and the deconstruction and re-ordering of these binaries to foreground ableism strategies of self-definition. Self-definition is an aspect of presence and lends itself to many interpretations. The core associations of the term are: knowledge of the world, the subject meaning, consciousness and their relationships. In classical metaphysics of presence "all names related to fundamentals, to principles, or the centre have always designated the constant of a presence (Culler 92). Presence is meaning, identity and unity of the human subject. Meaning is considered as present to thought, language as transparent and perfect representation of meaning, and consciousness as transparent and self-identical.

CHAPTER THREE

3.1 The Cultural Contexts of Narrative: Ableist Rhetoric and Ideology

Our existence today is marked by a tenebrous sense of survival, living on the borderlines of the present...we find ourselves in the moment of transit where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion (Bhabha 7).

3.2 Dominant Cultural Narratives

Cultural narratives on disability have received much attention over the past few decades. Communal narratives have emerged to explain the presence of disability. Underpinned by cultural belief systems, such explanations affect, not only the ways individuals with disabilities view themselves, but also the responses of others (Shakespeare 4). *The Book of Memory*, *Golden Boy* and *Because Pula Means Rain* reflect these cultural belief systems. The arts, film, fiction and the medium of comics are replete with albino figures that possess supernatural powers and other qualities that serve to emphasise their abnormality. This trend has contributed to the difficulties faced by people with albinism, for it compounds the tendency of others to regard them as freaks of nature, or objects of morbid curiosity (Baker 3). This chapter highlights how albino characters in fiction are defined by extremes, marked apart by physical difference that is reproduced in various forms of social deviance. The chapter has been divided into subheadings that herald

normative desire, denial and social exclusion, and longing and (un)belonging that have sprang out due to the dominant cultural narratives. Constructed as the embodiment of corporeal insufficiency and deviance by dominant cultural narratives, this chapter argues that the albino body becomes a repository for social anxieties about such troubling concerns as vulnerability, control and identity. The study uses various modes of narrative such as stories, sculptures, and diaries and dreams that the characters charts in the course of the narrative.

Emmanuel in *Because Pula Means Rain* narrates how the people of the village passed stories about his birth mainly blaming his mother for infidelity (22). In their village having an albino baby was the worst fate in the world (22). One woman even ostracizes Emmanuel by saying; “So why must they stay here in Botswana taking up our land and our children’s places at school? They do not belong here with us” they are outcasts (18). Apart from that Emmanuel also complains that at the school too he is called “*Leswafe! Leswafe!* As if he is an alien or a refugee and not a Motswana at all”, as he believed he was (18). From these sayings we can argue that albinism is defined by the people of the community (culture). And Emmanuel does not have control of these images levelled against him by his community. He believes he is a Motswana and part of the community but the community does not believe so.

“Culture” comprises a range of ideas and objects, including norms, myths, traditions, material artifacts, and so on (Puddephatt, Kleinknecht and Sanders). Socially circulating systems of meaning that are used by story authors to compose story scenes, characters, plots and morals are of particular in understanding the persuasive possibilities of stories.

Symbolic codes are systems of meaning surrounding cultural ways of thinking. Emotion codes are about cultural ways of feeling. *The Book of Memory*, *Because Pula Means Rain* and *Golden Boy* reflect both symbolic and emotion codes of culture. The symbolic code is reflected in the way the communities perceive the characters with albinism and the kind of narratives that goes with such descriptions. The emotion code is in the characters with albinism as they negotiate their identities in line with their culture. Symbolic codes have much in common with similar ideas such as discursive formations (Foucault 1980). Foucault describes culture as a hierarchical organization of values, accessible to everybody, but at the same times the occasion mechanism of selection and exclusion (173). In African context, communities from different cultural backgrounds have different beliefs and attitudes towards disability. It is the society that selects and excludes people according to cultural norms constructed in society.

In *Golden Boy*, Habo illustrates how people failed to recognise his social identity. Asu tells Habo that “everyone was arguing about what you were. The old men thought you were a ghost of the ancestors. The stupid *mkunga* (witchdoctor), was wailing on about demons” (29). In this extract, Sullivan brings to our attention how different people view albinism in an African society. The old men represent culture; they are the custodian of culture. This is so because old people are noted as the repositories of experience, memories, authority and wisdom. Another figure mentioned is the witchdoctor. The witchdoctors orchestrate the killing of people with albinism. I can argue that the elders and the witchdoctors are representatives of culture. Tom Shakespeare calls for a greater attention to cultural representations of disabled people by arguing that “disabled people are ‘objectified’ by cultural representations” (287). If the two representative of the society

(old men and witchdoctor) could recognise Habo as a being not an object then the whole community could embrace albinism.

3.3 Deconstructing the Dominant Cultural Narratives

Tara Sullivan, Jenny Robson and Petina Gappah have deconstructed the dominant cultural narratives imbued in contemporary African novel. Dominant cultural narratives, defined as “overlearned stories communicated through mass media or other large social and cultural institutions and social networks” (Rappaport 3), are systems of representation that function as subtle mechanism of oppression and social control that shape cultural norms and personal beliefs, while concealing the processes that produce them (Rappaport 3). Dominant cultural narratives operate as legitimising myths that justify the maintenance of unequal intergroup relations.

Dominant cultural narratives exert their influence through processes of psychological internalisation that shape the self-concept and social perceptions of members of both dominant and minority groups. Frantz Fanon, argues that “the dominant cultural narratives reflected in European history books, comic books and literature served to propagate myths about the inherent savagery of blacks and superiority of whites” (1967), and that the internalisations of such myths engendered subordinate identities and inferiority complexes within black children. In line with Fanon’s argument, this study illustrates how dominant cultural narratives contribute to the marginalisation of subordinate groups. *The Book of Memory*, *Because Pula Means Rain* and *Golden Boy* have central characters that are in the margins of the society. These texts challenge

systems of representation that function as subtle mechanisms of oppression and social control that shape cultural norms and personal beliefs.

Albinos like other disabled people, all over the world, are struggling to confront the process that exclude and segregate them and to escape from the institutions that are part of that (Oliver 96). Judith Butler, in *Bodies That Matter*, describes how bodies are being subjected to a normalisation process which never fully reaches the essence of the norm itself (7). In the end of his narrative, Emmanuel in *Because Pula Means Rain* acknowledges that no matter what the people say will not change his essence, the essence of being. He assures himself that “their words could never again hurt me” (132). Due to this belief, the empty circle of loneliness around him seemed to be withering and disappearing. Finally, he understood the meaning of Mrs Turner’s God-grant picture. He understood things he could not change like his skin colour, things that must be accepted because no magic or miracle could ever alter them.

Even though, Sullivan, Gappah and Robson challenge the dominant cultural narrative imbued in albinism, there are a number of challenges that affect characters with albinism which has led to normative desire in these characters. One of the major problems the dominant cultural narrative promotes about people with albinism is vision. In the opening of *Golden Boy*, Habo introduces us to his problems with seeing/vision, “I wish I could see their faces, but my eyes aren’t good enough for that this far” (1). Emanuel in *Because Pula Means Rain* also highlights about the problems of sunburns, as he says he must always wear a hat “it stops my pink neck from blistering and burning in the sun” (28).

This is also echoed by Memory in *The Book of Memory*, as she says “fearing always the heat of the sun” (53).

Skin is generally supposed, at the very least, to protect. However, the skin of the albino is open to assault from the sun and easily becomes damaged or diseased (Baker 3). The skin that would generally be considered a boundary or a seam is broken down and becomes inefficient as a membrane of separation, as a divide between the individual and the world. Notions of the skin as ‘final boundary’ and the sense of the ‘closed person’ are challenged in the albino body, and with this breaking down of boundaries come a characteristic disruption of categories (Baker 3). The failure of albino skin to ‘contain’ or to delimit is emphasised in the novels of Gappah, Robson and Sullivan in descriptions of its transparency, with the skin failing to provide a division between the internal and the external.

These are some of the common problems that people with albinism have in society. As a result of the problems people with albinism encounter there is a strong normative desire in people with albinism.

3.4 Challenging Normalcy: Normative Desire in Albinism

In the three novels, internal growth and development of the characters is entirely affected by their external environment. No amount of escapism through neither the physical nor the mental outlets could cushion them from the reality of being different from the normative. Emmanuel says:

Sometimes I dream that the freckles are slowly growing bigger and bigger, spreading into one another like mud pools. I dream that I will wake up in the morning with my skin warm and brown and whole (52).

Normalisation implies that people with albinism are not normal because of their skin colour. Disability studies scholarship often stresses the centrality of modern western notions of normalcy in structuring historical experiences and representations of disability. Foucault argues that, in recent times practices of division, classification and ordering around a norm have become the primary means by which to individualise people. John Rajchman (1991) explains that the “great complex idea of normality” has become the means through which to identify subjects and to make them identify themselves in order to make to make them governable (Rajchman par.4). I suspect all societies invoke norms to understand bodily difference. But in places like Africa, where health and physicality are located and defined with social relationships, the notion of normal bodies and normal relationships are two sides of the same coin. In Africa, the disabled individual is the embodied nexus of a set of social relations, the character and shape of which are open to debate. In *Golden Boy* Habo recalls this normative desire that he longed for a long time:

Kweli worked me like a regular boy. This is maybe the first day in my entire life that I have worked just as hard as anyone else, and the feeling is almost as warm in my belly as the stew. Today, I was normal (174).

Kweli does not realise that Habo is an albino because he is blind. His lack of vision makes him to treat Habo as any other normal boy. Sullivan use Kweli blindness to challenge the notion of normalcy. The image of blindness postulates that only if we were blind is the only way we could appreciate the people with albinism as normal beings.

The Webster New World Dictionary defines “normal” as one conforming to accepted standards or norms, which correspond to the average of a large group; free from disease or disorder; average in intelligence and development; mentally sound. Lennard Davis has demonstrated that, “a normal body is a theoretical premise from which all bodies must, by definition, fall short” (7).

In *The Book of Memory*, Memory also expresses a normative desire when she says; “I longed to be like all the others. I tried to get as dark as the other children. I longed to belong. I felt a sharp, and burning envy of everyone I saw” (57). She even considers taking some disability of other characters so that she should have some colour in her skin. She narrates; “I would have taken Whizi’s eyes, and Lavinia’s limp... only to have colour in my skin” (58). It is because of her skin colour that she felt a sharp and burning envy of everyone she saw. This is a strong desire to have normal colour like everyone else. This desire leads her to pray to God to darken her skin but prayer (religion) failed her. Lastly she resorts to science by sitting in the sun to darken her skin but instead it makes her skin “red and sore and blistered” (58). All these desires for a normal body do not work for Memory.

Goffman (1963) refers to those who stigmatise others as ‘normal’ but he does not explain what normality is or how it is constructed (42). Lund and Gaigher (2002) when referring to learners without albinism, say “normally pigmented learners,” suggesting that albinism excludes a person from the ‘normal’ (367). Davis (1997) attempted to explain why the notion of normality is important in trying to understand disability. He states that “the problem is not with the person with the disability; the problem is the way the normalcy is

constructed to create the problem for the disabled person” (Davis 9). In the case of Habo, Emmanuel and Memory, it is not their problem but the way how the society views them due to their physical appearance.

According to this norm, valuing normal bodies and devaluing abnormal bodies reflects sensible awareness of the way things naturally work instead of employing questionable ideology. Questions regarding the use of disability rhetoric and its power construct and reinforce an able-bodied ideology within accidental bodies of people with albinism. Cherney contends that focusing on ableism as rhetoric makes rhetorical responses more attractive (14). In such scenario we can extrapolate this analogy to ableism rhetoric in albino figures. The problem is not that deviance is bad; it is that ableism teaches seeing it that way. The problem is not that being abnormal is unnatural, it is that ableism teaches valuing normalcy that way. The problem is not that ability resides in the body, and that a body with different skills is inherently unable to function in society, it is that ableism teaches knowing ability that way.

Central to this idea of describing other people as normal and others as abnormal comes in due to the accidental properties attached to the body. Aristotle argues that “accidents have incomplete definitions, because they cannot be defined unless we put a subject in their definitions, and this is because they do not have absolute existence per se apart from a subject” (Book II *Metaphysicae* 993b24-27). Accidents follow from the order the matter has to a general form, and so with these accidents, if the special form is removed, the accidents still remain in the thing (Book X *Metaphysicae* 1058b21-23), as the whiteness of the skin of a person with albinism comes from the mixture of the elements and not

from the notion of the soul, and hence the whiteness remains in the man after death. Since everything is individuated by matter and is placed in its genus or species through its form, the accidents that follow from the matter are accidents of the individual, and by these accidents individuals of the same species differ one from another.

Ironically, it is this accidental body image that leads to denial and social exclusion for people with albinism. Denial and social exclusion is an important element that derives from dominant cultural narratives. From the texts being analysed we can note that the main characters have gone through denial and social exclusion because of their skin.

3.5 Accidental Body Image: Denial and Social Exclusion in Albinism

Chirwa (2002) defines social exclusion as a process that constitutes of a “multi-dimensional character of deprivation and the processes, mechanisms and institutions that exclude people” (95). An apparent sign of social exclusion is the inability to participate in key societal activities, through no fault of the individual (Alston and Kent 93). Emmanuel recounts in *Because Pula Means Rain* how he was denied and socially excluded when he went to a cattle post with Mashego. He recounts how they felt uncomfortable seeing him in their midst:

This *leswafe* with his ghost-body and his misshapen face! It will be bad for our herd... The milk will come out sour and rotten and green. The calves will die inside their mothers’ bellies (65).

From the above quote, social exclusion is characterized by significant discontinuities or ruptures in social relations. There arises issues of detachment, un-belongingness and marginality from the mainstream cattle post people as Emmanuel comes in their midst.

One of the most common misconceptions about albinism is that it is contagious. Like people with disability, people with albinism are traditionally segregated in Africa. The power of family and community in particular cannot be underestimated in providing the framework of association for people with albinism (Baker et al, 173). The acceptance or otherwise of the person with albinism is highly mediated by his or her family and the surrounding community. Just as Davis contends that “disability is judged to be a state of negative difference, then the normal is the central mode from which it deviated” (3). As Davis argues, “to understand the disabled body, one must return to the concept of the norm, the normal body (23). The majority of the population must or should somehow be part of the norm. With the norm comes the concept of deviations or extremes. When we think of bodies, in a society where the concept of the norm is operative, then people with disabilities will be thought as deviants (29).

In *Because Pula Means Rain*, Emmanuel’s mother lives on the mine with his sister and younger brother and he only sees them once a year at Christmas. His grandmother tells him that his mother cannot look after him because she has two other children she has to look after. Emmanuel knows that his mother did not want him because of the shame of having an albino baby. This is what Foucault expands as repressive hypothesis that was pivotal to the emergence of the “abnormal individual” (49). Emmanuel has mentioned that he feels like an “alien being” in his community, yet he has had conversations with all various groups.

Emmanuel tells some of the stories that are widespread about him behind his back—that albinos do not wash like normal people, but the skin flakes off like a snake’s; and that albinos do not die, but simply go out into the desert and crumble into dust (23-24). This

alludes to the postcolonial identity postulated by Homi K Bhabha. For Bhabha the postcolonial African identity is “fluid, relational and always in flux” (Kalua 23). In postcolonial African context, “we find ourselves in the moment of transit where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity” (Bhabha 2). The identity that comes packaged alongside skin colour is the one that reduces Memory, Habo and Emmanuel to split/fragmented selves.

Furthermore, Emmanuel avoids mirrors. Emmanuel is psychologically affected by mirrors. He says “I hate mirrors. I hate to see my reflection...” (10). He feels that everybody he passes reflects his “ugliness”. So he feels abnormal. Here Emmanuel has a negative body image. Grangon argues that “mirrors have the ability to entice individuals to see themselves externally as objects and imagine how others view them” (3). This evokes Jacques Lacan’s “Mirror Stage” in which he argues that “human pass through a stage in which an external image produces a psychic response that give rise to the mental representation of an I” (63). Lacan looks at the role images and mirror processes play in identification. The effects of poor body image in people with albinism are very profound.

The human society has always placed great worth to the beauty of the human body. The individuals differ in their perceptions of their own body and their perceptions may not fit to the societal standards and expectations. The knowledge of the facts and dynamics of their personal attributes significantly affect their psychological functioning and well-being. The term body image refers to the extent to which individuals perceive the facts pertaining to their body (Grogan 1). People with albinism are affected by body image in their psychological functioning and well-being. Habo laments that “I wish I wasn’t an

albino, with all its problems” (136). The reason why Habo is denying albinism is because of the problems that come with it.

A sense of identity, belonging and being part of a group or community has always existed (Hall 2). People with albinism are in constant search of identity, belonging and inclusion because of the stigma they face due to their difference in skin colour. Albinism is usually associated with stigmatised identity. Stigmatised identity is a category which includes particularly negative representations of a group and its members (Hall 2). In *Golden Boy*, when Habo’s family moves from their village in Arusha to Mwanza, as they walk through the streets, Habo, “stare and stare, but does not see anyone who looks like him” (16). He was out of place and did not belong. Habo is outside the mainstream society.

Emmanuel recalls how much he enjoys the Independence Day celebrations. It is the one day in the year where there is no focus on him and his pink skin (57). He feels part of the community and remembers how one year, Thabang even put his arm around his shoulders and didn’t mock him. He revels in the sense of community and togetherness. He wants to stay on the soccer field as long as possible because “for that one day” (57) he feels part of the village, they are his people and he is part of his country.

Tara Sullivan uses the motif of the ebony wood to deconstruct the accidental body in Habo’s albinism. Ebony is a very dark black wood that is carved for various objects. Underneath it’s skin or bark, it is very white. This revokes Donna Haraway’s question; “why should our bodies end at the skin?” (220), a very important question in the postmodern era, where issues of bodies, boundaries, increasingly challenge not only the

normative performance of the human subject, but also the very understanding of what counts as human. When Kweli gives the wood to Habo he says it “reminds me of you” (267). At first Habo does not understand but after carving this is what he says:

I’m digging into the white wood with the blade, unearthing the general shape of my statue, when my knife slips and pulls out a deep wedge. I look down at the chunk, baffled. The wood is no longer white. ...Once you get past a thin outer ring of whiteness, the wood is a deep, pure black all the way to the core (267).

This represents that albinos are African only the surface of their skin is white. Used as a noun or adjective, ebony derives from Greek word “ebenos”, meaning ebony and was first used in the 17th century to describe a very dark black colour. In African literature, ebony is a symbol of power, purity, balance, protection and luck. Ebony is similar to dark skin which is concealed as compared to the light skin symbolised by whiteness which is revealing and open to interpretation. The perceived transparency of albino skin is carried to the point of absence.

Closely related to denial and social exclusion is displacement. Displacement is a prominent theme in African fiction. Albino characters are often displaced from traditional notions of “home” through their double consciousness and presence in the narrative. Tara Sullivan, Petina Gappah and Jenny Robson use characters who are outside and homeless, for the world to see. They challenge the dominant cultural narratives that portray characters with disability as weak and disillusioned.

3.6 Longing and (Un)-Belonging: Displacement in Albinism

Tara Sullivan's *Golden Boy* (2013), Jenny Robson's *Because Pula Means Rain* (2000) and Petina Gappah's *The Book of Memory* (2015) are narratives of displacement. These novels respond to the subsequent movement of people within the country. All the three writers explore albinism as a site of multiple (un)belongings and interrogate how notions of identity are displaced and disrupted by albinism. Displacement or dislocation as a condition experienced by the characters with albinism is a central concern of this chapter. All the three novels conjure up subjectivities marked by longing, loneliness and loss of home, identity and belonging. They also portray confinement, which is caused by dominant cultural narratives. In *Golden Boy*, Mwanza district is both a site of Tanzania's contemporary cultural regeneration and by unspoken killings and mutilation of people with albinism. In *Because Pula Means Rain* there is an element of fragmentation and alienation of characters not only from society but also from themselves like Emmanuel, Masego, Keshia and Jackson. In *The Book of Memory*, Gappah delves into the difficulties of displacement and prison life.

The representation of Melinda Carter, an American journalist in *The Book of Memory* enforces the notion of "The White Man's Burden" in Africa through the western media. "The White Man's Burden" is a poem of obligation by Rudyard Kipling, rallying the Western world to go to Africa in order to save a supposedly condemned culture (Kipling 12). The western media portrays Africa as a site where basic safeties are being stripped from people. Charles Muchemwa argues that "the representation of Europe as possessing divinely assigned powers to rescue Africa is clearly a problematic narrative" (23). In light of Muchemwa's argument, I argue that unless African governments rewrite their

histories, the western media will continue propagating negative stereotypes of Africa as a nest of poverty and problems.

The presence of Mrs Turner, a British woman who open a book shop in the village in *Because Pula Means Rain* represent European colonisation. Mrs Turner gives Emmanuel a small prayer plaque in an attempt to help him deal with his difference. Emmanuel refers to the prayer plaque as “the God grant prayer” also known as the Serenity Prayer, and it becomes a central motif in the text. This serenity prayer by Reinhold Niebuhr has inspired countless people seeking peace and strength, in times of struggle, despair and uncertainty since it was first written. And with Emmanuel’s condition, Mrs Turner says that “the words in this picture will help him”.

The intention of the serenity prayer is to bring peace, faith and certainty to the mind and heart of those seeking God’s support like Emmanuel. It asks God for the wisdom and ability to gracefully accept “what is” (what cannot be changed), and for the willingness to manifest, with God’s support, one which is the highest good (Courage to change things that can be changed). Emmanuel often thinks of the words of this prayer throughout the text, and he later uses the prayer as an incentive to try to change his skin. Emmanuel’s gradual understanding of the prayer charts his character growth throughout the novel, but while it offers him some hope in dealing with his difference, it does not help him find his own identity.

In the novel *The Book of Memory*, the prison is portrayed as a space that allows Memory to re-imagine the past and what has been lost, but it is also a place where her rebirth and

transformation is enriched. The prison has been portrayed as the third space in which Memory can easily interrogate her identity and meaning. Judith Butler argues:

In the context of prisoners Foucault writes, the strategy has not been to enforce a repression of their desires, but to compel their bodies to signify the prohibitive law as their very essence, style and necessity. That law is not literally internalised, but incorporated, with the consequence that bodies are produced which signify that law on and through the body; there the law is manifest as the essence of their selves, the meaning of their soul, their conscience, and the law of their desire (Butler 182).

Rather than punishment, *The Book of Memory* shows that prisoners are confined and subjected to the scientific dynamic of one-way surveillance and observation that lead to coercive objectification of the self in exclusionary and disciplinary practices (Foucault 102). Michel Foucault explains “prisoners represent a danger to the body of society and must be excluded, studied, observed and treated if and before they can be readmitted to society as normalised citizens” (102). One’s location may therefore be a site of creativity and re-memory; exploration, challenge, instability. Or it may be a site of further repression. This is more evident in the prison space in *The Book of Memory*.

All the three novels articulate displacement of the characters. Displacement creates desire for home. Caren Kaplan argues that “homesickness or homelessness, the rejection of home or longing for home becomes motivating factors in rewriting” (187). This is what we encounter in the displaced characters in *The Book of Memory*, *Golden Boy* and *Because Pula Means Rain*. Home can only have meaning once one experience a level of displacement from it, as Memory, Emmanuel and Habo have experienced. Still home is

contradictory, contested space, a locus for misrecognition and alienation. The figure of the displaced, homeless person is the most poignant, tragic representation of the transnational, capitalist postmodern condition. Both physical and psychic homelessness exist on a continuum which has its extreme physical disruptions and outsider-ness (Kaplan 190).

The word “home” remains for many, “ambiguous, ironic and even sarcastic” because it produces the notion of strangers at home. Home is frequently invoked to refer to the nation and a unified national identity. In *The Book of Memory*, *Golden Boy* and *Because Pula Means Rain*, home is an evocative and fluid concept which has significance on the characters’ self, relationship and family, and a physical resting place. In these texts, it is a space, physical or metaphorical, which compresses many normative values, as well as normalities and familiarities associated with family, status, ethnicity, culture and nation. In addition, perhaps because of its symbolic and affective power, the meaning of home is susceptible to multiple interpretations and manifestations.

These three novels are marked by movement. Habo, Emanuel and Memory narrativise movements towards and away from their local homes. Habo moves from his small village outside Arusha to Mwanza from Mwanza to Dar-e salaam. Emanuel moves from Kedia Height to Gaborone, from Gaborone to Kedia Heights. Memory moves Mharapara Street to Summer Madness suburb and finally ends up in Chikurubi Prison. From these movements, we can say, home is intensely personal and subjective, but it is also a place of collective identification. For such instance, home is also both symbolic and material in its support for identities.

Emmanuel wants to go to the city with Sindiso to close the “circle of loneliness” (33) around him. He says that “maybe among all those people my circle of empty dead space would be squeezed to nothing” (6). Emmanuel is eager to go to Gaborone because “people would be too busy to take any notice of him” (3). When he is in Gaborone, Emmanuel is in awe of the tall buildings, the interesting people, and the fashion of the young white girls and especially the sight of a man leaning against a pole with “orange-yellow” hair. He is convinced that in Gaborone he could be invisible and happy. It appears as if he has been right: in Gaborone he is invisible. As he awaits Sindiso a pregnant woman bumps into him and barely notices him. He is delighted because at Kedia Heights pregnant women especially avoided him like the plague lest they should also give birth to an albino baby.

In Gaborone, Emmanuel enters a bookstore—a place where he feels comfortable due to the influence of Mrs Turner. In an attempt to close the “circle of loneliness” around him, he sits on the floor next to a young white boy, and asks if he is enjoying the book he is reading. Emmanuel describes it as “a book about strange monsters on a desert island, excerpt in the pictures the monsters looked funny, not frightening. I was feeling so good” (38). When he asks the boy that “no one can ever be scared of such monsters...” (38), the boy is frightened and screams at seeing him. Emmanuel runs from the bookstore terrified and deeply shaken. He begins to realise that he always be different, no matter where he is—he is the “monster”. Foucault notes that the monster represents transgression of the natural limits hidden in abnormalities, deviances and irregularities.

In the similar vein, Habo goes to Dar-e salaam to seek refuge from Alasiri, a man who wants to kill him for muti. By changing place, Habo believes that “perhaps he will be normal somewhere else” (14). But he is disappointed in Arusha streets when a “woman with bright hair and sky eyes sees him, and her mouth goes around”... “That’s when he knows for a fact that he’s a freak he has always been called”. And he further says “even to the strangers, people who hardly know him, he is strange” (16). These sentiments revoke Homi K Bhabha’s sentiments of liminality and ambivalence. It is the ambivalence and liminality enacted in the enunciatively present of human articulation (Bhabha 58) that results in the signs and symbols of cultural difference being conjugated through the interactive temporality of signification.

Memory also records the same emphasis as she says; “I was in town, far from torments of my school-playground nemesis, Nhau, who tormented me as much as at home as at school because he lived on our street” (3). Memory narrates the complexity of living with albinism and also the bullying that comes with it.

Within the confines of a story, a character can do only three things: he can think, he can talk and he can move (Weiland 2014). It is less frequently that writers talk about how a character moves. But in these novels due to the traumatization present, the main characters are robbed of the power of the spoken language. Not only are they unable to speak themselves but they are also unable to speak others. Speech is taken as an index of identity and presence and silence as a sign of non-identity and absence (Muchemwa 13). The only option that these characters have is to move towards a safe haven.

David Atkinson in his paper “Nomadic Strategies” argues that “the figure of the migrant, like the idealised nomad of postmodernism, is celebrated for his perpetual, subversive movement and displacement” (97). Habo tells Davu and Kweli:

I grew up in a little village outside of Arusha, but recently my family moved to Mwanza. I took the train from Mwanza to get to Dar es Salaam (198). In Mwanza people tried to kill me like you would kill an elephant for its tusks because they wanted to sell pieces of me to waganga to make good-luck talismans (232).

The reason why Habo is displaced is that at first after his birth his father disappeared and abandoned his family because his wife had given birth to an albino child. With the disappearance of his father the family lacks money to sustain running the farm as such they are convicted from the farm. They move to Mwanza to her aunt but on their way they pass through Serengeti National Park where they encountered Alasiri, a hunter who was poaching in the park for elephant tusks. Alasiri offers them a ride to Mwanza but when he hears from a waganga that parts of albinos make good charm, he starts hunting him down.

Golden Boy is a novel that uses blindness as a parable about society. The notion that blindness brings with it forms of compensatory powers i.e. sixth sense is certainly one of the most widespread and frequently encountered themes found in literature. Accordingly, blindness might be understood as a narrative prosthesis that distorts experience and constructs blind people as the other. Jacques Derrida refers to the castration figure of the blind in his book *Memoirs of the Blind: The Self Portrait and Other Ruins* (1990) invoking the deconstructive process of difference. The term “the blind” belongs to a

binary set, connoting as much about what it is not as about what it is. This means that the normalcy of “the sighted” depends on the notion of deviance in the blind (Derrida 15).

From a cultural point of view, therefore, there are many specific circumstances that have influenced the living conditions of people with albinism, not to mention people’s attitudes towards them. This chapter has shown that ignorance, neglect, superstition and fear are social factors that have influenced isolation of people with albinism in the society. Throughout Africa, persons with albinism are seen as hopeless and helpless. The African culture and beliefs have not made matters easier for people with albinism. Through the works of Petina Gappah, Tara Sullivan and Jenny Robson, this study maintains that by giving marginalised people a voice, in this case people with albinism, they challenge the world’s false sense of order.

In a conclusion, disabled literary characters usually remain on the margins of fiction as uncomplicated figures or exotic aliens whose bodily configurations operate as spectacles, eliciting response from other characters or producing rhetorical effects that depend on disability cultural resonates (Garland 9). We have seen how characters with albinism remain in the margins due to the dominant cultural narratives.

CHAPTER FOUR

4.1 Lifting the Veil of Secrecy in Albinism: Deconstructing Myth and Stereotypes

The myths associated with albinism in Africa have a profound influence on the lives of the people with the condition, from the moment of their birth until their death (Baker et al, 169). The beliefs and superstitions are imbued in derogatory name calling, question on personhood, sexuality. The complex nature of the albino body and the taboo and the prejudice that it evokes make it an inspiring subject for writers (Baker 2). A web of misconceptions surrounds the albino body, permitted precisely by such perceptions that the albino body lacking or inadequate. Apart from the real disability caused by albinism, the fictional albino body is often attributed other defects that are imagined or assumed. In this study, it is evident that the fictional works of Petina Gappah, Jenny Robson and Tara Sullivan serve to perpetuate the misunderstanding of albinism, sustaining the myths surrounding the condition. This chapter aims at undistorting and interpreting, to simplify and representing the tendency in literature towards misrepresentation and the failure to portray a positive image of the albino. The chapter deconstruct the recurrent misrepresentation of the albino in literature through myths and stereotypes. In the analysis the chapter will focus on the relevance of names (onomastics), the concept of being, sexuality and religious remedy as the subheadings.

4.2 Myths Associated with Albinism

Some of the common myths that are associated with albinism in *The Book of Memory*, *Golden Boy* and *Because Pula Means Rain* are: “they are cursed. Their families are being punished by ancestral spirits. Their body parts make potent charms for riches and success. The presence brings luck or misfortunes (GB 74). They do not die, but simply vanish” (BPMR 24). Yet despite the fact that albinism is a relatively common disability, myths and stereotypes about it abound and people with this condition face discrimination, stigma, hate, hurt and even personal danger on a never-ending basis. Petina Gappah, Jenny Robson and Tara Sullivan start their narratives by charting the birth of characters with albinism and its aftermath. They explain about the shock associated with the birth of a baby with albinism, that is, a child who is visibly distinct from other members of his or family.

In *Golden Boy*, Habo laments that his father left right after he was born, “when whispers started that Raziya (his mother) gave birth to a white son—not a good brown child...but white” (14). This makes him to question about his father’s belief in superstition and his true biological father. The fault for the birth of a baby with albinism is often deemed to lie with the mother and an assumption of infidelity is a common belief related to albinism (Lund 3). Asu in *Golden Boy* says “I think Father figured out you were the son of one of the white men who come to climb Mount Kilimanjaro or take a *safari*” (29). This is a direct suggestion that Habo’s mother was promiscuous and also being blamed for giving birth to a child with albinism. Habo feels out of place living with his family because his physical appearance is not like the rest of the family members.

Emmanuel recounts in *Because Pula Means Rain* how having an albino baby was the worst fate in the world (22). And also the accusations and suffering his mother endured:

It is because she had been with a white man. A bad white man. That is why Gladys Lesenyamotse has birthed this deformed child or else: she drank alcohol—not chibuku beer but proper spirit alcohol—while she was carrying the poor baby. And now look at what has happened (22).

According to Emmanuel these stories were too hard for her mother to bear. And so she left him with his grandmother. This shows that Emmanuel’s mother did not accept having a child with albinism as was the case with Habo’s father.

Memory in *The Book of Memory* gives us a different account to the myth surrounding her birth. She says; “...I was born with no darkness in my skin, with no pigment, an albino....My mother believed that I had been cursed inside her womb” (253). When the headman heard about her condition they were asked to leave the village. Gappah, Sullivan and Robson are trying to draw attention to the reader that in the society some section of the people accept people with albinism while some section reject them. The power of family and community cannot be underestimated in providing the framework of association for people with albinism. The acceptance or otherwise of the person with albinism is highly mediated by his or her family and the surrounding community.

Apart from birth, people with albinism also face challenges of coping living with albinism. The very visible difference of a person with albinism has a profound effect on the personal identity of that individual (Baker, et al 173).

The same with *The Book of Memory*, Memory also laments that “when I first arrived, I found the usual fear-laced fascination and superstition around my condition” (28). She further says that “...it was my skin and my crime that caused the other prisoners to shrink into themselves as they walked past me” (28). Memory exercise agency within the narrative and create her on-air identity through her actions, behaviour and skin colour. Agency is therefore something contingent upon an individual’s ability to act within the social and cultural constructs of their situations.

The myth that people with albinism do not die a natural death but go into the bush and disappear is common in Africa. Emmanuel confirms this myth in *Because Pula Means Rain* as he says; “...a *leswafe* does not die. When he is old he goes out into the bush and slowly crumbles into dust. Or into ashes” (24). The death myth is closely associated with the notion of the intermediary nature of people with albinism, who are considered to belong to both the living and the dead. Lipenga and Ngwira argue that these myths account people with albinism as mysterious beings (1473). However, I see that there was/is a systematic killing of people with albinism in Africa, and the only way to convince the people about their disappearance is the death myth; that they do not die but just disappear. Robson and Sullivan’s texts disrupt popular perceptions

Memory, Emmanuel and Habo are all victims of culture which taught them that they have no worth. Their neo-colonial culture causes them to be alienated as they are convinced that their appearance is the source of their wretchedness.

Nnedi Okorafor in his novel *Akata Witch* also accounts the myths surrounding people with albinism. Sunny Nwazue, a protagonist with albinism in the novel, narrates that “people say stuff about people like you. That you’re all ghost, or a half and half, one foot in this world and one foot in another” (3). The place of difference and otherness is being created out of the albino image, a question of ambivalence.

Petina Gappah, Jenny Robson and Tara Sullivan account an enduring problem encountered by people with albinism is the stigmatisation and ostracism they face as a result of the web of myths surrounding the condition. At the centre of contemporary cultural practices towards people with albinism, is the belief that the body parts of people with albinism will bring wealth, win political elections (like Governor Msembo in *Golden Boy*), and bring success at mining and fishing (as the lake region of Mwanza in *Golden Boy*) and also personal luck (as Sindiso in *Because Pula Means Rain*). This belief has directly led to the murder of people with albinism by people desperate for success in the form of good luck and money, just as how Charlie Ngeleja, an albino man was brutally murdered like an animal in *Golden Boy*. In *Golden Boy*, and also prevalent in most African societies is the belief that “people consider albino medicine to be lucky” (67). At the core of this practice are witch doctors. Habo’s auntie explains in *Golden Boy* that “the *waganga* (witchdoctors) here in Mwanza kill people like your son (Habo) and use the parts from their dead bodies to make luck charm” (67). This was a warning about the safety of Habo in Mwanza because it is a district that has cases of such killings. The people that orchestrate such killings are witch doctors, ironically they are supposed to be protecting the people.

Studies on the topic of albinism often assume that people with this condition have a poor quality of life, and are exposed to a great deal of stigmatization and discrimination (Barker et al. 172). People with albinism have said that they experience difficulties in terms of social problems related to cultural or racial taboos, myths and misunderstandings connected to their looks. African communities contain stories and myths describing albinism. Some of these stories and myths are well covered in *The Book of Memory*, *Because Pula Means Rain* and *Golden Boy*.

Merg Wandermewe, Nnedi Okarafor and other scholars have written about sensationalist and stereotypical portrays of disability and the use of disabled bodies in the representation of villains. While each of these articles critically examines the ways that disability is positioned as abhorrent and vilified, this study creates heroes out of characters with albinism, drawing on the notion of multiple meanings created by the text in deconstruction. Closely related to myth and stereotypes in albinism is name calling and labelling.

4.3 Onomastics: Re-Mapping and Re-Naming the Albino in Narrative

The three novels have been imbued with names of people and places that convey specific images and messages for the representation of albinism in literary works. Gabriel Vom Bruck and Barbara Bodenhorn in *The Anthropology of Names and Naming* (2009), argues that names are “potentially powerful things in themselves as signifiers of the social person” (10). This suggests names as sites for identity formation and an indicator of social position from which the person being signified come from. Habo, the name of the

protagonist in *Golden Boy*, is a name that comes from Swahili word “*Dhahabo*” (29) to mean gold after Asu (his sister) observed his “white skin, yellow hair and light eyes” (29) and concluded “*Yeye ni motto dhahabo*” translated as “this is a golden child” which Sullivan has used as the title of the novel. The identity of Habo is conveyed in the title of the novel.

Names are crucial, forming the basis of language itself and helping shape how we perceive the world. As Sullivan, Gappah and Robson show, I argue that naming is an integral part of identity, disconnecting albinos from and connecting albinism to their heritage, families, and community. On another level, the three authors use the process of naming to show how albinos are oppressed in a predominantly hegemonic society. Naming, the natural extension of language, is also used by normal bodied people to denigrate and belittle persons with albinism. Selepe (2007), in her study of teenagers with albinism notes that one of the challenges of learners with albinism in schools is name-calling. Names carry meanings that influence the themes and narrative discourse of these novels. It is significant to note that in *The Book of Memory*, *Because Pula Means Rain* and *Golden Boy* the power to name is given to the society. This naming process demonstrates their power to mediate reality. From the names of the characters, the author derives specific character traits, themes, images and symbols that pervade the language of narration.

Coleman posits that derogatory and demeaning terminology for persons with albinism has led to prejudice and stereotypes (Coleman 1997). This constitutes emotional abuse which affects negatively the self-worth and dignity of persons with albinism (Coleman 1997).

The undignified names that the persons with albinism are given are meant to break their wills; their names have all the panache and zest of animals. Emmanuel is teased by his friends at school, who call him “white monkey” (19). Emmanuel says that “it is a name that makes [him] tremble with anger and shame” (19) and he “can feel the coldness rise up inside [his] chest, even on the hottest October day” (24). “White monkey” is a derogatory name to Emmanuel because it offends him and denies him personhood or a sense of being. Animalization is a widespread element of dehumanization across the globe. Being an albino in Africa comes with a long history of prejudice and stereotyping. Memory also holds the same resentments as Emmanuel before she was bought by Lloyd. She argues that “there was a brutal honesty in how children regarded anyone different” (TBM 12). She was called a *murungudunhu* or *musope*. She recalls that “as a murungudunhu or musope, I am a black woman who is imbued not with the whiteness of murungu, of privilege, but of dunhu, of ridicule and fakery, a ghastly whiteness” (TBM 12). And she concludes that “on Mharapara Street, I had a torrid time of it, but at school, where children from other streets in Mufakose joined the children of my street, the tormenting reached unbearable levels” (56). According to the Shona language, murungudunhu is a person in whom by some defect organization the substance which gives colour to the skin, hair and eyes is deficient or in a morbid state. An albino has a skin of a milky hue, with hair of the same colour, and eyes with deep red pupil and pink or blue iris.

Habo recounts how he hates people to call him *zeruzeru*. He says “I hate it when people call me *zeruzeru*. The name means “zero-zero,” “nothing”. A *zeruzeru* is unnatural thing, like a zombie. It’s like calling me an animal (GB 34). Another name that Habo was called

by the children was ghost. A *zeru zeru* is a Swahili lexicon from English zero. Zero means nothing which is what people with albinism signify in Tanzania as nothing (ghost). The white skin in the local populace is associated with bad spirits. Using this word is very impolite and singles out albinos in a negative and unjustified manner.

From various African countries the word albinism is imbued in local terminologies that depict an albino as less human or non-being. In Setswana there is the *leswafe* that Robson has used in her narrative, in Shona they are called *murungudunhu* which Gappah uses in her narrative and finally in Swahili albinos are called *zeruzeru* which Sullivan uses in *Golden Boy*. These writers use local languages terms for albinism to bring the African culture to life, in order to bring realism to their novels by illustrating the way of life of people with albinism. The novels challenge western mainstream disability studies.

Charlotte Baker et al, highlight that “the very visible difference of a person with albinism has a profound effect on the personal identity of that individual” (173) as is the case with Habo, Memory and Emmanuel. In the view of name calling and derogatory remarks towards people with albinism, it can be argued that “nowhere can an albino be his real self—socially, at work, at school, at home” (Baker et al, 173). Von Bruck and Bodenhorn claim that:

Names are always implicated in social relations. These entanglements may be negative as well as positive and clearly are important factor in the ways that names may define or cross boundaries. Names are ubiquitous as kinship. They are as caught up in histories as they are in daily social life and serve as a means of structuring social relations as well as powerful medium in which to talk about those relations (25-26).

Ashley explains elsewhere that names occupy a central place in the understanding and appreciation of literary texts given that:

Names can drive the plot... Names can set the tone. They can create the atmosphere. They can build suspense. Terms of address can reveal relationships. Names can familiarize or distance the reader. Names do much more than designate. Even the absence of a name can be significant. Names can be comic or satirical. Names can be deliberately ludicrous or, as the British say, spot on (16).

The question to ask at this point is why names are important. Ngubane explains that in Africa, “an individual is not considered a human being until a name is bestowed, for giving a name is the acknowledgement of the existence of that particular human being” (68). This implies that there exist a close relationship between being (identity) and the act of naming or being named. As Asu tells Habo in *Golden Boy* that “Yeye ni mtoto dhahabo” meaning “he was a golden child” so he was named *Dhahabo* which is shortened Habo after Asu had made an observation on her brother’s white skin, yellow hair and pale eyes (29). Hughes argues that naming transcends this (1). In Hughes reasoning, names cannot be viewed simply as abbreviations or disguises of character and identity. Notwithstanding this perspective, it is undeniable that names are important in characterising people. In relation to accidental being in albinism, Herrscher explains that:

A person or a phenomenon enters into being and into existence through referential designation because ‘without a name, a person or a thing barely exists, it becomes part of our consciousness only when it has a name (126).

Herrscher implies that a person or thing ceases to be, or disappears, once they are not named or fail to name themselves. This could be the reason why Habo, Memory and Emmanuel were angry when they were called derogatory names because they make them look like ghost, animals, freaks, alien and strangers in their own community. The emphasis is that the terms that we use to name people with albinism carry strings of echoes and inscriptions. Gappah, Sullivan and Robson are examining the power of a name and its value in fiction and also in the society. The argument they are advancing is that names themselves do not hold worth or meaning, and they simply act as labels to distinguish one thing or person from another. And this correlates well with William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* quote "what's in name" (II.ii.). What is his name but, simply, a label. It does not define him as a man. The same applies to name calling in albinism. The issue of name and name calling has lead characters with albinism to question their being and personhood.

4.4 The Concept of Personhood in Albinism

Undoing the dominant conceptions of the body threaten the very basis through which our sense of selfhood is established (Hoeft 11). What constitutes and defines a person varies greatly from one culture to the other, entailing different rights, duties, kinship, bonds and titles. Most attempts to define personhood recognise that the human person must extend beyond merely biological basis to include some form of consciousness or rationality. Petina Gappah, Jenny Robson and Tara Sullivan have tried to portray in their text that albinism is not just the skin tone but all that is constructed towards those people who appear different from the rest.

Peter Frederick Strawson identifies the concept of a person as “an entity that both has predicates ascribing states of consciousness and predicates ascribing corporeal characteristics” (101). Jaakko Hintikka agrees with Strawson as they argue that “persons are beings to which states of consciousness are attributed, or to which psychological or mental or intentional predicates, are ascribed (23). Many would say that each individual human could not fail to be human; if so, then the basic modal characterization counts the property of being human as an essential property of each human. People with albinism even though have those attributes are denied personhood. Most people take humanity as the deciding mark for personhood, but on the other hand we recognise conditions that exempt human beings from personhood, or at least some very important elements of personhood such as physical limitations or albinism. For instance, Habo in *Golden Boy* argue that “Chui may not be a man, but I’m hardly a person” (5).

4.5 Religion as the Opium of the Accidental Bodies

Patina Gappah, Jenny Robson and Tara Sullivan are also concerned about the role of religion in contemporary African society. Religion is a complex human and cultural institution, even though it deals with the sacred and the transcendental. It is a weapon to blunt the peoples’ consciousness of their condition of being (2). Religion, according to Karl Marx is “the response to the pain of being alive, the response to the earthly suffering”. Further contends “is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the feeling of heartless world and the soul of soulless circumstances.” This statement connects well with the three novels. In the same line of argument, Ngugi agrees that “it is a weapon to blunt the people’s consciousness of their condition of being” (5).

Emmanuel for instance, hopes that Christian religion will help to change his condition. His grandmother, a devoted Christian, with her fellow church members pray miracle for other people and not him. Like Marx's oppressed creature he argues:

What about a miracle for me? I had screamed. "You go and pray and pray and pray at Kotsi Corner. You go and pray for a miracle for other people. Why can't you pray for a miracle for me (4).

Here, even though Emmanuel seeks for a religious remedy to his condition, but it is ultimately not of much use in dealing with his condition. Such sentiments express his desire to be normal like the rest of his friends.

Just as Emmanuel, Memory too says:

I prayed every second I could for God to darken my skin. After Reverend Bergen said, 'Ask anything of me, says the Lord', I redoubled my prayers. I made all sorts of bargains, made promises about being good, about coming top in class. I promised not to slap Mobhi, and even vowed not to hate my mother. But my skin remained what it had always been (58).

The recourse to God in order to explain albinism is also very explicit in the three novels. Sister Mary Gabriel in *The Book of Memory*, told Memory that Noah was an albino; that God has chosen to save an albino above all the people he flooded in his wrath (55). Apart from that Memory's mother attended a number of churches looking for a miracle for her daughter. Memory recounts that "she had been to different churches over the years, dragging us with her, almost as though she had to try them all out before she finally settled for one" (109). This is what I call as religious fanaticism,

Petina Gappah, Tara Sullivan and Jenny Robson show in their novels how religious myth of spirit possession is used to construct a postcolonial idiom of resistance (Vambe 127). Spiritual possession articulates a contradictory life principle. Being judged as miracle seekers in religion, people with albinism have also problems in sexuality.

4.6 Queered Bodies: Sexuality and Albinism

Sex has always been one of the most discussed and controversial topics within human history, especially in Africa. Sexuality is a taboo and enshrouded in secrecy in most African societies. Society generally perceives the sexuality of disabled person as repulsive. Discussing disability and sexuality in the African context comes with multiple challenges especially when one is asked to talk about both concepts. Disability is viewed with mythical rather than factual appreciation and sexuality is hardly discussed in public. At other extreme “women and men of good will” consider the disabled to be without sexual feelings. Lipenga and Ngwira argue that representation of sexuality highlights people with albinism as individuals with sexualities though in current hegemonic discourse disabled bodies not permitted to participate in the erotics of power, in the power of erotic, in economies of transgression (1477).

The Book of Memory delves well into issues of sexuality. One member of Goodwill Fellowship is astonished when Memory tells her that “what I really long for, more than anything, what I miss above all other things, is a good hard fuck” (149). Here, Gappah is trying to deconstruct the African customary beliefs and practices that sought to make women ashamed of their sexuality. In Africa, female sexuality is a taboo, but Gappah

makes Memory aware of her sexual desires and her striving to satisfy it. The general argument is that sexuality has received minimal critical and creative attention in African literature because of the secrecy and taboo enshrined in sex in African culture.

The sexuality of a body deemed “disabled” is ignored, or alternately is portrayed at the other extreme as perverse sexuality that is equally deviant (Baker 5). These novels are examples of a discourse that highlights people with albinism as individuals with sexualities, just like any other human being (Lipenga and Ngwira 1477). If this is the case then the tyranny of the norm should not make albino bodies into freakish bodies, which both compel and repel the normate sensibility.

Robert Mcurer and Anna Mollow in their book; *Sex and Disability* hold the assertion that able-bodiedness is the foundation of sexiness (1). This assertion is premised on the assumption that the sexiest people are healthy, fit, and active: lanky models, buff athletes, trim gym members brimming with energy. Rarely are disabled people regarded as either desiring subjects or objects of desire. And when sex and disability are linked, the conjunction is most often the occasion for marginalization or marvelling: the sexuality of disabled people is typically depicted in terms of either tragic deficiency or freakish excess (1). Pity or fears, in other words, are the sensations most often associated with disabilities; more pleasurable sexual sensations are generally dissociated from disabled bodies and lives (1). In *Because Pula Means Rain*, Emmanuel recounts that he was stopped from dating a girl (by the girls’ parents) because he was an albino. And what is this? You keep away from my daughter, you hear (30)? You don’t come near her, do you hear me? They chased him like a stray dog from their house.

Every action has a clear motive and logical reaction. Rejection is the most common emotional wound Emmanuel sustains in his daily life. The greatest damage rejection causes is usually self-inflicted. It causes emotional pain in Emmanuel which impacts his well-being. From this incident Emmanuel's self-esteem and mood is affected and destabilise his need to belong. All this is due to the crime of his skin.

Michel Foucault's ground breaking *History of Sexuality: Volume 1* (1979) politicises both truth and body; and reconstitutes knowledge and sexuality as sites of contestation for scholarly and political intervention. African society is evolving along with interpretation of gender and sexuality. Judith Butler contends that "bodies are materialised as sexed through the repetition of norms" (2). By performative, Butler means sex is reproduced in a process of constant re-citation of norms. She argues that "through this citation of norms the one becomes viable and a body is qualified for life within the domain of cultural intelligibility" (2). Butler's argument is that, from the moment they are born individuals are produced as subjects through the process of gendering.

Society sees heterosexuality as the norm and homosexuality as the opposite, the abnormal. The taboo around sex still holds when it comes to such "eccentricities" as homosexuality. Homosexuality is one of the many themes surrounding the body and sexuality that have long been avoided in African literature and its academic criticism. Butler argues that homosexuality forms what she calls the "constitutive outside" to heterosexuality and is essential in defining the boundary of what lies within the position of the norm (8). This norm is established by the creation of those "abject subjects" who define that which the subjects are not—homosexuals.

The Book of Memory presents a story of Zenzo, a young homosexual man and his struggles to conform to a normal lifestyle. Narrated by Memory, Zenzo is a well-known artist who had exhibitions round the world (179). Memory was attracted to Zenzo in that she fantasised about their life together but this dream was shattered the day she found Zenzo in bed with Lloyd. The insertion of Zenzo in the text challenges the heterosexual assumptions in the normative discourse.

The Book of Memory is a text that upset the idea that homosexuality is un-African, and through the character of Zenzo, Gappah reveals that some black men in Zimbabwe do engage in same sex relationships, but they do so secretly because homosexuality is perceived 'deviant' behaviour. Another text that addresses the concept of homosexuality is the *Hairdresser of Harare* (2010) by Tendai Huchu. In the novel, Dumisani engages himself in homosexual activities that arouse societal suspicion because homosexuality is unnatural, abnormal and strange to African culture. Despite looking at sexuality and sex-orientation; Huchu, Gappah and several Zimbabwean writers try to test Robert Mugabe's belief that homosexuality "degrades human dignity. It's unnatural, and there is no question ever of allowing these people to behave worse than dogs and pigs". Mugabe has characterised homosexuality as un-African and many journalists duly report gay stories with hostility. This agrees with Butler's claim that "sexuality is always constructed within the terms of discourse and power, where power is partially understood in terms of heterosexual and phallic cultural conventions" (41). This study highlights how *The Book of Memory*, *Golden Boy* and *Because Pula Means Rain* interrogate the heterosexual and patriarchy normativity in African society.

The world Gappah, Robson and Sullivan create can only be known through the consciousness of their protagonists. *The Book of Memory*, *Because Pula Means Rain* and *Golden Boy*, do present alternative world views, but all are imbued with meanings that centre on the portrayal of albinism. Albinism is colour coded. The world is colour coded—black, brown and white carry marked valences. Meanings are slippery in these novels’ sign system. These authors, in their writerly style, conspicuously assign meaning to every moving thing, piling on images and freighting their stories.

In western literature, the black and white colour is coded with a number of symbols. White is the colour of everything good and pure, and black is the colour of everything bad and evil. However, in albinism these colours signify contrary to the norm. Albinism manifests in white skin, white or straw-coloured hair and lighter, even blue, eyes. All the characters in the novels in the study wonder why their body is white unlike their family members who are either dark or brown. Habo retorts that “I look down at my white and red hands nested in her even brown ones. I wonder again, for the thousandth time, why I’m so different” (29). Emmanuel also shares the same sentiments:

And I wondered then, the way I wonder so many times: why it must feel like to look down at your body and see skin dark and brown like the skin of all those around you? Warm, rich brown, not pink and freckled and strange (23).

The albino body is the other in fiction. However, it is the extreme negativity with which the albino is portrayed that is of interest here, for albinism is constantly distorted to become something else, to signify. It is significant that such negativity persists across all writing about albinos, as well as in other forms of representation.

The body of the other had been stripped to its most physical form and had been transformed into the mere signifier of the difference, the explanation of the savagery, wildness and intense sexuality of the colonized (Boehmer 270). This othering is what we encounter in albino characters in the works of Tara Sullivan, Jenny Robson and Petina Gappah.

In this study, black is associated with power, strength, authority, aggression, sophistication just to mention a few. The black or brown skin colour is used interchangeably throughout these novels to symbolise the norm, or normal people as opposed to the white skin of the albino which symbolise lack, absence and abnormality. In a conclusion, any label that is used to describe a person's skin colour carries some connotation. It may point to discrimination, stereotyping and stigmatisation. This is especially true for people with albinism as they have been presented in *The Book of Memory*, *Golden Boy* and *Because Pula Means Rain*. It is the skin colour of characters with albinism that is imbued with negative social constructions.

Jenny Robson and Petina Gappah writing construct a black female subject in form of Mma Lesenyamotse and Synodia respectively, who displaces the negative cultural images generated by patriarchy and hegemonic masculinities. Emmanuel describes his grandmother as “made of iron” (BPMR 3) meaning that she is a tougher woman who rules her household with an iron fist. Memory also describes Synodia, the head guard at Chikurubi Prison as the tough one (9). The portrayal of these two characters challenges the dominant narratives imbued in patriarchy and hegemonic masculinities.

The chapter concludes that misrepresentation of the albino occurs on many levels. Certainly, the myths and stereotypes surrounding albinism in Africa evoked in the work of Gappah, Robson and Sullivan play a central role in this, built in to common belief systems as they are. However, these myths and stereotypes in themselves are typical of a more general tendency. That is to say, the need to emphasise the real or assumed deficiencies that mark the albino apart, reinforcing his difference and ultimately serving to confirm the normality of those who designate his body as defective. The need to categorise, to define and to 'know' the other is continually frustrated by the albino body and it has become evident that this is particularly problematic for the writer attempting to represent the albino.

CHAPTER FIVE

5.1 Conclusion

Deconstruction does not consist in passing from one concept to another, but in overturning and displacing a conceptual order, as well as the non-conceptual order with which the conceptual order is articulated (Derrida 329).

Texts are created to be read. Without their audience, texts have little significance. Books are supposed to show us things about ourselves and beyond ourselves. Jacques Derrida argues that “there is nothing outside the text” (312). *The Book of Memory, Because Pula Means Rain* and *Golden Boy* are texts that assign multiple meanings to albinism by creating an accidental body image. In deconstruction we do not simply reject a conceptual system of meanings, but we problematize it from the inside by bringing in possibilities of signification that have been left outside the systems, that is, by putting side by side the recognised and unrecognised, the accepted and the rejected as is the case with accidental bodies in albinism as viewed by normal people. It can be argued that deconstruction offers an “alternative where that which deviates from the norm is the norm” (Mosley 2000). The exploration of divergent realities and the disruption of normative frameworks is the central tenet of deconstruction, establishing it as a literary concept made to rail against the status quo. The study deconstructs accidental body in albinism which stems from accidents.

Accidents are what accrue to substances and modify substances in some way. Logically speaking, accidents are predicated of or in some substance; metaphysically speaking, accidents cannot exist in themselves but only as part of some substance. As their name suggests, accidents are incidental to the thing, and they can come and go without the thing losing its identity; whereas a thing cannot cease to be the substance that it is without losing its identity.

In the novel, the body is positioned as a text that can be both written and read. Or conversely, the text is represented as a body and as such, an animate object that is constantly changing and that can exert not only intellectual but also physical pleasure, and conversely, pain upon the reader (Malhotra 485). The idea that the body can be read and re-read, written and re-written is the central motif in *The Book of Memory*, *Golden Boy* and *Because Pula Means Rain*.

The works of Petina Gappah, Tara Sullivan and Jenny Robson examined in this thesis recognise the challenges people with albinism face but also depicts them as normal, creative, resilient, and courageous to forge their identities. Gappah, Sullivan and Robson make writing an art form. Sensual language and, more particularly visualisation are used to great effect; “*Yeye ni mtoto dhahabo!* This is a golden child (29) in *Golden Boy*. Symbols permeate all levels of these novels. Sound, rhythm, image and touch are simultaneously juxtaposed, and in harmony with subject and content, heightening the aesthetic experience. Part of this defamiliarisation lies in the fusion of poetry with prose, using language in unfamiliar way.

This study has deconstructed the accidental body in albinism in literary representation. The three texts analysed in the study represent the accidental body placed on people with albinism, neglected by the society because of their skin tone. The texts highlight the loneliness, isolation and alienation that albinos experience within the so-called normal society. The three texts chosen for this study all narrate displacement and loss of home, identity and belonging of people with albinism. Most importantly, they demonstrate how literature attempts to understand society and how it acts as an agent of change for the voiceless people in the society. The study has examined through fictional representation the ideas and discourses on albinism, communitarian perceptions of albinism, cultural assumptions about the body and meanings connected to physical difference. It also analysed the various labels and terms related to albinism as a way in which stigma and deviance, not to mention attitudes of acceptance and inclusion in these narratives.

Petina Gappah, Jenny Robson and Tara Sullivan have highlighted this problem and in their text there are discussing the problems that characters with albinism face in society. According to Blankenberg, in Africa, such interventions are ethnicity, spirituality, community, family and ancestry (10). The three novels centred on family and community and its associated social institutions. As such, the power of family and community in particular cannot be underestimated in providing the framework of association for people with albinism. In African communities, life still centres on the community in which one lives and consequently the attitude of these people towards albinism is fundamental to their life experience.

Deconstruction is Derrida's subversive approach to Western logocentrism, through which he inverts and dismantles conceptual hierarchies. It serves to dislodge the dominance of privileged forms of knowledge and opens up new ways of thinking that break with the epistemology of certainty. Though taken as a western concept, but deconstruction also works well in African literary works. A deconstructive approach places the subject and how he/she is perceived and located in and between particular categorical identities at the centre of enquiry. And in this study, I focused on the albino subjectivity as the centre of narrative and they are located in and between particular categorical identities. The study emphasised fragmentation and dismantling the accidental bodies attached to albinism.

This study argues for a changing attitude towards people perception to albinism. Given the continued impact of myths and beliefs on so many different aspects of the lives of people with albinism, education can be one way in which people can come to understand and ways of dealing with and helping people with albinism (Baker et al 177).

Reading Petina Gappah, Jenny Robson and Tara Sullivan, we are frequently taken together with the protagonists into the past, which reveals to the reader the previous history of the characters. From their characters, we learn where they lived, how they acted and what choices they had made in their past. At the same time, Hubert Hermans' theory helps not only to analyze the psychological situation of characters searching for their identity in the present and in the past, but also to discover the prospects and direction of their evolution, manifested in a dynamic multiplicity of self-positions in the inner dialogue (Rojek 90). The polyphonic self-implicates a complex identity and, furthermore, it is fundamental for both actual and potential changes in identity (Rojek 90). According

to Erikson, it is the phrase “I know who I am” that represents a person’s identity. Hermans, however, replaces it with “I sense who I may be” (Hermans, 2002).

Habo in *Golden Boy*, defeats Alasiri his nemesis who wanted to kill him so that he should use his body parts for rituals (muti). In *Because Pula Means Rain*, Emmanuel is transformed in that he accepts things as they are. There is spiritual growth in him to accept the things he cannot change like his albinism. And finally in *The Book of Memory*, Memory is able to reconcile her past.

The socialisation of albinism played an important role in how society and persons with albinism can interact from this point on. The narrative aspects came into play with philosophical reflection, where personal stories, literature and art enable us to see and hear another’s life may enter our own. Albino narratives in fiction actively and critically involve us in dialogue in which many questions are posed but for which not all answers are directly supplied.

In this modern world, through deconstruction, the albino can be no longer representing something beyond it. The albino is not a liminal figure, the exiled fool, social rejects, as those who should not or who would not fit into an ordered social scheme (Mitchell, 10). As I earlier argued that accidental qualities can be altered without affecting the functional unity and coherence of the object and, therefore, its categorical identity. For example, the colour, location and ownership of a pen do not affect its pen-ness and it may be used to write, so is the concept of albinism. To claim, or contest, what it is that makes something what (some) people take it to be, does not imply that in some other, non-social or natural

way, it really is so. For instance, when being shouted at, Habo says “my ears are one of the few parts of my strange body that work just fine” (3).

If *Golden Boy*, *Because Pula Means Rain* and the *Book of Memory* have happy ending, it is because Habo, Emmanuel and Memory are able to recognise themselves as accidental bodies, yet at the same time accept that they are individuals. Throughout these novels, the narrator struggled with many false identities, one after another, because of the protagonists’ desire to be recognised. They are unable to see a self, their self, but instead act out of the wishes of others. Nevertheless, in the course of the narratives these protagonists take a step further in mapping their own identities.

This study calls for diversity in literature as a way of generating many fresh conversations across social media concerning inclusiveness. When we get a chance to look beneath superficial difference, we sometimes discover extraordinary awesomeness. In this way literature can be used to bring communities together as people will accept physical, cultural and perceived disparities, and even find these differences endearing.

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