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Gendered Dance and Bodily Display for (Dis)empowerment as Represented in Novuyo Tshuma's *Shadows*

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Abstract

In Zimbabwe, images of the female body in fiction and the media are gradually shifting from being interpreted as merely sexualized objects of male visual consumption to those of resistance to and defiance against sexist objectification, exploitation, and moralist surveillance. Drawing on the intersection between Foucault's notion of disciplinary power, feminist notions of the female body as a cultural template for punitive patriarchy and the male gaze, and the decolonial insights from African feminism(s), I discuss the potential for representations of female dance and bodily display to stimulate debate on gender (dis)empowerment, agency, and punishment in Novuyo Tshuma's novella *Shadows* (2012). Acknowledging the pervasiveness of the globalized male gaze, I develop a flipside notion of male glare to negotiate the hardly critiqued unconscious African male desire to rebuke the imagined subversive dancing or stripping female body. The novella enables a discussion of the agency of the stereotyped African sex worker – not only as a debased performer, but also a potentially empowered embodied being. However, by employing a male narrative voice, informed by the dominant male discourses on gender, Tshuma problematically prioritizes the scopophilic and punitive narrative perspective that she seeks to undermine.

Keywords: Agency; corporealization; (dis)empowerment; male dominance; male gaze; male glare; pole dance; striptease

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Introduction

In this article, I examine Novuyo R. Tshuma's depiction of bar dance and striptease as performed by Ndebele[1] female characters struggling against the interlocking effects of gender, status, and race. In so doing, I chart the place of such representations in the re-imagination of contested gender stereotyping, bodily autonomy, and (dis)empowerment in a postcolonial patriarchal Zimbabwe alive to the decolonial interventions of "more audacious and radical" African feminism(s) (Atanga 2013; Ahikire 2014, 8). Like most formerly colonized countries, Zimbabwe's nationalist elite has glibly adapted and reproduces the imported "patriarchal ideologies of colonisation" (Steady 2005, 314) which privilege Western narratives of hierarchized sexual power relations. My analysis is grounded in a cultural and literary terrain swamped with "diametrically opposed discourses" regarding the (dis)empowering potential of female "erotic dance and striptease" (Ncube and Chipara 2013, 70; Chikonzo and Chifamba 2018; Chidora 2018). Tshuma's fictionalized patriarchal Zimbabwe is marked, firstly, by a euphoric yet disruptive post-1980s independence urbanization period and, secondly, by a dystopic post-2000 Zimbabwe crisis period propelling the emigration of citizens, with women migrants being the most at risk of the hazards of migration. Both periods reel under a nationalist patriarchy that often relies on coercion to control "recalcitrant bodies" (Muchemwa and Muponde 2007, xvii), and that objectifies and maligns the female performer (Ncube and Chipara 2013).

Novuyo Tshuma is a Bulawayo-born Zimbabwean female author who writes mostly from abroad. Her writing represents Western Zimbabwe, where the Ndebele people principally reside, with Bulawayo as the regional capital city. The precolonial Ndebele state was a socially hierarchized "male dominated society", where most women remained little valued as "perpetual minors" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2009, 91–92). Mlotshwa (2018, 87) argues that post-independence Ndebele women remain "a subaltern class" who are doubly exploited because of their "invisibility and hypervisibility". A winner of numerous awards, Tshuma is better known for her debut novel, *House of Stone* (2019), inspired by the Great Zimbabwe civilization. *Shadows* is her previous 2012 novella, set in the slums of post-1980s Bulawayo and in the strip clubs of contemporary Johannesburg. The main characters include Mpho, the male narrator and epitome of Ndebele patriarchal morality; Mama, his mother; Nomsa, his childhood girlfriend; and Holi, Nomsa's mother.

The ideological strength of *Shadows* lies in its deployment of the dancing female body as a potential site of the contestation and rupture of gender power. This conjures the status envisaged for women by Baker et al. (2021, 7), wherein women could enjoy "[t]he right to the autonomy of [their] bodies" and "have the power and agency to make choices". In his analysis of Virginia Phiri's *Highway Queen,* Nyambi (2015, 1) deconstructs the "patriarchally constructed notions of morality and female identity", especially their sustainability in times of crises. Nyambi (2015, 1) argues that Phiri recreates a sex worker who intentionally uses her body to reject the patriarchal label of either victim or villain. Munyoro (2018, 1) also contends that post-2000 Zimbabwean female authors 'converge' with their female protagonists to symbolically "vacate spaces of victimhood" and "transition into resilient agent[s]". This resonates with Stobie's (2016) analysis of Ramaka's 2001 film *Karmen Geï,* which depicts a Senegalese bisexual character defiantly performing fascinating dances as a strategy to destabilize patriarchal moralities and

[1] The Ndebele are the second largest ethnic group in Zimbabwe after the Shona. The Ndebele migrated from South Africa at the beginning of the 1830s and settled in western Zimbabwe. The Ndebele state has been a male-dominated one over the years (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2009). During the post-2000 crisis in Zimbabwe, the Ndebele also trekked down to South Africa to seek employment, experiencing hardships as epitomized in the figures of Mpho and Nomsa in the novella.

conceptions of such 'queer' identities. Mangena (2019, 102), on the other hand, criticizes the narrative of agential sex workers charting their own empowerment for its "problematic" celebration of "prostitution" instead of centring women who harness more moral ways to tackle their economic challenges. What fascinates me here is how Tshuma's *Shadows* deploys dance/pole dance as a deliberately chosen survival strategy for both the urban sex workers of post-independence Zimbabwe and female migrants in Johannesburg in contexts where men lecherously gaze at, yet also self-righteously glare at, this category of women.

My argument, firstly, is that Tshuma paradoxically deploys dance as both an enabling performance through which a female performer can negate bodily objectification, and, secondly, that she presents dance as a limiting performance where the same dance mediates and radiates patriarchal visual and disciplinary authority over the dancing or displayed woman's body. Theorization of the Black female body as multiply disadvantaged due to intersections of race, gender, and class has a long history – consider, for instance, Descartes' and Hegel's dualisms and racial framings, the parading of African slaves as objects on the auction block (Stupp 2011), and the "hyper-objectification" and display of the 'exotic' body of Hottentot Venus (Mashile 2019, 6). Eurocentric inferiorization of the African on the basis of physical attributes thus entrenched the notions of bodily difference as hallmarks of racial and sexual hierarchies (Oyewumi 2005). According to Oyewumi (2005, 4), the body of the African female/Other "*invites* (…) the gendered gaze" that is characteristic of racial and gendered biases (italics in the original).

Historically, the Black female body has been conceived as both an exotic spectacle and a moral threat, something triggering visual fascination and glaring. There have been distorted Eurocentric constructions of the African body, and particularly of the Black woman, which were meant to dehumanize and devalue the physical and ontological being of that body. Despite all such efforts, the latter has demonstrated defiance, resilience, and innovativeness. Gonye (2013) has theorized how Nehanda's [2] psychologically empowering dances while in colonial captivity and awaiting execution affirm the assertion of African feminists that African women have always "created and transformed cultural expressions to counter various forms of domination and control" (Kuumba 2006, 114). This article analyses how the performances depicted in Tshuma's novella, particularly those of Mama and Nomsa, tease readers to appreciate the doubly conceptualized fascinating and transgressing Zimbabwean female body as it endeavours to chart its own survivalist trajectory. I thus analyse *Shadows* to explore Mama's *dhindindi*[3] dances and Nomsa's pole performance as both characters negotiate their marginalized identities as objectified, commodified, and morally marked women in the globalized economies of the Global South. Even in the current hostile gender environment, real-life Zimbabwean women performers, such as Sandra Ndebele and Bev, the pole dancer, are reinventing themselves as victors overcoming patriarchal victimization. Bev performs sexually suggestive dances atop male fans, performatively turning them into "her sexual slaves" (Chikonzo and Chifamba 2018, 120).

[2] Nehanda, popularly known as Mbuya (Grandmother) Nehanda, was an influential spiritual leader responsible for directing the operations of the Shona resistance fighters of the 1896 -97 Shona-Ndebele First Chimurenga/Umvukela war against the colonial forces under Cecil John Rhodes' British South Africa Company.

[3] *Dhindindi* is an onomatopoeic indigenous Zimbabwean term used by both the Shona and the Ndebele to denote the loud music, the alliterative drumming and percussive sounds, alongside the clicking dancing boots, that dominate the atmosphere of urban disco bars in post-independence Zimbabwe. The term *dhindindi* was popularized by Paul Matavire, a visually impaired multi-lingual musician, some of whose music of the early 1980s encouraged people to enjoy themselves in line with the euphoria of independence.

However, with Africa's HIV/AIDS infections ballooning since the late 1980s, this health issue has become increasingly conflated with African issues of morality and sexuality contradictions. The bodies of female sex workers in post-independence Zimbabwe increasingly became objects of scopic and disciplinary regulation, notwithstanding the contribution of their male counterparts to the proliferation of sex work. With sex workers thus stigmatized, the prospects of reimagining a latent redemptive potential in Zimbabwean women becomes interesting. This is especially so when it comes to the analysis of Tshuma's *Shadows,* where the female author has settled for Mpho as narrator, a male voice who seems ambiguous and biased in his descriptions of female characters.

The male glare syndrome

While cultural and literary representations that portray Zimbabwean female dancers as objects of the male gaze have received some scholarly attention (Ncube and Chipara 2013; Chidora 2018; Gonye 2018; Chikonzo and Chifamba 2018), fictionalized representations of the corresponding motif of what I term 'male glare', vis-à-vis the survivalist instincts of Ndebele female characters, remain unexplored. With global technological advancements shrinking the world and thus enabling the complication and proliferation of "the intersections of world systems" (Nnaemeka 2005, 53), male visual behaviour regarding female bodies on display is wont to oscillate between the paradoxes of scopic pleasure, moral panic, and visual censure (Ncube and Chipara 2013; Nyambi 2015; Kurylo 2017; Chidora 2018). Such notions reflect biased gendered power structures within patriarchy. To elucidate what I consider as punitive male visual tendencies, I proffer the notion of 'male glare', a notion tangled with male gaze. Male glare, as the obverse of male gaze, manifests as a shocked glowering at, as well as a "moral[ly] panic[king]" staring at, the deviant woman's body (Chidora 2018, 108), whose posture, movement, and acts it finds offensive to the patriarchal notions of "decorum and propriety", unless that dancing body is deployed in the service of a propagandist agenda, which legitimizes otherwise vulgar dances (Chidora 2018, 98). The male glare paradoxically sacrifices the supposed "to-be-looked-at-ness" (Mulvey 1997) or the otherwise lewd dance movements that patriarchal voyeurs habitually look for in the female body. Instead, it conjures up an anticipated shrivelling and punishment of the norm-challenging female body – a wish for a painful death to the debased and potentially home-wrecking female body that preoccupies patriarchal thinking.

The notion of 'male glare' is of interest because, in its potential to disempower the woman, it resonates with Foucault's (1977) and later feminists' notions of masculine disciplinary power. Embodied by Mpho, male glare wears the moral eye of a traditionally conservative Ndebele patriarchy, and enacts that sexually hierarchized society's degradation of the female body. The reaction of female characters to such seemingly uninterruptible punitive behaviour becomes critical in understanding the nuances of hidden gender resistance. My untangling of the nexus represented between an objectifying male gaze, a disciplinary male glare, and a survivalist female bodily performance offers opportunities for discussing female corporealization as embodied resistance. By corporealization I mean a process whereby a female performer such as Nomsa consciously uses her body to enable her inner 'self' to claim and modify her identity as an agent who is fully aware of the male manipulator's weakness. It is in the backdrop of entrenched, yet contradictory, masculinist perceptions of the dancing female body that I analyse Tshuma's representation of female performance in *Shadows*. This article has two goals: 1) to explore how Tshuma's *Shadows* represents Mama's and Nomsa's dances as not only displaying patriarchal images of the stereotyped sexualized

African/Zimbabwean female body but also suggesting female empowerment; and 2) to criticize the female performance represented as providing men with the opportunity to witness the symbolic fall and chastisement of the female body.

In the first section of this article I state my intention to analyse how Tshuma's portrayal of the dancing female body envisions defiant Ndebele (Zimbabwean) women as harnessing their corporeal agency to negotiate patriarchal hegemonic notions of their bodies. The second section introduces the notion of male glare before discussing the frameworks which inform my theorization of the female body and gendered dance. I unpack male gaze (symbolized in Mr Duplesis) and male glare (symbolized in Mpho) as complementary arcs of the same circle, whose aim remains the objectification of the female body. The two final sections explore Mama's *dhindindi* performances and Nomsa's pole dance displays in their transforming contexts, and discuss active survival strategies and female subjectivity through performance.

Theoretical framework: Foucault, Western feminism, and African feminism(s)

I draw on Western European post-structuralist and feminist theories (Foucault 1977; Mulvey 1997; Bordo 1993; Butler 2007) and African feminism(s) (Oyewumi 2005; Atanga 2013) to analyse Tshuma's literary representations of the female dance and bodily display. This interweaving of theories enables an understanding of female subject invisibility vis-à-vis female corporeal visibility. Foucault's impactful notions of surveillance and knowledge of the body as site of power have triggered well-known critiques from Western feminist theorists, including Susan Bordo and Judith Butler, all of whose theorizations illuminate my discussion on how the female body is constituted either as subject to a disciplinary patriarchal order or as its contender. African feminism(s) strengthen my analysis by proffering African counter-perspectives regarding responses to both the dominant colonial and postcolonial normative regimes of male disciplinary power over the imperilled African female body. This amalgamation of theories enables us to discern the contradictions of a masculinized world where men gaze at the African female body, yet paradoxically feel obligated to punish that transgressing body.

The selected theorists variously engage with the patriarchal powers arraigned against the female body, a body otherwise conceptualized as the locus of species degeneracy (Hannah 2012), and hence as vindicating patriarchal censure (Butler 2007). Benhabib (2002) argues that human societies take the woman's body as a symbolic and cultural place upon which they inscribe their moral systems. Similarly, Bordo (1993, 165) agrees with Bourdieu and Foucault that the body is "a practical, direct locus of social control". For most feminists, male power entails the objectification, normalization, domination, condemnation, and disciplining of the female body into a docile, socially controllable frame (Bordo 1993; Mulvey 1997; Butler 2007; Bullock 2010). To fit into societal expectations, the female body is coerced into regulatable habits and behaviour, the failure of which invites Foucault's (1978, 85) "law of transgression and punishment". Bordo (1993, 166) argues not only that, historically, "the discipline and normalization of the female body" has remained a ubiquitous form of gender oppression and social control "that exercises itself (…) across age, race, class and sexual orientation", but also that scholars should undertake analytics of Foucault's "power from below" to rethink a more enabling "political discourse of the female body" (167). Similarly, Butler's (2007, 371–381) notion that the performing "culturally inscribed" and gendered bodies seek "survival within compulsory systems", since gender is "a performance with clearly punitive consequences", enables analysis of how the dancing woman is alternately gazed

and glared at.

Incidentally, African feminism(s) carry the burden of explaining the survivalist spirit that imbues the struggle of African women, who, because of the constraints of contemporary 'patriarchies' in Africa and abroad, are compelled to be active and resourceful (Atanga 2013). Hard-working African women and mothers continue to suffer because the male-dominated political systems have expediently combined the Eurocentric and their own African conceptualizations of the female body to view it as "immoral, bestial and lascivious" (Tamale 2015, 22) and, therefore, as befitting restrictive surveillance. Male-controlled governments such as those in post-independence Zimbabwe have also superintended over the collapse of their economies and the insecurity of citizens, which has had a greater impact on women than on men (Nyambi 2014; Zengenene and Susanti 2019). The combative African feminisms which are engaged in "rewriting the identities of African women not only as passive victims of male dominance and patriarchy (…) [but also] as active social, economic and political agents" (Atanga 2013, 309) enliven my analysis of the behaviour of Mama and Nomsa in relation to their visual subordination by Mpho and Mr Duplesis. This theoretical tapestry, in which the body is framed as a discursive node both politically, racially, and culturally, enlightens my reading of Tshuma's depiction of the tension arising from the objectifying vision of the male gazer and/or glarer, and from how the female dancer actualizes her corporeality.

Reconstructed snippets of female dance: Defiance and conformation

Ndebele patriarchal structures and thought have generally subordinated and othered Ndebele women. Ndebele proverbs encapsulate the limiting patriarchal philosophy regarding women (Mapara and Thebe 2015), where, for instance, "sexual promiscuity [is] indirectly encouraged in men, while it [is] shunned and vehemently discouraged in women" (Bhebhe 2018, 6). Girls are socialized into submissive *owesintwane* (or minor-child) female roles against the decisive male roles for boys (Matsa 2015, 76). Ndebele courtship game songs such as *Nyama yembongolo kheth' omuthandayo* demonstrate that in the boy-girl love relationship, only boys initiate. This resonates with Gonye's (2018) analysis of *pfonda*, a sexually suggestive Shona courtship dance, as a practice that lubricates the perpetuity and lordship of the male lineage over women, thus guaranteeing patriarchally sanctioned procreation. Of late, however, Ndebele female artists, including Busi Ncube, Sandra Ndebele, and Beatar Mangethe-Khumalo, have harnessed the erstwhile gender-determining performances into empowering ones, thus navigating the precarious patriarchal socio-political and economic conditions of Zimbabwe. Performers such as Sandra Ndebele defiantly display their erotic dance movements to attract paying male patrons (Marongedze and Machanja 2018). I stretch Marongedze and Machanja's notion (2018, 131) of "erotic bodily exhibition" to discuss its potential as a (dis)empowering performance for Tshuma's female characters.

In this section I argue that Tshuma's *Shadows* reconstructs emerging female dance in urbanizing early post-independence Zimbabwe to tease out the potential of dance to wean female bodies away from patriarchal domination. The 1980s construction of towns and growth points and the resultant emergence of an urban class of sex workers, female clubbing, and *dhindindi*, became part of the intrusive post-independence social transformations which patriarchy had to keep under surveillance. Female dance in the urban nightclubs in Tshuma's novella seems ambiguously depicted, evoking both the visual pleasure of male voyeurs and the desire of panicking patriarchy (Chidora 2018) to morally censure or stigmatize women's bodies. Thus, *Shadows* presents readers with the problem as to whether

patriarchy retains control over the bodies of Mama and other entertainers, or whether these unmarried characters reinvent fecund African femininity to empower themselves outside of marriage.

In *Shadows,* Mpho reconstructs the character of his mother in seemingly chaotic bricolage fashion by bringing prose, poetry, dance, and photography to artistically converge. Through his analysis of Mama's old 1980s photographs, Mpho recreates the emerging identities of women venturing into the neon-lit urban spaces of recently independent Zimbabwe. Of significance, however, is his ambivalence where, on one hand, he draws attention to the camera-captured voyeurist dance postures of Mama, yet, on the other hand, he graphically reconstructs those dances as defiant performances of the new woman negotiating the definitions of male morality. Mpho's narrative gender role reversal, however, complicates the opportunity to parody male self-righteousness and the stereotyping of female dancers. Instead of emphasizing how his mother acquired and furnished her house and single-handedly raised him as dancer, Mpho compels readers to alternately gaze and glare at the old photographs that privilege Mama's gyrating backside.

In a flashback, Tshuma recreates how, at Zimbabwe's independence in 1980, the liberation-struggle promises of basic freedoms viz-à-vis the appeal of new township dance paradoxically empowered and corrupted rural women. Depravity, conveniently assigned to female bodies by patriarchy, seems to be linked to the euphoria of independence that characterized growth points such as Nkayi. The narrative depicts Mama befriending one male long-distance truck driver in Nkayi. She believes her bodily appeals will facilitate her escape from rural patriarchal circumscriptions. In town, she and the driver drink, dance, and indulge in sex. Mama gradually realizes how the wave of growth point dance both liberates and exposes them:

> We used to run away in the evening and trek across the bush to the growth point. There was always a *dhindindi* happening every night *bantu*! And we would dance! And dance! The truck drivers passing on their way to Wankie Coal Mine would buy us beer! It tasted bitter. But it was beer from the town. Castle Lager boy, and not *amasese* curdled in the rurals. Heh! Heh!
>
> And she would clap her hands, Mama, grinding her hips to Shwi.
>
> I was in love with one of the truck drivers (…) So one day, I ran away with him and came to see the bright city lights… The bastard was married. (10)

Mama's memories of their trekking to town and drinking the "bitter tasting" alcohol suggest her nostalgic reimagining of her generation's breaching of patriarchal expectations of submissive domesticity. Their audacity (Ahikire 2014) is seen in their harnessing and transformation of dance into a performance of female empowerment within the circumscribing patriarchal order. The girls become agents whose provocative dance moves reflect both their performative rejection of the submissive, cloistered status of the female body and their transformation of that body into one with the agency to sustain itself. The advent of modern music in post-independence Zimbabwean towns led to the purpose of African-Zimbabwean dance as social entertainment being modified and increasingly commoditized into commercial sexual display, divorced from courtship purposes such as that found in *pfonda* or *nyama yembongolo kheth' omuthandayo.* Tshuma's unmarried female breadwinners flaunt dance as a performative challenge to the symbolic marriage unit and the authority of patriarchal lineage. However,

patriarchal morality ensures that female autonomy is curtailed. It ensures that female performance struggles to free the female body from its assigned position of objectification and moral scrutiny. Despite having been abused by a married man, it is Mama who is blamed for debauchery. Notwithstanding the fact that patriarchy is actively responsible for the sexual and moral decadence in the cities, in patriarchy's biased eyes, it is the woman's body which is degenerate, and thus crucified on the patriarchal cross.

Mpho's male-mediated reconstructions of Mama suggest that for women, joy, as expressed in dance, exists only in an imaginary ungendered utopia. While all of Mama's old photographs capture her in various degrees of contentment, Mpho's contemporary poems and paintings of her are agonistic. Mpho's perspective paradoxically dampens the exuberance and jubilance expressed by Mama in these photographs by suggesting that they present happiness for women as transient and only acknowledged through artistic tributes. The underlying effect of the photographs is to excite scornful annoyance in Mpho, the master narrator, whose panoptic glare directs that of the readers. Mpho, however, recounts Mama's resilience, where, despite ageing and having been degraded from a glamorous sex worker to a housemaid, she still defiantly plays the radio loudly and "scrunch[es] up her face and sway[s] her hips (…). Whenever Shwi's songs played, Mama would leap into the air and wriggle her bum, screeching" (10). Here, Mpho replays Mama's nostalgic bodily moves, especially the erotic displays and provocative bent-over twerking. In the charting of a new identity, Mama persists in twerking, despite the performance seeming to fix her more in that object visual position for the male gaze or glare that zooms on the iconic African lower backside (Netto 2005).

While the raw photographs provide the background of dance, Mpho uses them to recreate how puritan patriarchy ambiguously re-conceptualizes a falling female body. One particularly captivating picture features the following scene:

> Mama at *dhindindi*. She is caught by the camera in the middle of a dance. She is half way to the ground, as though she is squatting. Her bum sticks out behind her. She is gazing over her shoulder at it, as though to make sure it sticks out in the right way. In her hand is a bottle of Black Label. She has a perm on her head, and huge earrings that dangle all the way to her shoulders. Her lips are pulled into a pout, something that can be considered sultry and seductive. There is Mama gulping down her youth. The picture comes alive. What songs did they dance to in those days? It was independence and the Tina Turners were raving. Yvonne Chaka Chaka was raving in South Africa. The picture comes alive and Mama is wriggling to Yvonne Chaka Chaka's hit song "We MaDlamini." (45)

This passage, despite its objectifying imagery, depicts a defiant female entertainer squatting and twerking in the middle of a bar dance or *dhindindi*. Here, in contradistinction to pretentious puritanical men, Mama, like most sex workers, uses elaborate dance to accentuate her body's attributes and posterior endowment to attract available male patrons. As the slum suburb setting testifies, Mama and her co-workers use dance and their sexuality to negotiate urban struggles and fend for their 'fatherless' children.

Ironically, however, the 'picture' that Mpho conjures re-inscribes the dancing Mama into the Ndebele/Zimbabwean patriarchal gender role where the woman has to "work hard" to "please [her] people" (46). That Mama is recreated, expertly and suggestively,

as "getting down" before appreciative male patrons (46), problematically casts her not as an honest hustler, but as a health and moral threat to patriarchy. Mpho struggles to imagine Mama as a "resilient agent" (Munyoro 2018, 1) tackling a crisis (Nyambi 2015). This casting of Mama at *dhindindi* helps complicate her identity. Notwithstanding the multi-nodal intersections of oppression, Mama hangs on to the dance and bodily accentuation that enable her to run her home even beyond the post-2000 crisis.

Mpho's initial condemnation of his mother typifies a vain masculinist conception of sex work and dance that begs deconstruction. Often, the simplistic conception of sex work contentiously depicts it as revealing women's villainy and sexual fallibility. However, Nyambi (2015) and Tamale (2015) deconstruct the monolithic male visual survey and condemnation of the female body as the bastion of lasciviousness, instead blaming it for obscuring an underlying gender dilemma and overlooking female agency. Men obsessed with "decorum and propriety" (Chidora 2018, 98) half-fearfully and half-expectantly anticipate that the female body under surveillance will depreciate from beauty to ugliness, from good health to HIV/AIDS-related disease, and from perfection to disfigurement – even if the degradation is just imaginary. This patriarchal dilemma is evident in Mpho's contradiction of self as he ponders Mama's physiognomic deterioration: "You were never this ugly. But this your business, it has made you ugly in my eyes. But I love you" (8). Split between his love for his mother and reproach for all women in general, Mpho agonises over Mama's inglorious body that needs cleansing. Mpho's later art exhibition in honour of Mama, however, demonstrates his subversive realization that 'their' overarching (and partially) imported male authority (Steady 2005) contributes to his struggling mother's physiological and physiognomic degeneration just as much as it superintends over the continued deterioration of the nation's socio-political well-being.

At the point of narration, Mpho's mother resembles that image conjured up in one of patriarchy's self-fulfilling prophecies. It is one often found in Zimbabwean fiction, for example, in the figure of Muchaneta in Patrick Chakaipa's novel *Garandichauya*. [4] From that patriarchal perspective, the bodies of both Mama and Muchaneta are represented as losing their original allure as punishment for engaging in a depraved profession which triggers actual and symbolic ugliness. This degradation, which arouses both revulsion and glee among men, however, comes as a form of fated disciplining for daring patriarchy, or endangering its survival. Here, Mpho resembles a stalking scavenger, surveilling the fallen woman's beauty and health as she deteriorates and dies. *Shadows* thus seems to suggest that some men still find it difficult to countenance women who hustle in previously taboo arenas. For instance, Mpho, who represents the reproving male glare, seems to mock and parody sex workers, as seen in his caricature of Holi:

> Her face is yellow, not a natural yellow from having caramel skin, but a jaundiced yellow from all the lightening creams she uses. The rest of her body is dark. It is a frightening contrast: an oval yellow face and then brown from the neck going down. (7)

The above quotation suggests that the originally dark-skinned Holi applies various lightening creams to her face to make it lighter in complexion – and, therefore, more appealing to men whose concept of beauty has been shaped by that of European colonialists. Her overall figure appears ridiculous in that the facial complexion achieved contrasts with the rest

[4] Muchaneta is a fictional sex worker in Chakaipa's Shona novel, *Garandichauya*. Muchaneta uses her modern township dance and cosmetically enhanced beauty to lure the urban men who patronize beer halls.

of her body, which remains dark/brown. This figure of Holi invites debate on what Oyewumi (2005) calls the racial and sexual hierarchies, where one's skin colour and sex determine one's power or worth. For a proselytizing man, the descriptor "jaundiced yellow" not only suggests disease and deterioration but also evokes the sinful tampering with the biblical Temple of God, which deserves punishment. However, Holi does not necessarily typify those Africans who have adopted the denigrating Eurocentric discourse to such a degree that they are dissatisfied with their dark skin (Fanon 1968) and bleach it. Rather, Holi's skin-bleaching resonates with Xaba's (2019, 181) cynical observation that, "in a patriarchal-capitalist society", the woman who knows that some men are fascinated by a light-complexioned woman "can voluntarily treat her body as a commodity and enrich herself through self-objectification by treating herself as an object to be viewed and evaluated based upon appearance". Indeed, it is actually the men who are tempted by the enhanced complexion who deserve mocking. Thus, Holi's determination to get money anyhow compares well with Mama's *dhindindi* gyrations and Nomsa's stripping; they are all variations of the conscious woman's body on display.

Stripping as control over one's body

Zimbabwean scholars have criticized the ways female characters situated in limiting patriarchal conditions reject victimhood as they become agents seeking survival (Nyambi 2015; Munyoro 2018; Chidora 2018). Munyoro (2018, 1) even argues that female authors 'converge' with their protagonists as they criticize gender-insensitive patriarchal structures. My analysis of *Shadows* adds to this growing body of literature, especially for those parts that focus on how Nomsa has to contend with voyeurs of European descent. However, Tshuma's privileging of a censorious male narrative compromises her intention to portray active female economic agents.

Firstly, that Nomsa jilts Mpho and decides to free herself from a relationship with a paradoxically atypical patriarchal breadwinner, is symbolic of women's empowerment. Nomsa dumps the ineffectual 'fiancé' and decides to fend for herself as a pole and striptease dancer. As a female migrant, she has to carefully manoeuvre bodily display and autonomy in Johannesburg, a cosmopolitan predatory space replete with crime, corruption, and xenophobic and sexual violence (Jacobs 2016). Her career autonomizes her so that she deploys her body to challenge the patriarchal image of the dependent, clueless woman. As in Fairley's (2006, 476) analysis, Nomsa consciously presents her body as a 'convertible' 'trade asset' and, like Bev, a popular real-life Bulawayo pole dancer, she manages to transfix the drooling voyeurs as "her sexual slaves" (Chikonzo and Chifamba 2018, 120), all in the desire to circumnavigate the harsh economic conditions created by capitalist patriarchy. In a 2006 article on Cuban urban dances, Fairley (472) theorizes how the female Cuban dancers performing in a country under American sanctions trade their dance moves for "convertible currency" for subsistence as they dance before tourists who pay tips. Here, the argument is that, unlike the dependent housewives, Tshuma's female characters decide to hustle and persevere, using their bodies to challenge the patriarchal dictum of 'decorum' and 'propriety'. Hence, Nomsa's decision to substitute pole dance for the incapable Mpho exposes the unspoken limitations of patriarchy, amplified in the failures of Robert Mugabe's ironic *amadoda sibili* [5] regime.

The body as a locus of struggles (Foucault 1977; Oyewumi 2005; Hanna 2012) has

[5] When a Ndebele minister resigned from Robert Mugabe's post-2000 government and went into exile, the latter dismissed this resignation as a non-event, gloating that his government was only for *amadoda sibili* or real men.

dominated debates on power and domination in general and male domination of female bodies in particular. Nomsa's predicament, especially her stripping on stage, could be construed as a contradictory display of the female body to equally morally inconsistent men, as well as a counteractive deployment of the subversive female body to smite both the indecorous male gaze and the disciplinary male glare. The problematic of an African female body on display resonates with that of Hottentot Venus, whose body was paraded before Western European audiences (Lindfors 2001; Netto 2005; Mashile 2019). *Shadows* re-enacts how, for some South African white men, who may represent the earlier Eurocentric 'slave-master' worldview, the body of the African woman remains uncannily fascinating. Yet, for some self-righteous puritanical African men, pole dancing and stripping constitute treachery and are taboo. The underlying paradox is illustrated in a passage in which Mpho expresses moral horror on locating Nomsa in a Johannesburg strip club:

> She is suspended on a pole. Her breasts jiggle bare. There is a group of men sitting around the pole; white balding men, red faced from the exertion of watching her. They whistle and cheer. They tuck hundred rand bills into her G-string. She giggles. (70)

These rather short sentences visualize the complexities of the utility of the female body in gendered strategies of (dis)empowerment. While, in terms of objectification, the incident resonates with what happens in pornography, where, "[i]n the condition of hierarchy and subordination, submission is necessary for women to survive" (Kurylo 2017, 2), in terms of agency, African women's combativeness harnesses "erotic bodily exhibition" (Marongedze and Machanja 2018, 131) for survival. Having appropriated the Western European performance art form of pole dance, Nomsa caricatures how European men exoticize and dominate African women's bodies. The scene in which Nomsa suspends herself on a pole, bares herself, and shakes her breasts before voyeurs invites readers to interrogate how women migrants paradoxically profit from global capitalism's sex industry. That Duplesis compels Nomsa to strip evokes the display of African women slaves on an auction block, actions which had to be resisted subtly.

From Mulvey's (1997) perspective, Nomsa's suspended nude body evokes the cinematic atmosphere, where male spectators derive pleasure from watching sexualized female characters in film. In a related article on Hottentot Venus, Netto (2005, 154) observes that this "obsessive scopophilia and fascination with gazing on the 'other' is still very much alive" in South Africa today, where the Khoisan's physiognomy remains a tourist attraction. Lindfors (2001, 61–62) explains the exoticization of Sarah Baartman as follows: "The Hottentot Venus was (…) much more than a living icon of sexual difference; she was Otherness personified – a singing, dancing, jiggling incarnation of one extreme in a rigidly hierarchical taxonomical paradigm". However, in Tshuma's novella, Nomsa manipulates this fetishization to make a living. Symbolically stirring up the same curious feelings that Hottentot Venus/Sarah Bartmann stirred up in nineteenth century European spectators, Nomsa's body fascinates contemporary rich 'white' South Africans. Nomsa's predicament suggests that the imperialist legacies of sexual exploitation still pertain in the 21st century. Notwithstanding Mangena's (2019, 102) moral concern about the 'problematic' of celebrating 'prostitution' in some narratives about women, I argue that in this structurally gender skewed society it would be unreasonably moralistic to malign poor women who try to benefit commercially by taking advantage of men's

unacknowledged weakness over the female body.

As suggested above, the sexual exploitation of the African woman is timeless, being more virulent on the slave plantations and persisting in the cosmopolitan, multi-racial city strip clubs of the 21st century. Could there be ways for women to manage their bodies in the face of sexual exploitation then? I find Nomsa's justification of her decision somewhat appealing in that she intends to subvert the humiliations of the 'cheap' 'unprotected' sexual 'labour' associated with 'corporate globalisation' (Steady 2005, 313). Being a disadvantaged female migrant, Nomsa experiences hardships that shape her decision – a decision that, however, fixes her under the patriarchal radar of surveillance. She recounts the shameful ordeal that she and the foreign vegetable vendors experience with the (fictional) corrupt Johannesburg police, and how the latter beat her up and multiply rape her in exchange for not deporting her. Seemingly powerless and outnumbered in this patriarchal jungle, Nomsa suddenly decides to circumvent that male control over her body, as well as patriarchy's propensity to condemn the female body for depravity. I argue that Nomsa actively embraces pole dance, having convinced herself that patriarchy should not obfuscate the urgency of female security and survival by overemphasizing female morality. As she claims control of her body, she decides to take full financial advantage of men's apparent fascination for her displayed body. She thus nonchalantly exchanges her sexual labour for money with poor men such as Chukwujekwu, while she sets her sights on wealthier European-born men such as Mr Duplesis, who, according to Nomsa,

> is old, with sagging skin like folds of papery leather, and thinning hair that is dyed a horrible black. But he is white, and white people have got money. He likes me, he says. He takes me to his friend who owns a strip club. It is really not that bad and better than Chukwu, better than spreading my legs for a policeman all the time. They say all I have to do is dance on a pole and make a few balding men happy. Where is the harm in that? And I am protected, they say they will process my work permit everything. (74)

Nomsa's reasoning in this passage makes business sense. There is nothing in it to denote depravity of the body, but a purely economic reasoning that recognizes the exchange value of the female body. The passage shows how Nomsa takes the proverbial risks in business without being emotional. I am not really persuaded by Jacobs's (2016, 10) interpretation that Nomsa's 'indifferent' behaviour regarding her 'sex trade' could be a manifestation of 'conversion disorder', a result of experiencing prolonged stress. Rather, Nomsa consciously and deliberately strips and allows the elderly clubbers to caress her body to earn money to protect herself against the actual rape that lurks everywhere. She actively embarks on economically empowering herself, thus contradicting her seeming façade of naivety and docility before the male voyeurs whom she symbolically hypnotizes. Although, in terms of race, the scene evokes the exploitative relations between the dominant group and a subjugated African woman, the African feminist perspective would suggest a determined African woman emerging to appropriate sexual dance to self-consciously and persistently override sexual servitude. Pole and strip dance ironically guarantees Nomsa protection from the sexual predators roaming Johannesburg, an unhomely and expensive city.

Yet patriarchal hegemony looms large – Mpho's frowning upon Nomsa is a case in point. He re-configures Nomsa as the epitome of a corruptible feminine body, and an extension of all their sex-working mothers.

However, Nomsa sees through his bigoted frustrations and explains to him that to survive in a foreign country one neither has to like nor hate one's job. Nomsa rationalizes her recently found pole dancing career as follows: "I am not here to play. I am here to make money. I do not claim to be happy here. Neither am I unhappy. I do not mind for it" (74). Nomsa thus defends her reliance on dance, bodily attraction, and movement for subsistence. She wants Mpho to understand that in disenfranchised circumstances, love is not enough; survival is everything, hence the economy of pole dance in harsh contemporary realities where the submissiveness of the African female migrant's body is contested:

> You are so full of dreams, Mpho. I do not eat dreams. I do not want them. I know the kind of girl you want, and I am not that kind of girl. I am no hero. I do not want trouble. I just want to make life a little easier, live comfortably. I also want to have nice things, like other girls. I want jewels, I want diamonds. I want a nice car. (…) I don't have any money. But I have this, my beauty, and my lovely body, and apparently that counts for a lot here. (75)

It is ironic that Nomsa does not consider herself a 'heroine'. But this does not make her a villain either. She is just a simple woman who grabs life's little opportunities to survive. Rejecting the idealist and decorous womanly figure, Nomsa declares her intention to use her bodily attributes to make life easier for her. Nomsa negates feminine self-pity and expresses faith in individual acts of defiance for survival. She also rejects the passive anti-heroism of long-suffering women. She further rebuts Mpho's paternalism, which chimes with the patriarchal stereotyping of female dancers as insubordinate fallen women. Thus, having recently realized that her alluring bodily manoeuvres could help her survive the male-dominated economy, Nomsa undergoes the process of corporealization, which involves the full coming-to-be of a decisive woman.

Conclusion

The major argument of this article about *Shadows* is that readers ought to contest the objectifying philosophy projected in the novella's male narrative that suggests that men are authorized to possess, control, and discipline the female body. Mpho exhibits this patriarchal entitlement in his choked confession: "I stare at her. I want to slap her. Want to pummel her down and crack that beauty that spits in my face against a hard surface" (76). This muted outburst signifies men's uncanny craving either to sexually exploit the women's bodily beauty or, alternatively, to obliterate that tempting beauty. Rather, the behaviour of female characters in these conditions that favour male characters has demonstrated the capacity of women to use their bodily appeal and dance to challenge male dominance and censure. The female body, then, should be a point of strength, not weakness. Tshuma's use of a male narrator's voice in *Shadows* can thus be seen as an attempt to parody patriarchal ideology and propriety, which have arguably influenced both male gaze and male glare behaviours in relation to the dancing female body. Engaging in such literary analysis could suggest the possibility of tackling imbalances in gender power relations and masculine impunity in real life from different gender fronts - real or represented. The envisaged revised outlook on female performances could help modify the taken-for-granted gender stereotypes of a dependent depraved woman. Dance, then, becomes an icon of female survival and an artistic empowerment strategy that female characters adopt to negotiate difficult conditions both locally and abroad. Tshuma's narrative counterbalances conceptions of the Zimbabwean female dancer as a stereotypical

dancing temptress, a victim and purveyor of sexually transmitted infections or of potential pornographic material, and a defiantly and corporeally identity-charting woman. Overall, both the dancing female body and the dance phenomenon itself remain ambivalent. It is ironic that it is only after they adopt the 'degraded' pole dancing posture that the hustling Nomsas of the Zimbabwe depicted can fend for themselves. There is, however, that ambivalent possibility of discussing female dance as not only exposing women to either sexual rapaciousness or censorious glare but also to empowerment.

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