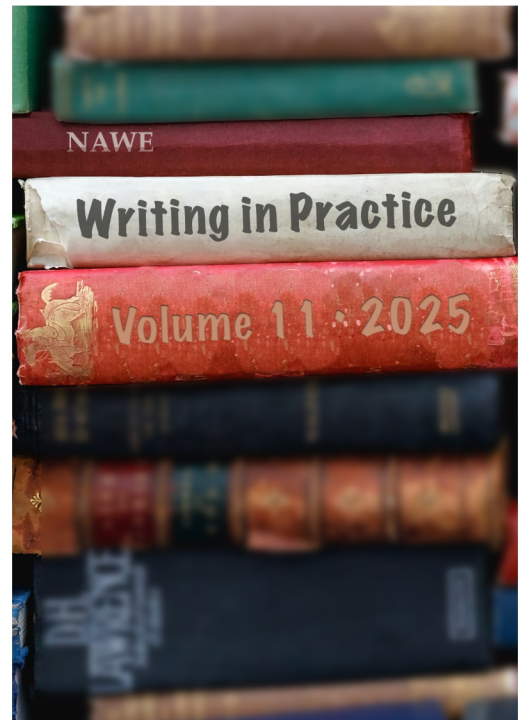




The Black Man Cannot Write: Storytelling is My Other Mother

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Ignatius Mabasa image source: Ignatius Mabasa

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Authorial Reflections on Indigenous Language, Education and Creative Writing in Zimbabwe

ABSTRACT

Before the introduction of books, radio, and film through colonisation, folklore functioned as a vital form of home-schooling for the indigenous people of Zimbabwe. When creative writing in Zimbabwean indigenous languages began, the first Shona novel, *Feso* (1956), was widely regarded as a written folktale. Forty-three years later, in 1999, the author's debut Shona novel, *Mapenzi*, also bore the strong imprint of folklore. This autoethnographic paper reflects on the enduring influence of oral storytelling during Zimbabwe's transition from a traditional to a modern society under British colonial rule, and examines how this oral tradition shaped the author's creative writing career in a context that lacked – and continues to lack – formal writing schools.

Drawing on Homi Bhabha's theory of the "third space," the paper explores storytelling as a powerful tool for education, cultural preservation, language development, and creative expression. It concludes by advocating for the revival of Zimbabwe's storytelling heritage, not merely as a means of transmitting traditional knowledge, but as a platform for co-creation – one that fosters the emergence of new, hybrid identities and bodies of knowledge.

KEYWORDS

English, Shona, Folklore, Colonization, Co-creation, Storytelling, Knowledge, Identity, Decolonial, Pedagogies, Autoethnography.

Introduction

I am a Shona language storyteller and writer, born nine years before my country, Zimbabwe, gained independence from British colonial rule in 1980. I use the term "storyteller" to refer to the oral traditions of non-literate societies, where imaginary worlds and lived experiences were created and shared through forms such as "folktales, myths, ballads, fables, medieval romances, fabliaux, exempla, local traditions" (Finnegan 2012: 312).

As an author, I primarily write in my indigenous language, Shona, because it was the language that first introduced me to words, songs, stories, characters, and sounds – long before I knew that there was a foreign language called English, a language that was to metaphorically instruct me to kill my mother so that it could adopt me. Cecil John Rhodes, the founder of the British South Africa Company that spearheaded Zimbabwe’s colonisation in 1890, “never doubted the superiority of whites” (Rotberg 1988: 688).

To him, everything English was superior. To me, however, this claim was senseless, because Shona was the language that named the foods I ate, the birds, mushrooms, and trees I encountered, and the different kinds of rain that fell in various seasons and forms.

To this day, I am often asked by my own people why I wrote my PhD thesis in the Shona language. This attitude shows the depth of the colonial problem which can be best expressed in the Shona language idiom, “chakabaya chikatyokera” (it pierced and broke leaving a part lodged inside).

To some Zimbabweans, my decision is a form of epistemic disobedience because to them knowledge is legitimized by the English language. Yet, I sometimes feel violated when I fail to find the English words for things that I know in my language. It makes me feel that if indigenous people are to have a place in this modern life, they must forsake their mother tongues. It becomes a herculean task in the “pedagogy of the oppressed,” (Freire 2000) to claim the right to think, dream, and imagine in our own tongues (wa Thiong’o 2025) especially in the face of globalization.

If knowledge is power, the source, nature and language of that knowledge must inform the liberation of the oppressed because as wa Thiongo in Feng (2025) put it, “all languages have the best knowledge of the environment they come from.” Therefore, where one would expect that “reading and interpretation present problems when we do not see ourselves in the text,” (Smith 2008: 36), there are problems, too, when we do see ourselves in a Shona PhD thesis, but think that our languages don’t deserve to be on such esteemed platforms.

A child of storytelling

Shona is both a people and a language. When my parents divorced, I was three years old and enveloped in the fog of early childhood. My mother quietly returned to her people, while my father remarried and moved on, leaving me in

the care of my grandparents. Parentless, I remained on my grandparents’ remote farm – far removed from city lights, roads, shops, and modern sophistication. I first grasped the concept of money when I moved to the city at age seven. Mishler (2013: xix), quoting Jacob Grimm (1815), writes:

Although there is almost no district which is completely devoid of folklore or stripped of it, nevertheless, it is provincial towns rather than big cities; and villages rather than provincial towns; and among the villages, the ones which are most of all quiet and impassable, located in the forests or in the mountains, it is these which are most endowed and blessed with folklore.

Far from the distractions and glitter of city life, my grandmother’s songs, idioms, and folktales adopted me and gifted me with an early awareness of language, culture, values, and wisdom that no formal schooling could match.

As a result, I began telling stories before I could read or write – before I knew about writing boards, pens, ink, and books. I am a child of storytelling – storytelling is my other mother.

My grandparents’ farm was located in what the British colonial government called African Purchase Areas. There, I had the rare opportunity to observe and interact with the very animals featured in folktales. I studied them closely and understood their characteristics and behaviours intimately.

Whenever a story involved Hare, Baboon, Tortoise, or other animals, my close proximity to their world made those tales vividly real and relatable. These animals weren’t just characters; they became my friends and kin. In Shona folktales, many animals are addressed with familial terms – such as “uncle” – and they use human relational titles among themselves, rendering them members of the extended family.

There is adrenaline, magic, intrigue, peace, and more in the storyteller’s voice as she conjures worlds, people, places, and emotions. As one folklorist noted, “Hearing and telling the tale has allowed me the luxury to live inside of it. I am part of its habitat...” (Mishler 2013: xx). My grandmother’s grass-thatched hut was the theatre, and the dying embers from the evening fire provided the lighting.

I remember evenings when the stories were so intense that it became difficult to leave her hut. Stepping out meant facing the dark and shadowy world filled with unsettling sounds –

chirping insects in the grass, the eerie whistle of nightjars, hooting owls, and the distant barking of dogs – all turning our homestead into an extension of the grotesque landscape of the folktale.

Identity

My identity as a writer is rooted in folklore – in the world of the spoken word. The novel, short story, and written poetry are all recent literary forms and do not originate from Africa.

One former Native Commissioner even declared, “the black man can’t write,” yet conceded, “but if he can’t write, he has a very rich unwritten literature” (Worthington, 1940: 9). Today, 45 years after Zimbabwe gained independence from British colonial rule, the country has twenty universities – yet none offer a degree programme in creative writing or indigenous literature.

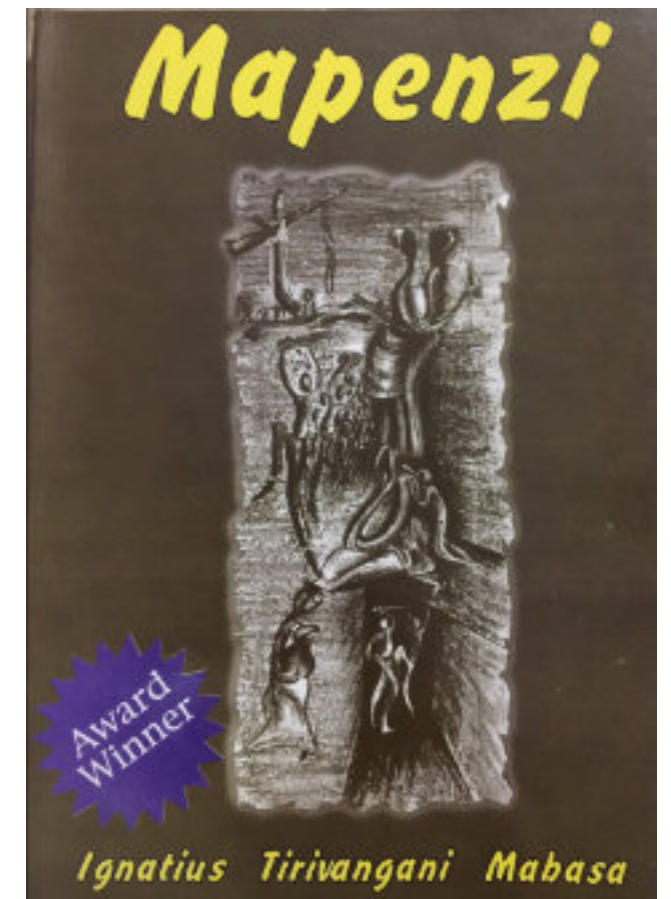
We are losing both the borrowed art of writing and our own rich, unwritten literature. Countries need national narratives, because they carry unique cultural, emotional, and historical contexts that can’t be fully conveyed in another language, especially in English (Mizumura 2015).

Zimbabwe was colonised by the British in 1890 and renamed Rhodesia after the imperialist Cecil John Rhodes. In 1894, the colonial administration established the Native Affairs Department, which was responsible for overseeing the welfare of black Africans living on tribal trust lands.

Native Commissioners, tasked with administering tribal districts, sought to understand indigenous cultures in order to manage them effectively. These cultures included spiritual beliefs, practices, and everyday life.

Because black Africans didn’t write, colonisers created the written narratives that described, interpreted, and guided African life. The absence of a written African counter-narrative allowed colonial interpretations to flourish – erasing, silencing, and undermining indigenous worldviews.

Jeater (2001) quotes a Shona man who was educated during the colonial era as saying, “When a friend of mine was growing up in the 1960s and 1970s, he was forbidden to speak chiShona, his mother tongue, at school. Violations were punished by severe beatings from the teachers.” One of the long-term effects of this colonial strategy is that postcolonial Africans have internalized and perpetuated the



Cover of “Mapenzi” by Ignatius Mabasa

silencing of their own languages, stories, songs, and cultural frameworks.

This tragic phenomenon is illustrated by the celebrated Zimbabwean writer Dambudzo Marechera, who chose to write in English rather than Shona. He explained, “It never occurred to me. Shona was part of the ghetto demon I was trying to escape. Shona had been placed within the context of a degraded, mind-wrenching experience from which apparently the escape was into the English language and education” (Veit-Wild 1988: 7).

Marechera, who studied at Oxford University, not only spoke with an Oxford accent but reportedly disrespected fellow authors who wrote in indigenous languages. On one occasion, he is said to have ordered the renowned Shona writer and cultural activist Aaron Chiunduramoyo out of a writers’ gathering, declaring: “Take him out; he isn’t a writer! Munyori, not an author” (Mushava 2021). Yet, prior to colonization and the elevation of English as a superior language and race (Rotberg 1988), oral poetry and performance were widely embedded in Shona society. “The recitation of oral poetry was widely diffused in Shona society. There were certain social occasions which demanded and

encouraged it, and certain social relationships which received appropriate expression by means of it” (Fortune n.d.: 41). Shona people were verbal artists. They expressed gratitude, celebrated achievements, courted lovers, and even greeted one another using poetic and idiomatic expressions. Where an English speaker might say, “Thank you very much,” I remember my grandmother would thank me using totemic titles of honour before launching into a praise poem lasting two or three minutes.

That did wonders to my self-esteem and encouraged me to be a poet too where “Ordinary men and women had to be their own poets if they were to be fully members of their society and cooperate adequately in the social occasions which demanded poetic expression” (Fortune n.d.: 41). That was the society I grew up in. Ordinary people chose to greet, praise, grieve, and amuse through poetry and metaphor. I particularly remember one villager who regularly used to pass through our homestead from beer drinking. The chap was exceptionally fluent and lucid in imagination and expression. Now I know why I positively responded to his creativity – he too was my mentor and inspiration.

As a young boy at my grandparents’ farm, I wasn’t aware that my artistic identity and destiny had already been placed in the oven and begun to bake. Even those around me never hinted that they could smell the sweet aroma of the artist that I was becoming. But the folktales my grandmother shared with us each evening around the dying embers of the fire enchanted me into the world of storytelling – a world where I felt at home, where I could travel to strange lands and meet peculiar characters and fantastical happenings.

Although my grandmother told her stories to a group of children, I believe I was the one most deeply captivated and shaped by them. I retold her tales to my nephews and nieces, and in doing so, added my own twists, colour, and drama. My love for storytelling grew to the point that I broke the taboo that forbade telling stories during the day. Among the Shona, this prohibition existed because they believed that stories were so enchanting such that listeners could become spellbound and unproductive. And for us cattle herders there was a risk of becoming so engrossed resulting in letting cattle wander into and destroy crops.

The liberation war

In 1976, as the liberation war that began around 1966 intensified, my father was killed. Our lives at the farm were turned upside-down. There were guns, refugees, deaths, displacements, and

danger everywhere. Schools were closed, and evening storytelling sessions with my grandmother came to an abrupt halt due to the wartime curfew.

This curfew required all people to put out fires and go to sleep before 6 p.m. During this curfew, Rhodesian security forces were authorized “to shoot on sight anyone violating the curfew” (Darnton 1976). After my father’s burial, my aunt took me to the city, where schools were still open despite the war. In the city, I deeply missed my grandmother’s folktales and the rural life. City life felt cold and unfriendly; I was ignorant of urban ways and not streetwise. However, I found a connection to my rural past and my grandmother’s stories by retelling them to my city cousins. We had no television. I soon became known as the family storyteller.

I now had more freedom to remix and reinvent the tales, retelling them in my own style when I couldn’t remember all the details, confirming the view that, “A story lives and is reborn each time a storyteller makes it his or her own and passes it on to an attentive audience” (Riddington 2013: x). It was through these informal storytelling sessions that I stepped onto the path of creative writing.

Formal schooling

Eventually, I began formal schooling. A new world opened up – books, letters, vowels, consonants, printed words, numbers, and captivating illustrations. The illustrations, especially, fascinated me. I would study a single image for a long time, eventually creating my own stories around it.

Learning to read and write in Shona at school was easy and enjoyable. As soon as I mastered reading and writing, I read anything I could find. Unfortunately, there was little relevant or age-appropriate reading material in either Shona or English.

One major source of stories for me was the Bible, which my Grade 3 teacher read aloud with great skill. In a way, her dramatic voice replaced my grandmother’s and took me through new story worlds – Jericho’s streets where Zacchaeus climbed a tree to see Jesus, and where blind Bartimaeus shouted, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!”

When we began writing our own creative compositions at school, I loved it. But because I came from a strong storytelling background, I initially wrote as if I were speaking. This presented challenges. My teachers expected stories to follow formal written conventions –

not the lively and fluid rhythms of oral storytelling. They were second-language English speakers themselves, not creative writers, and were prescriptive and unable to guide me through the transition. What they failed to see was the birthing of something between the oral and the written which Homi Bhabha (1994: 55) calls the third space where people are “free to negotiate and translate their cultural identities in a discontinuous, intertextual temporality of cultural difference.”

Learning to read had opened a new world for me. I discovered Shona novels that were beginning to appear in greater numbers, particularly those published by the Rhodesia Literature Bureau. Whenever I found books – whether from neighbours, friends, or during visits to relatives – I would ask to borrow them. Most were in poor condition, with missing pages or covers.

I remember reading books that started on page twelve without any idea what had occurred prior. Yet the human mind is remarkable. Even when a story started midstream, I could piece together the plot, imagining the missing parts, and most of the time, it worked well because I was also creating a “third space” by bringing my experiences from the storytelling world of my childhood. The story was being my “escort” as observed by Achebe (1987).

I read aloud to my cousins the novels that I had hunted and gathered. My background as an oral storyteller had prepared me well to read with fluency and expression, as well as imagine and anticipate the diverse story worlds we encountered. Again, the third space was transforming “the meanings of the colonial inheritance into the liberatory signs of a free people of the future” (Bhabha 1994: 55–56). I didn’t enjoy English books as much as I did the Shona ones.

English books were often difficult, alien, and sometimes confusing. Besides, I didn’t have a dictionary or anyone at home to ask the meaning of new words, let alone how they were pronounced. Many English poems and stories described cultural norms and behaviours that felt far removed from my reality. For example, the nursery rhyme “Little Jack Horner” left me puzzled: “Little Jack Horner sat in a corner, eating his Christmas pie. He stuck in a thumb and pulled out a plum, and said, ‘What a good boy am I.’” I wondered: Why would Jack sit in a corner? What was a Christmas pie? Why would he stick his thumb into it? What exactly was a plum? And why was he praising himself?

Other English nursery rhymes were equally perplexing. There was one about an old woman who lived in a shoe and had many children. Looking back, I see that my discomfort with English stories stemmed from a lack of comprehension of the language, and encountering unfamiliar cultural objects and contexts.

When I moved on to secondary school – after Zimbabwe had gained independence – I was delighted to discover that we had a teacher dedicated to teaching Shona only.

Finally, after years of being tossed by English in the storms of education, I felt recognized and dignified. For our very first assignment, the teacher asked us to write a creative composition in Shona. That exercise officially marked my entry into the world of creative writing.

I wrote a story that the teacher singled out as exceptional. She had me read it aloud to the entire class – and because of my storytelling background and experience of reading to my cousins I had them enchanted.

There was a mini riot as some of my classmates protested, insisting that a Form One student couldn’t possibly write so well. The teacher then took me to the staffroom, where I read the same story to a roomful of teachers. I received a standing ovation.

That moment gave me creative wings that couldn’t be clipped. The worlds of storytelling and creative writing were merging in a fantastic way that I had never imagined.

From then on, I approached writing with a conscious and serious attitude. I became more aware of language, of text, of voice – of the power and texture of words. I began writing both Shona and English short stories and poems, sharing them with my teachers and reading them during school assemblies. I also illustrated some of my own stories. For years I wrote without being published, guided only by the storytelling foundation laid by my grandmother and encouragement from my language teachers. Eventually, I met Solomon Mutswairo, the pioneer novelist of Shona literature.

Meeting the Pioneer

From colonization in 1890 up to 1920, the only provision for native education in Zimbabwe was through mission schools (Hadfield Report 1925). In their quest to find relevant content for African learners, missionaries collected and incorporated well-known indigenous folktales and folk characters into the reading materials

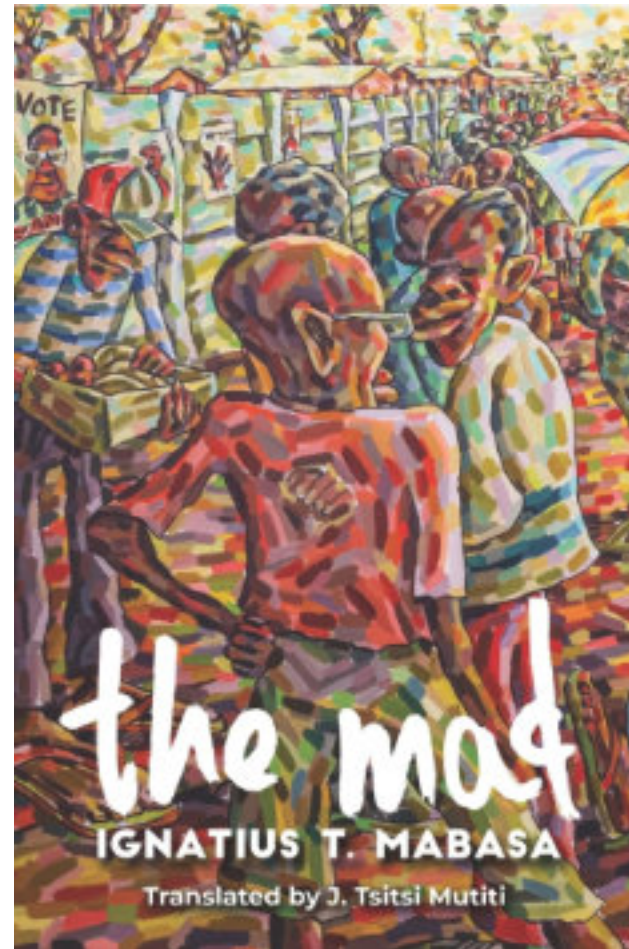
they developed for native education (Mabasa 2023). Creative writing by indigenous people only began to emerge after a small number of Africans had received missionary education and were introduced to reading and writing. The books produced for Africans between 1890 and 1920 were primarily authored by missionaries.

The first generation of Zimbabwean writers were predominantly teachers and priests educated in mission schools (Veit-Wild 1992). Despite the formal introduction of literacy, Zimbabwean creative writing in indigenous languages only truly began 66 years after British occupation. The first Shona novel, *Feso* by Solomon Mutswairo, was published in 1956 – 15 years before I was born. According to Mutasa (1999), *Feso* “marks a transition from oracy to a new mode, the written word.”

Three years later, Mutswairo participated in the compilation of the first collection of Shona poems. Shona poetry made its book debut in the 1959 collection *Madetembedzo Akare Namatsva* (*Old Traditional and Modern Poems*), which contained examples of traditional oral poetry in written form. However, the bulk of the content was original, composed directly in written form – a relatively new and unfamiliar medium for a genre that was deeply rooted in oral traditions.

As Fortune (n.d.: 41) observes, these works were “composed in the medium of writing, a medium relatively new and strange to an institution which [was] very ancient in its oral form.” Whether original or adapted from oral traditions, these early published creative works – novels and poems alike – demonstrate the enduring power and influence of oral culture. This oral resonance is similar to what one senses in the written versions of *Beowulf* or Selma Lagerlöf’s *The Treasure* – that offer a reminder of how aesthetically rich the original art forms were.

I first read *Feso* when I was around 13 years old, but at the time, I never imagined that my path would one day cross with that of its author – Solomon Mutswairo, the founding father of Shona literature. I met Mutswairo when I was 19, having gate-crashed a Zimbabwe Writers Union meeting held at a local hotel. I had hoped to meet a sympathetic published writer to whom I could show my work, in the hope of receiving guidance or even an invitation to join the esteemed company of Zimbabwe’s literary giants. The venue was filled with famous writers whose works I had read but whom I had never met in person. Before I had the chance to approach anyone, a remarkable opportunity arose. The master of ceremonies asked if anyone



Cover of “The Mad” by Ignatius Mabasa

in the audience wanted to share a sample of their new or in-progress writing. None of the established writers responded. I raised my hand and was invited to the podium. I can’t recall what I was wearing or how I appeared, but I remember vividly that it was my first time in a hotel, my first time using a microphone, and my first time reading my poetry aloud in public outside a school setting. After reading the two Shona poems, I received a standing ovation from the assembled writers. Mutswairo, moved by my performance, offered to publish my poems in a literary magazine produced by the then African Languages Department at the University of Zimbabwe. A few days later, the national newspaper *The Herald* ran a story celebrating the discovery of a new voice in Zimbabwean creative writing. A year later, I enrolled for a Bachelor of Arts General degree at the University of Zimbabwe, and the legendary Solomon Mutswairo became my lecturer. This was 32 years after *Feso* was published, and 101 years after the British raised the Union Jack to mark their occupation of Zimbabwe. Mutswairo taught a course titled “Shona Traditional Literature and Thought,” which allowed me to connect more formally and deeply with the roots of traditional storytelling.

Forty years after *Feso* was published, my debut Shona novel *Mapenzi* (*The Mad*) came out and it was described by Chiwome (2001) as one of “the most significant books to have come out of Africa,” in an article published by *The Times Literary Supplement* of 17 August 2001.

Mapenzi was translated and published in English as *The Mad* in 2025. While Mutasa (1999) describes *Feso* as a literary work that marks the transition from oracy to writing, Mutasa and Muwati (2008: 159) comment about *Mapenzi* saying, “Mabasa establishes a link with oral traditions which function as the vital nourishing supplement to his creative act.” They go on to observe that orature has transformative power “if responsibly and effectively used in literary art.” I take this as an acknowledgement of the potential of storytelling in the establishment of the third space. As a third space force, stories are powerful vehicles of ideology and socialization, and as Loomba (2005: 26) asserts, “Ideology doesn’t, as is often assumed, refer to political ideas alone. It includes all our ‘mental frameworks’, our beliefs, concepts, and ways of expressing our relationship to the world.”

And these ways of expressing our relationship to the world involve hybridization or innovative ways of revisiting, appropriating, reimagining, translating, rehistoricizing and reading anew (Bhabha 1994). As a third space force, *Feso* was banned by the Rhodesian government “because the plot seemed to be an allegory of the British-settler – Zimbabwean conflict,” (britannica.com). When I wrote *Mapenzi*, I didn’t consciously try to incorporate oral forms – riddles, proverbs, folksongs, and anecdotes – but my DNA as a child of storytelling naturally infused the text with those elements, proving that third spaces can also be organic rather than intentional.

In *Mapenzi*, the third space’s “transformative potential where people aren’t restricted to adhering to one or other set of dominant values and traditions” (Tatham 2025: 870) is seen at play. I can single out Harare the dog character that I later discovered I unconsciously used to extend the role played by folktale animal characters in stories. Harare isn’t just a metaphor; he engages in conversations with human characters in the same way animals do in folktales. Additionally, the protagonist of *Mapenzi* is fond of telling folktales within the novel, embedding the traditional tale within a modern literary form.

It’s now 69 years since the first Shona novel was published. Compared to when the Literature Bureau of Rhodesia was established in 1953,

Shona literature has stopped being vibrant and ubiquitous because “Some of the more traditional publishers have scaled down their operations,” (UNESCO 2025: 240). The Literature Bureau of Rhodesia was “a government-funded agency that promoted indigenous languages through subsidized publications,” (UNESCO 2025: 238) but the establishment was taken over by the Zimbabwean government at independence only to close in 1999, leaving a huge void in the publishing of indigenous language novels. Today, self-publishing is in vogue and “Retail outlets and individual booksellers have largely replaced traditional bookshops, which have dwindled significantly since 2000 as a result of economic challenges...” (UNESCO 2025: 240). The closure of the Literature Bureau shows how even at government level Zimbabweans “look down on literature published in indigenous languages” (Gudhlanga and Makaudze 2007). Forty-five years after independence, Zimbabwe still lacks a coherent language policy. While Japanese writer Minae Mizumura is concerned that “non-English literary traditions and languages – like that of modern Japanese – are being gradually hollowed out by English’s global dominance” (Feng 2025), some African governments like that of Zimbabwe are complicity in facilitating the English hegemony.

While back in 1940, Frank Worthington observed that “the black man can’t write,” before adding that “but if he has no history worthy of the name and can’t write, he has a very rich unwritten literature” (Worthington 1940: 9), today we face a much more concerning scenario: the black man can write – but is forgetting and despising his language and stories. He has become detached from his identity, and has lost the third space agency to explore how cultural signs and pedagogies can be translanguaged, rehistoricized, and reimagined through storytelling – something I have been experimenting with for the past twenty years.

I have used the Shona traditional template to create children’s stories *The Market Superman* (2010) and *Rehdiyo yaTsuuro* (2012). The re-imagination in both stories is disruptive of the traditional story world in a beautiful and hilarious way. In *The Market Superman* (2010) a boy sacrifices his dignity to save his little deaf brother at a vegetable market. He goes back home having lost his clothes save for his Superman underpants. In *Rehdiyo yaTsuuro* (2012) when Hare buys a radio and takes it to his colleagues in the forest, they offer mixed reactions to the new foreign product. The conflict is beautiful because it creates great dialogue on the binaries of traditional/modern

and rural/urban. The two English stories *Goats* (2014) and *Snakes and Venom* (2014) are a further exploration of the third space drawing from the folktale to facilitate dialogue in managing and resolving conflict.

When I created *Chipo neChipopayi* (2017) – it was a performed piece that I later turned into a film script. It won the best short film award at the Zimbabwe International Film Festival in 2017. Again, *Chipo neChipopayi* uses the traditional folktale template to create a Zimbabwean hybrid version of the American cartoon character Popeye, a modern setting and playful language. In all these productions, I created a third space which enables negotiation and re-signification across cultural boundaries.

Conclusion

I hate to see my storytelling heritage wasted, knowing its power to inspire future creators. My identity as an artist has largely come from my culture, and there is great potential to use that knowledge to create accessible third spaces. Drawing from ‘Southern Theory’ by Raewyn Connell (2007) which examines the global dominance of ‘Western’ social theory and argues for the importance of non-Western perspectives in understanding the world, I have a dream of teaching traditional folktales as a living template for the co-creation of hybrid stories that respond to social change.

Through that approach I won’t only honour indigenous epistemologies but also enact Bhabha’s theory of the third space in practice. Traditional folktales have always been adaptive, oral, and performative – the stories changed with context, audience, and teller. Fixing them in written “authentic” forms is a colonial imposition. Using folktales as templates rather than sacred texts returns them to their flexible roots. Besides, hybridity thrives on negotiation and Bhabha’s third space where cultures, generations, and knowledges meet becomes a great theory to contextualize my dream. Co-creating new stories with elders (custodians), educators (facilitators), and youth (critical inquirers) creates a discursive site of negotiation, breaking binaries of old/young, traditional/modern, or rural/urban.

I see the ultimate outcome as a pedagogical transformation that enables the rewriting or hybridizing of stories that engage young people as active meaning and solution-makers, not passive recipients of inherited tales. Participants won’t be confined to following a single dominant set of values or traditions.

Rather, the third space offers a generative environment where individuals and groups can

construct their own identities by drawing from multiple discourses.

This approach aligns with decolonial pedagogies that value translanguaging, situated knowledge, and critical engagement.

It will stoke the storytelling tradition fires so that they aren’t treated as a fixed museum object. The stories will have agency, countering the long-term effects of colonialism while recovering lost indigenous knowledge and languages.

BIOGRAPHY

Ignatius Tirivangani Mabasa is a Zimbabwean storyteller, writer, and academic who primarily creates in his mother tongue, Shona. His deep love for storytelling was nurtured from an early age through traditional oral narratives and folktales. Mabasa is notably the first person in Zimbabwe to write a PhD thesis in Shona, completed at Rhodes University in South Africa. His literary work engages themes of identity, culture, and social justice, drawing from his lived experiences under colonialism and during Zimbabwe’s journey to independence.

A celebrated author, Mabasa’s debut novel *Mapenzi* was described in The Times Literary Supplement (17 August 2001) as one of “the most significant books to have come out of Africa.” *Mapenzi* was later translated and published in English as *The Mad* in 2025. He has taught English Literature and Creative Writing in Zimbabwe, the United States, and Canada. A former Fulbright Scholar and writer/storyteller-in-residence at the University of Manitoba, Mabasa continues to champion indigenous storytelling.

For over two decades, he has revitalised Shona folktales through film and digital media, making them accessible to new generations. His work contributes to the preservation and evolution of African knowledge systems, while inspiring creative hybridity in literature and performance.

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This is story of a boy who sacrifices his dignity to save his little deaf brother after an accident at a vegetable market.

He goes back home having lost his clothes save for his Superman underpants.

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This is a story about a writer who meets a character who has escaped from a novel into the real world following a sharp disagreement with the author of a novel. The character tells his story and the “new” writer writes the new story.

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This story is in the Shona language. Hare buys a radio and takes it to his colleagues in the forest, they offer mixed reactions to the new foreign product. The conflict is hilarious, but critiquing colonisation.

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This is a graphic story of emotional and physical abuse, where an old woman is humiliated in the presence of her grandchildren by a male neighbour after her goats escape and destroy his maize crop.

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This story explores the pain that a mother whose daughter is mentally challenged has been raped by a known powerful individual.

After being denied justice, she takes that matter into her own hands.

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This book is based on seventeen years of research and offers the definitive biography of Cecil John Rhodes, a British imperialist who is considered one of the most controversial figures of the nineteenth century.

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This book tracks the epochs in the history of Zimbabwean literature in English, Ndebele and Shona. It does this by looking at three main categories – the generation of writers who were trained by missionaries as teachers and priests, as well as the “rebels” who departed from that path.

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This is a collection of essays that explores language, culture, and power, particularly in the context of colonialism.

It emphasizes the importance of African languages for cultural identity and resistance against both the psychological and material effects of colonialism.