

**SHONA FICTION AND ITS TREATMENT OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC ISSUES IN  
ZIMBABWE**

**by**

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## DECLARATION

Student number: **3661-740-7**

I declare that **SHONA FICTION AND ITS TREATMENT OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC ISSUES IN ZIMBABWE** is my own work and that all sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

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**DATE**

**(Mr G Makaudze)**

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## **SUMMARY AND KEY TERMS**

### **SUMMARY**

Much of what has been researched on Shona fiction has been limited to literature published before independence. The current research endeavours to assess the treatment of socio-economic issues as conveyed through fiction published since 1990. This fiction focuses on socio-economic issues in both pre-colonial and independent Zimbabwe. The study endeavours to establish if writers who focus on these issues in the pre-colonial era have been able to reclaim a complicated picture of the African pasts. It also discusses fiction that focuses on post-independence experiences; such as extent of the impact of empowerment brought about by independence, continued poverty among Africans, emancipation of the female being and the HIV and AIDS pandemic. Here, it strives to ascertain if the writers have identified the causes and offer meaningful solutions to these. The study observes that contemporary novelists on the Shona pasts have reclaimed more realistic ‘worlds’ when compared to their predecessors who have largely presented distorted images of these pasts. On the outcome of independence, two groups portray it as a total success and a total failure respectively, whilst the third and more successful group gives a balanced exposition. Fiction on poverty among contemporary Africans falls into two classes, namely rural and urban. The former still suffers from the heavy influence of colonial myths as it only highlights the effects of poverty without situating them in their tension-ridden historical context. The latter provides important sociological information on the plight of the characters but is lacking when it comes to suggesting ways of alleviating such poverty. On female empowerment, it emerges that while some writers are for women empowerment, others are against it. Women writers are better at explaining problems of women. However, both groups are still unable to identify the root cause of the incapacitation of women. On HIV and AIDS, whilst male writers demonstrate a wider social vision on the factors that disempower society against the spread and curbing of the virus, female authors still fall in the trap of blaming both men and Shona traditional customs. Overall, it emerges that contemporary Shona writers reveal contradictory modes in articulating these issues.

**TITLE OF THESIS**

SHONA FICTION AND ITS TREATMENT OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC ISSUES IN ZIMBABWE

**KEY TERMS**

Shona fiction, Shona past, socio-economic issues, responsibility, distorted images, early writers, contemporary writers, disempowerment, empowerment, incapacitation, colonial law, myth, causes, solutions.

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## **Chapter I**

### **Introduction**

#### **1.1 Preamble**

From time immemorial, art has been man's faithful companion. Through it, man has managed to come to terms with reality, exposing reality, explaining, criticising and changing it for the well-being of humankind. Fischer (1959: 15) has argued that it is through art that man has become fully human and without which he could still be animalistic in behaviour. In this regard, art has been viewed as a form of social consciousness, a mirror of society's code of conduct, arising to explore, explain and shape life. The unquestionable truth about any work of art is that it is environmental. It "does not grow or develop in a vacuum but is given impetus, shape, direction and even area of concern by social, political and economic forces in a particular society" (Ngugi, 1972: xv). Thus, every work of art's being is dictated by events and by life as lived in society. Hence, writers write what they see, hear or imagine to be transpiring in society and it is their undoubted responsibility to demonstrate commitment to this fact.

The above is also true of written Shona fiction, which, from the time of its inception during the colonial period to today, has served to explore, explain and address pertinent issues in the Zimbabwean society. Writers have tackled historical events such as colonialism and the liberation struggle, though with varying degrees of competence. More importantly, these themes have constituted current issues of their time. Since independence, a new set of topical issues has cropped up. The Zimbabwean government has adopted a number of new policies that have culminated in a number of events as well as problems and conflicts in society. Among the new policies are decolonisation and cultural regeneration, the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP), emancipation of the women as well as land redistribution. Amidst these are also other topical issues that include the HIV and AIDS scourge, underperformance of leaders in various sectors of life, all leading to acute shortages of food, foreign currency and fuel, and resulting in hyperinflation.

In response to the above, new fiction in the Shona language whose setting is the pre-colonial era has been published. In addition, literature on socio-economic experiences in the new dispensation has also been published. While it is undoubted that many Shona writers have used their works of art to expose some of the above-mentioned realities, questions such as the following need to be asked: To what extent have the writers managed to truthfully tell the socio-economic story of the Shona pasts? How important are those pasts to today's Zimbabweans? How capable are writers in exposing the root causes of the current socio-economic problems bedevilling the country? How practical are the solutions to current problems that they suggest in their works of art? These questions are crucial in examining the way the writers have handled the given current issues and in determining whether they are fully conscious of their responsibilities as writers. Questions surrounding the reasons behind the evolution of these new literary works are answered in this study.

The study focuses on some selected works in the Shona language published since 1990, and only those that focus on the selected issues. This helps determine how conscious Shona writers are to the need to make their works of art relevant to the contemporary society. Achebe (1975: 78) writes that no writer worth his mettle can avoid the big social issues of his day, what he regards as the burning issues of the day. Achebe equates any writer who avoids such important social and economic issues to the proverbial man who left his house on fire to run after a rat that had escaped from the flames.

The fiction that is analysed ranges from novels that focus on the past, such as Mutasa's *Nhume Yamambo* (1990) and those that portray the importance of that past to today's Zimbabwe, like Tsodzo's *Mudhuri Murefurefu* (1993). The study also discusses fiction on the outcome of independence, such as Choto's *Vavairo* (1990) through to fiction on African people's lack of economic empowerment that include Hwendaenda's *Mubairo* (1993). Ultimately, literature that tackles women's emancipation and the HIV/AIDS issues, which include Makayi's *Makudo Ndomamwe* (2004) and female writers' short story collection, *Totanga Patsva* (2005) is also analysed.

## 1.2 Aim of the study

The main aim of the study is to analyse how Shona writers portray socio-economic issues. The study focuses on the portrayal of socio-economic issues as conveyed through fiction published since 1990. Such fiction focuses on both the pre-colonial Shona society as well the new dispensation after 1980.

In response to government efforts to rehabilitate and regenerate African culture, African writers have re-visited the African past, trying to demonstrate that it was as good as any. In this regard, the study aims to scrutinise the objectivity of such expositions of the Shona past and in what ways these new novels differ from those of early writers. This is discussed with reference to Mutasa's *Nhume Yamambo*, (1990) and *Misodzi, Dikita Neropa* (1991), Tsodzo's *Mudhuri Murefurefu* (1993) and Zvarevashe's *Dzinza RavaGovera VaChirumhanzu NaMutasa* (1998), a historical novel focusing on the genealogy of the Shumba-Tembo clan. More importantly, the study discusses the relevance and usefulness of such works to today's Zimbabwe. How important, is for example, the custom of *kugara nhaka* (inheritance) portrayed by Tsodzo in *Mudhuri Murefurefu* (1993) in contemporary Zimbabwe? If the custom is not important, why then does an author of Tsodzo's calibre positively depict it today?

On empowerment and disempowerment in the new dispensation, the study analyses a number of issues. Firstly, it discusses Shona writers' portrayal of the extent of empowerment brought about by independence. The aim here is to expose whether or not writers are aware of the extent of empowerment independence brought to various classes or groups of people. The argument is that portrayal of both the positive and negative gains brought about by independence helps the new nation to have an informed understanding of its strengths and weaknesses necessary for a look into the future. The novels analysed here include a biography, *Magamba eChimurenga: Josiah Tungamirai* (Makari, 2003), *Vavariro* (Choto, 1990) and *Chakwesha* (Chimhundu, 1991).

Secondly, the study discusses the continued lack of empowerment among many contemporary Africans. Here it discusses the economic incapacitation suffered by both rural and urban dwellers. It strives to determine if writers are aware of the root causes of this poverty and if they

have suggested humane solutions to alleviate it. It also intends to establish if contemporary writers have moved away from the victim-blame characteristic of most early writers. The question to answer is whether they have exonerated characters from blame. This section focuses on *Mubairo* (Hwendaenda, 1993), *Minisita Munhuwo* (Chitsike, 1999) and *Ndozviudza Aniko?* (Nyandoro, 2006).

In addition, the study scrutinises efforts being made to empower women. The intention is to note if writers are aware of the root causes of women's incapacitation and whether they are able to offer sound solutions to such. Male authors' perception of government policies meant to elevate the status of the female gender are exposed and compared to how the female writers themselves tell their own story. The idea is to establish if male and female writers' depiction of the feminine problem is the same. On this, focus is on Makayi's *Makudo Ndomamwe* (2004), Mutasa's *Sekai: Minda Tave Nayo* (2005), Moyo's *Ndabva Zera* (1992) and *Chemera Mudundundu* (2002) and Chitsike's *Magora Panyama* (1999). Owing to the paucity of novels published by women writers, the study supplements this with some stories from the female short story collection *Masimba* (2004).

Lastly, the research focuses on factors that disempower society from understanding the complexity of the HIV and AIDS pandemic. The focus here is also on the recommended ways of empowering people against HIV/AIDS. In this regard, the study discusses Mukwazhi's *Zvibaye Woga* (1996), Chitsike's *Minisita Munhuwo* (1999) and the female short story collection *Totanga Patsva* (2005). The aim is to establish male and female writers' vision of the pandemic. Are they able to identify the factors that disempower society against the spread of the pandemic and are they able to help suggest ways of empowering society to fight against its spread? Overall, the study aims to establish whether contemporary writers have been any better in articulating issues grappled with by modern society as compared to their predecessors and whether they have meaningfully undertaken the responsibilities expected of them as writers.

### 1.3 Justification of the research

The relationship between literature and society has long been recognised (Veit-Wild, 1993: 2), yet the study of Shona fiction lags behind if compared with literary production. Most studies on Shona fiction to date are sadly limited to literature published just before independence yet new experiences, which the Zimbabwean country has undergone, have given birth to a new and thought-provoking fiction which addresses these but which sadly is yet to be scrutinised. Kahari in his numerous works ranging from *The Writings of Patrick Chakaipa* (1972), *Aspects of the Shona Novel* (1986) to the recent *The Moral Vision of Patrick Chakaipa* (1997) limits his scrutiny to fiction published before independence. Chiwome (1996, 2002), who has also examined the factors that have underdeveloped Shona fiction, limits his analysis to fiction published between 1956 and 1980. Despite bringing in a new and refreshing feminist perspective, Gaidzanwa's exposition, like the aforementioned, ends at books published before independence. Ironically, the country of Zimbabwe has of late gone through experiences that have culminated in new and serious fiction that addresses the issues the country has grappled with and yet no serious study of such works of art has been done.

The current study's 'broad' or 'dialectical' approach to today's realities encourages the Zimbabwean population to have a comprehensive self-analysis of their new policies and situation instead of a partial gaze that usually tends to produce a wrong, warped, or even idealistic image of the situation on the ground. No meaningful discussion and understanding of for example, social issues exist if done in isolation from the economic and political aspects that have a bearing on them. Such a study also helps remind writers to remain focused on their social responsibilities in an ever-changing environment without which their art may unintentionally degenerate into the European concept of art for art's sake. This is because literary development should not just be measured only in quantitative terms, but in qualitative terms too since every work of art serves a specific purpose in society.

The study also chooses to focus on socio-economic issues because they are interfaced with matters of development. Many of the policies adopted and pursued by the government are done under the guise of development. There is therefore need to scrutinise these issues because Africa

wants to develop, but development continues to elude it as a result of many mitigating factors (Chiwome, in Chiwome and Gambahaya [eds], 1998: v). The study shows whether the views and ideas generated and disseminated by writers of Shona fiction can help transform the Zimbabwean people's lives. Hence, it is imperative to discuss issues that have to do with development until words translate into action and reality for Zimbabweans (ibid). Such issues as raised by writers are vital as far as they relate to the alleviation of suffering in the Zimbabwean society. They also help bridge the tragically ever- widening gap between the rich and the poor.

The research chooses to focus on fiction mainly because narratives comprise over 80% of literature published in Zimbabwe since 1990. A few drama texts and anthologies of poetry have been published during the period in question. Interestingly, more people have an interest in reading narratives than the other named genres. The education system at both high school and tertiary level is also more inclined towards fiction than the other types of literature and this has a bearing on what scholars of Shona literature focus on as well. More so, in many cases, more than one writer has written on each of the selected issues. Such a multiplicity of voices makes it possible for the researcher to come up with valid conclusions on the way selected issues are portrayed by Shona writers. This is unlike in poetry and plays where at times, an individual has written on many of the given issues hence making it difficult for reliable conclusions to be drawn.

The study also makes special analysis of the mentioned texts by Shona writers because they cover a wide canvas of the social and economic issues that the country has grappled with since independence. The texts are also selected because they are representative of both the old and the new and upcoming writers who have recently mushroomed in the country. Among the selected writers, only Moyo, Tsodzo, Zvarevashe, Matsikiti and N.M. Mutasa represent the old generation whilst the rest represent the new voices coming up. It is important to discover how the new and old eyes perceive the current issues experienced in the country. Again, it is important to devote greater analysis to new voices in light of the seasoned writers like Moyo and Mungoshi who have been almost every scholar's subject of analysis.

Other aspects discussed include the commitment of Shona writers as well as their ability to provide practical solutions to the problems they raise. Such is important because every writer has a bundle of duties expected from him by society (p'Bitek, 1986: 19) and again, any work of art should go beyond mere exposition and condemnation (Ngugi, 1972: 46). It should try to provide answers to the problems and questions it raises.

#### **1.4 Observations**

The study is based on a number of observations. One is that very little research has been done on how Shona writers handle socio-economic issues affecting the country as portrayed through literature published since 1990. Scholars' preoccupation with literature published before independence has left the new fiction under-nourished in terms of analysis.

Another observation that the study is based on is that Shona novelists are unevenly aware of the responsibilities expected from them by society; such as being the voice of the voiceless, revealing and explaining all that lies hidden, teaching society about its past and future as well as suggesting possible solutions to the problems affecting the country. This is because art criticises and explains social life (Plekhanov, 1986: 6) and there is no art for art's sake in Africa. Hence, the selected artists' prowess is measured against this yardstick.

The study also observes that every literature can be understood within its particular environment and that a fair appreciation of any kind of literature is preceded by a comprehension of the circumstances surrounding its birth, including the history of the writer. More to this, writers write from different standpoints and so may have different visions of the same problem or issue. While some write in support of a given system, cultural practice or policy, others may very much be against it. Due to the partisan nature of writers, historical truth may be sacrificed for national, cultural or even religious interests.

An equally important observation is that literature can help transform social life and that if writers take up their responsibilities fully, they can help society come up with a possible

understanding of their problems as well as practical solutions to such problems. It is for this reason that the authors' commitment to the Zimbabwean people's plight is scrutinised.

### **1.5 Methods of research**

The nature of this study is such that it requires a multiplicity of methods and theories to collect and analyse its findings. The study strives to make a thorough exposition of selected novels, which are its primary sources. These novels are analysed in an attempt to determine how writers of Shona fiction view and expose the identified socio-economic issues. Thus, textual analysis ultimately provides the various standpoints and visions of the authors. Such expositions by writers are compared with information from newspapers and interviews.

Newspapers are consulted because, ideally, they convey the day-to-day happenings in any country. In other words, newspapers are usually concerned with the burning issues of each day hence their focus is also the socio-economic issues, which writers of Shona fiction portray. Interviews are held with some writers and Zimbabwean citizens. Such interviews also help bring out a more balanced and objective analysis because most Zimbabweans residing in the country have the privilege of witnessing or experiencing the issues raised by the writers. Writers are interviewed so as to establish their perception of the situation on the ground and to see if there are any other factors that tend to affect their perception of the issues at stake. This is because no meaningful understanding of a literary work of art is possible outside a thorough understanding of the history of its writer. As Ousmane (not dated, p.1) argues, man is himself/herself art. In a way, this means every writer is his novel, play or poem. What we see as a novel is in fact the writer, his perception, mentality, views and standpoint. Such a multiplicity of comparisons of what is in the fiction, in the newspapers and what is obtained through interviews helps determine whether writers of Shona fiction are conscious of historical reality, which is the pre-occupation of works of art.

Secondary material in the form of critical works and novels published in English on similar issues and from both Zimbabwe and other African states is consulted. Novels and critical works published in English provide an alternative explanation to the same issues raised by Shona



writers. Relevant works from other African states are used mainly because many of these African countries have undergone similar historical processes of colonialism, liberation struggle, independence and betrayal of promises of the struggle. More importantly, issues of decolonisation, cultural regeneration, and empowerment of women among others, have been experienced in many of these countries and in almost the same way as in Zimbabwe. Hence, similarity of information or lack of it between what Shona fiction writers portray and these other sources helps us pass judgement on whether Shona writers are able to competently expose reality.

The study employs Afro-centrism as a method of literary analysis on the depiction of the Shona past and the disempowerment of the female being. Afro-centrism is a political revolt against the tyranny of western culture by those who were colonised by Europe. It is an attempt to restore pride and dignity to those denuded of either hope or racial identity. It involves an African ontology, an essentially African way of looking at reality and human relations. Within it are elements of Negritude whose standpoint Césaire in *Nkosi* (1981:10-11) outlines as follows:

We lived in an atmosphere of rejection, and we developed an inferiority complex. I have always thought that the black man was searching for his identity. And it has seemed to me that if what we want is to establish this identity, then we must have a concrete consciousness of what we are – that is, of the first fact of our lives: that we are black: that we were black and have a history that contains certain cultural elements of greater value; and that Negroes were not, as you put it, born yesterday, because there have been beautiful and important black civilisations. At the time we began to write, people could write a history of world civilisations without devoting a single chapter to Africa, as if Africa had made no contributions to the world. Therefore we affirmed that we were Negroes and that we were proud of it, and that we thought Africa was not some sort of blank page in the history of humanity; in sum, we asserted that our Negro heritage was worthy of respect, and that this heritage was not relegated to the past, that its values were values that could still make an important contribution to the world.

Although Césaire is writing about Black Americans, his views equally apply to the Shona of Zimbabwe and Africans in general. The Shona too have been subjected to, and have suffered from an inferiority complex propagated by the coloniser. The colonialists have described and labelled them in terms as inhuman, cannibalistic, barbaric, primitive and highly superstitious. They have been denied of a history or civilisation, of a past. History and civilisation have always

been regarded as something introduced by the whites. The period before colonialism has been described as the pre-historic era. There is therefore great need for contemporary Africa to counter such imperial views by restoring the dignity, humanity and pride to Africa. Such a move therefore helps people understand Shona writers' intensified concentration on experiences of the Shona past in fiction published in the 1990s and, through it, reasons for a positive depiction of that Shona past as done by some of the writers are understood. The approach aids to explain why the Shona writers are creating positive heroes in their works of art and why writers like N.M. Mutasa and Zvarevashe, who used to castigate Shona people's cultural values now take a sudden twist to praise these values and depict them objectively.

The study also focuses on issues of economic incapacitation among blacks in urban areas, the HIV and AIDS pandemic and the problems caused by modern ways of emancipating women. As such, the research employs modernism as a theory of handling some of the texts. This theory emphasises the disintegration of society; is critical of the wrongs of modern society and through a number of new techniques shows that life is individualistic and meaningless and that society is unable to solve the problems affecting it. Such a theory is quite handy in analysing novels like Nyandoro's *Ndozvuidza Aniko?* (2006) that thrive on a number of modern techniques to bring out the evils in society. It is also useful in analysing Chitsike's *Minisita Munhuwo* (1999), Moyo's novels, *Ndabva Zera* (1992) and *Chemera Mudundundu* (2002) and some short stories in *Totanga Patsva* (2005) where society's future is painted bleakly. Thus, techniques such as introspection, first person narrative, epistolary method and others are best explained and understood under this theory.

Among the issues discussed by the study is the empowerment of the female gender. The government of Zimbabwe's policy of creating a level playing field for both men and women can best be explained and appreciated from a feminist perspective. This approach helps in the discussion of novels like Makayi's *Makudo Ndomamwe* (2004), Mutasa's *Sekai: Minda Tave Nayo* (2005), Chitsike's *Magora Panyama* (1999) and some female writers' stories in *Totanga Patsva* (2005), all which centre on the problems of the female being and how such problems can be solved. Such feminist discourse is counter to Moyo's novels, *Ndabva Zera* (1992) and *Chemera Mudundundu* (2002) where women are urged to be subservient to men. The theory

helps explain why male writers like Moyo usually end their novels with the defeat of women who want to liberate themselves from the grip of traditional values. On the other hand, it also becomes clearer why female writers always tend to blame patriarchy and appear more effective in depicting the problems of their gender than their male counterparts.

The study also aims to show the differences between male and female writers in the way they look at the problem of the female being and her empowerment. Again, it intends to show how contemporary writers on the Shona past differ from their predecessors and the reasons why it is so; as well as how the contemporary writers themselves differ among themselves in how they treat the given socio-economic and political issues. As such, the study makes use of the comparative approach. Such an approach helps establish each writer's level of competence in addressing the given issues. A work of art can best be judged not in isolation, but in juxtaposition with other texts. Such comparison helps to show whether male writers depict and understand the female problem, as do the female writers. It also helps to show the difference in how the Shona past is portrayed by current writers vis-à-vis early writers. More importantly, this approach can best explain reasons for such discrepancies.

Above all, the study makes use of the socio-historical approach. The approach helps relate some of the selected literary works to the background of their authors, their childhood, education and even careers as well as the social and political forces shaping their lives and writing (Veit-Wild, 1993: back cover). The approach helps the research focus on context and content of the selected novels without being oblivious of the literary style employed by the novelists. It helps explain the prevalence of the selected issues in works of art and provides the necessary platform for a wide canvas for the description, interpretation and appreciation of these works of art. It also helps explain the rise of both, literature on the Shona past and on empowerment of Shona women, as well as the emergence of issues such as the land redistribution exercise, which some of the works of art raise. The prevalence of both African and settler-oriented myths in novels by some of the writers like Mutasa in *Nhume Yamambo* (1990) and *Misodzi, Dikita Neropa* (1991) and Hwendaenda in *Mubairo* (1993), together with common points of view like victim-blame, laziness and poverty among Africans are better understood with the help of this approach.

## 1.6 Literature review

Many scholars have written critical works on the emergence and rise of the Shona novel. One of the earliest scholars of the Shona novel is Kahari. He has a number of publications, which include; *The Novels of Patrick Chakaipa* (1972), which was re-published as *The Moral Vision of Patrick Chakaipa* (1997), *The Imaginative Writings of Paul Chidyausiku* (1975), *The Search for Zimbabwean Identity: An Introduction to the Black Zimbabwean Novel* (1980), *Aspects of the Shona Novel and Other Related Genres* (1986). Kahari has also published *The Rise of the Shona Novel* (1990), *Plots and Characters in Shona Fiction* (1990) and *The Romances of Patrick Chakaipa* (1994). Among these publications, all but *The Search for Zimbabwean Identity: An Introduction to the Black Zimbabwean Novel* (1980) and *Herbert W. Chitepo's Epic Poem: Soko Risina Musoro The Tale Without a Head: A Critique* (1988) are exclusively on the Shona novel. However, in most of these works, Kahari's thrust has largely been to show the differences between what he realises as Old World Novels and New World Novels, the influence of orature on the written narrative, culture conflict, the inclination by some writers towards moralist and didactic stories as well as an exposition of formalist elements like plots, characterisation and style.

Pongweni (1990) has introduced more of a structuralist dimension in the analysis of the Shona novel. In his *Figurative Language in Shona Discourse*, he discusses the use of metaphors, similes and idiophones by writers to bring about different qualities between and among characters. Focus is limited to novels by Zvarevashe, Chakaipa and Mungoshi, all prolific writers of the pre-colonial period.

In his *A Social History of the Shona Novel* (1996; 2002), Chiwome highlights and discusses extensively the factors that have underdeveloped Shona fiction with particular reference to the period between 1956 and 1980. Chiwome bemoans the existence of the Rhodesian Literature Bureau, the colonial education policy, the influence of Christianity and Christian-oriented education together with tradition as censorship and as having negatively affected especially the qualitative development of the Shona novel. Although he argues that such factors barred Shona

writers from objectively exposing the current issues of the time, his research is done in retrospect and is limited largely to fiction published before independence.

Gaidzanwa (1986) has introduced a new perspective in the analysis of the Shona novel. In her *Images of Women in Zimbabwean Literature*, she exploits feminist ideas to expose the various categories of women that are found in Shona fiction – ranging from single, married, widowed to the divorced; and from the subservient to the most domineering. By and large, she shows that the way writers portray women in most Shona works seems to suit patriarchal attitudes because those women who tend to go against tradition are overtly or covertly punished. Although her analysis brings in a refreshing dimension, it sadly limits its scope to novels published before independence.

Another scholar who has discussed the Shona novel is Mapara (2003). In “The Bible and Literature: The Case of Influence in Some Shona Novels,” he argues that apart from orature, the Christian Bible has also had a great influence on the Shona novel. He argues that some writers have directly or indirectly preached Christian principles while others have used the same Bible as a tool for liberation, especially Ngugi’s Shona version of *A Grain of Wheat*. He concludes that although the given writers have used the Bible, they have however not used it in the same way and for the same purpose. Mapara’s study, like the afore-discussed, largely limits itself to novels published before independence.

Another worthy contribution to Shona literary appreciation is by Veit-Wild (1993). Through the sociological approach, she discusses the various forces and circumstances that have shaped the three generations of writers of both Shona and English fiction. She argues that the personal history of an author usually manifests itself in the author’s works of art. However, she does little to prove this otherwise valid point. Although the current study also links biographies of some authors to their works, it strives to show how some of such particular histories manifest themselves in the author’s style, world-view and points of view. Again, the current study departs from Veit-Wild’s preoccupation with works of art published before independence.

To date, there is no work, which attempts to largely discuss how Shona writers treat the socio-economic issues in Zimbabwe as conveyed through fiction published since 1990. What exist are sporadic and cursory discussions of individual authors. These exist in the form of Gudhlanga (1998), Mudzovaniswa and Manyevere (both 2004) and Majecha and Mutsaro (both 2006). Gudhlanga and Mudzovaniswa have attempted an analysis of how Shona novelists, N.M Mutasa and Matsikiti respectively, depict the Shona past. These studies have zeroed in on how these writers differ from early novelists in their portrayal of the past, without explaining the reasons behind such differences and without also linking adequately such portrayals to the broader issues of cultural regeneration, decolonisation and nation-building. The current study hopes to bridge this disparity and include other works of art whose focus is not just the African past. Manyevere (2004) and Majecha (2006) among other researchers have also made attempts at a feminist analysis of the Shona novel both focusing on the depiction of female characters in the selected novels at the expense of the socio-economic issues that they raise. More importantly, such discussions on characterisation are not linked to the broader socio-economic issues, which are important in determining the behaviour of the characters. The current study thus hopes to adopt a holistic approach to the issue, linking characterisation and theme in the process.

Thus, there seems to be no analysis to date, which is seriously devoted to how Shona fiction treats the socio-economic issues affecting Zimbabwe as conveyed through fiction published as from 1990. However, there are some critics who have written critical essays in English or have analysed English novels that have a relation to the issues raised in this current study. Among such critics are Chinweizu, Jemie and Madubuike (1980), Okeh (1976), Ngugi (1972), Mensah (2004), Zhuwarara (in Ngara [ed], 1996), Chennells (in Ngara [ed], 1996) and Arndt (2002).

In *Toward the Decolonisation of African Literature* (1980: 256-259), Chinweizu, Jemie and Madubuike, popularly known as the *Bolekaja* critics (meaning *Rise and Let us fight*) argue for the decolonisation of African institutions, literature and culture from western domination. To them, Africa should create her own way of perceiving and analysing life, a way quite different from that of Europe. This African world-view they say is embedded in the African past. As a result, they say that works that focus on the African past should be paid special attention to. They correctly observe that the works of art that have focused on the African past have done so mainly

from three standpoints, which are: total rejection, romantic embrace and realistic appraisal. The first one involves writers denigrating everything that was African, labelling it as savage, barbaric, heathen and uncivilised. These writers greatly lie about the past. They make African people throw away the good that was in their culture together with the bad. The other group has great admiration for the past, labelling it as a golden era where there was eternal peace and joy, without any war, hunger disease or any kind of suffering. Again, such writers do a disservice to the African people and their past because no culture is perfect. The other group, which is full of praise from Chinweizu et al. (1980: 258), looks at the past objectively, celebrating that which is worth celebrating and ridiculing that which is worth the scorn. This group's approach is the one important in today's processes of decolonisation, cultural regeneration and nation building because Africa cannot afford to build on misinformation. Hence, the novels on the past analysed in this current study are discussed with the hope of establishing how objective such writers are in reclaiming that, which was African. It is established whether the writers bring out the vices and follies of the people. Of significance also is the importance of such expositions of the Shona past to today's Zimbabwe.

In his article, "Two ways of explaining Africa: An Insight into Camara Laye's *L'Enfant Noir* and Ferdinand Oyono's *Le Vieux Negre et la Medaille*" (1976: 74-84), Okeh argues that Africa was, and still is, in spite of the great efforts being made today, an unknown, a despised and an underestimated world. Hence, he says it is the responsibility of the black writer, taking into account what he owes to his people and to his race, to deal primarily with all facets of African civilisation. To him, there is nothing to prevent independent Africa from recovering the good ways of life, which she lost in the course of history. In other words, an African writer should reclaim a genuine African culture – exposing the beauties and pimples of ugliness that are embedded in the authentic Africa, not in the Africa created by the Europeans. The selected works on the African past are thus analysed with the hope of establishing whether the writers are capable of restoring the dignity and lost pride to the African. There is also need to find whether they have managed to build up beliefs, myths and institutions that are truly African or they have fallen into the trap of propagating colonial myths about African people and their culture.

Ngugi (1972: 39) in discussing the past describes it as a way of talking about the present and the future. He argues that our vision of the future, of diverse possibilities of life and human potential has roots in our experience of the past. He therefore challenges contemporary African writers to rediscover and reconnect themselves and their people to their past from which they were severed and dislocated by colonialism. This he says is important because “a house built on sand is likely to fall” (1972: 41). In other words, in this period of decolonisation and cultural regeneration, the first step should be self-discovery; which is only possible if people look back at their history; where they came from. The educated African saw his past and history being labelled as non-existent. Hence, the writer has the duty to restore to the contemporary African people their history and dignity. Whilst this is important, Ngugi is however quick to warn African writers like Achebe, p’Bitek and others who reconstruct the past not to be fascinated by the yesterday of their people and forgetting the present. Rather, he challenges the writers to look at the past as a way of addressing today’s problems and coming up with prospects for the future. To him, the past should not be used as a means of escaping the present but as a way of facing it. A look at yesterday is only meaningful if it is meant to illuminate today and tomorrow (1972: 46). Ngugi’s views are vital in this study, which discusses Shona writers who focus on the past. The study determines whether such expositions are of any use in helping the Shona people conquer some of the problems in today’s society; problems which include poverty, blind acceptance of foreign values, rivalry between political parties and the subordinate position of women.

Mensah, in his article “The uses of History: Three Historical Novels from West Africa,” (in Losambe [ed], 2004: 69-83) identifies and describes three uses of history. These include, making the reader choose the correct side in the struggle between freedom and oppression, enabling the African to see the value of what he has lost, as well as providing moral lessons to the living. Mensah says that Ousmane (1970) in *God’s Bits of Wood* uses history to demonstrate the strength of ordinary people when they are made conscious of their common interest and to warn those in power not to underestimate the power of the masses, while Achebe (1958) in *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God* (1965) uses history to re-educate society. Armah in *The Healers* (1979) uses history as a moral lesson. He indicates that Africa’s defeat at the hands of the colonial invader was greatly facilitated by divisions within Africa itself; divisions that arose out of the greed and selfishness for power and that the salvation of Africa, according to the novel,



lies in the healing of all social and ethnic divisions. The article indicates that any author who writes a historical novel is putting history into use. Therefore, the current study intends to examine the use to which history is put by Shona novelists who write about this history.

Among other novels that are analysed are *Minisita Munhuwo* (1999) and *Ndozvudza Aniko?* (2006), both of which portray the lack of economic empowerment among urban Africans. Ngugi in the article “Satire in Nigeria” reissued as “Wole Soyinka, T.M. Aluko and the Satiric Voice” (1972: 65) says that writers who write after independence are usually viewed as the conscience of the nation. In analysing Soyinka’s *The Interpreters* (1965), he says the writer exposes his society in breadth but without enough depth and without suggesting solutions to the problems that he raises. He criticises Soyinka for standing aloof, for only highlighting society’s weaknesses without going beyond to suggest solutions. The current study, in discussing economic disempowerment among blacks intends to establish whether the writers seek out the sources, the causes and trends (Ngugi, 1972: 66). In other words, the study examines whether writers of Shona fiction are capable of identifying the factors behind the problems they write about and whether they suggest solutions to these problems as well as the genuineness of the solutions if applied in real life.

Arndt (2002: 27-54) in her analysis of feminist writing focuses on among other novels, Bã’s *So Long a Letter* (1981) and Emecheta’s *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979). She says that through a multiplicity of voices, Bã provides a sweeping criticism of the patriarchal organisation and primarily the discrimination against women in the public sphere of society, especially in politics. The writer, according to Arndt equally blames the women as she does the men. Polygamy is roundly condemned for women’s suffering. Bã shows that men enjoy the fruits of tradition, which is tilted in their favour. Women are criticised for making life harder for fellow women. Arndt says Bã ends her novel with even the most naïve woman, Ramatoulaye breaking out of her shell, taking the initiative to liberate herself. This is a message to women to initiate their own liberation from oppressive institutions. Arndt again says Bã emphasises the issue of complementarity between men and women, which, she hopes will ultimately lead to a harmonious society. More so, Bã’s view is that gender-specific roles should be jettisoned.

In her discussion of Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979), Arndt again says that the novelist largely criticises the ugly manifestations of patriarchy such as forced marriage, polygamy and the stigma attached on women as mothers. She shows with disapproval, that men see women solely as objects of their lust and mothers of their children, denying them all individuality and independence. No single man is judged positively in the novel. Social ills like the mindless criticism of childless mothers and irresponsibility of some husbands are exposed and ridiculed. The two female novelists, as shown, view patriarchy as the chief cause of women's suffering. They see men as incapable of solving women's problems since they (men) tend to benefit from women's subordinate roles. These views from female writers are quite handy as they help to show the differences in perception that lie between female and male writers. This helps clarify why Moyo's female characters who try to liberate themselves in *Ndabva Zera* (1992) and *Chemera Mudundundu* (2002) always end up as losers yet in novels written by female writers such as Bã, female characters are victors. Hence, such views help explain the differences between Moyo and female Shona novelists' vision of the plight of women.

Zhuwarara in his article "Gender and Liberation: Chenjerai Hove's *Bones*" (in Ngara [ed], 1996: 29-44) indicates that the novel shows how African men and women respond to the repression and exploitation inherent in the colonial state. On one side, a group of African males is anxious to be accommodated by the new colonial dispensation. On the other hand, female beings' outlook and sensibility clash with those of their male counterparts. Male characters cling to 'patriarchal' ideology that views women's position as naturally subordinate to that of men since they (men) tend to benefit from it. All the male characters are shown as incapable of bringing about any positive change from the colonial order. Rather, they transfer the violence they receive from the white man to the African woman. Women characters are shown as resilient and vying for change. Zhuwarara indicates that the female characters' role as given by the author is both outstanding and problematic. The female hero is presented as thinking that the war of liberation was a crusade against the moral dirt that the settlers had accumulated through their exploitative practices and ill-treatment of blacks rather than being against the unjust economic, social and political system brought by the settler. Again, Hove shows female characters as thinking that the war was meant to reconcile blacks and whites at the level of human relations. To Zhuwarara,

such a portrayal of female characters will not create joy for feminists. In other words, a male writer who tries to present female problems usually finds himself in the danger of denigrating them to the subservient position or presenting their plight wrongly. Such criticism is handy in assessing whether Shona male novelists like Moyo positively depict women's worries. It also aids to show and explain any discrepancies between the male writers and their female counterparts.

Chennells in an article "Authorizing Women, Women's Authoring: Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*" (in Ngara [ed], 1996: 59-75) says the novel shows how the colonised, in the colonising process, are attracted to or at least, seek empowerment within the new order. He says the novel portrays the black men collaborating with and opposing colonialism and women collaborating with and contesting their oppression by men. It identifies oppression not only in the Rhodesian settler racism, but also in the conservatism of the Shona patriarchy. Chennells indicates that writers like Dangarembga are provoked into writing because of the attacks on women in male-authored fiction, arguing that male authors blame women far too much. *Nervous Conditions* (1988) ends with Tambudzai, the main character taking the initiative to write her own story, criticising patriarchal conventions, which deny even respectable women a sense of what they are. Shona culture is criticised for pre-supposing discrete destinies for women and men, with women's inferiority destiny being stated and reinforced. The author is said to be grateful to European culture, which she sees as an eye-opener to Tambudzai as offering avenues of escape to trapped women. Therefore, British culture with its emphasis on an independent female being is offered as healing and liberating while African culture is damaging and constraining. The following questions can therefore be best answered with inclination to Chennells' analysis: When Shona women write, what do they see as women's problems and who is to blame for those problems? What do they suggest as solutions to the problems and how practical and viable are the solutions? Hence the selected socio-economic issues are best described, interpreted, analysed and understood in the larger context of these related analyses and expositions done by scholars mainly of African fiction written in English.

## 1.7 Burning issues and their time

Although current Shona writers write responding to issues of significance today, their predecessors too from the birth of the written Shona novel in 1956 to the period just after independence also wrote in some cases focusing on current and burning issues of their times. Hence the Shona novel has had a relatively long history of addressing topical issues of its times. This is because literature is a tool with which man describes, explains and changes his environment. However, in exposing reality, there is nothing as 'innocent' or 'neutral' writing because every writer is a writer in politics (Ngugi, 1981: x). In other words, to write is either to write in support of or against a system and, during the colonial period, it meant to write for or against colonialism.

Many events and experiences of the colonial period were so pertinent as to have given topical and thought-provoking fiction especially from Shona writers. The Shona people's fertile land was alienated and the people pushed to poor and rocky soils where it was difficult to eke out a living. They too were forced to pay an assortment of taxes; hut, poll, dog, among others and were subjected to forced labour on European farms, factories, mines and plantations. In cases where they were paid, their salaries were miserably low that they could hardly sustain a living, worse still to look after Shona families all of which were of the extended type. Families broke up as some adopted Christianity as a new religion while others remained traditional, and as some left for cities, mining and farming areas while others remained at home. The Shona were quickly transformed from first class citizens to third class, from proud and rich people to an inferior and poverty-stricken group.

One would have expected such experiences to culminate in a lot of revolutionary literature that sided with blacks. This however was not the case. Rather, novels of the time either exposed the African people's problems without showing the causes and without giving any meaningful and eye-opening solutions. In most cases, African characters themselves are blamed for the problems that the system has created for them. Examples of such works of art include Mungoshi's *Ndiko Kupindana Kwamazuva* (1975), Chakaipa's *Garandichauya* (1963) and *Dzasukwa Mwana Asina Hembe* (1967) and Zvarevashe's *Museve Wade Nyama* (1983). Among the problems raised in

these novels include family disintegration and cultural decadence as husbands left for the city and consorted with prostitutes ignoring their wives in the reserves as is the case with Rex and Matamabanadzo in *Ndiko Kupindana Kwamazuva* (1975) and *Garandichauya* (1963) respectively. The authors punish these two; Rex loses a daughter whilst Matamba is turned blind. As solution to these problems, both authors make the characters leave the cities and reunite with their families. Rex leaves for Chivhumudhara, a smaller town whilst Matamabanadzo goes back to the reserves and they are said to have lived happily thereafter.

In *Dzasukwa Mwana Asina Hembe* (1967), the family disintegrates due to excessive beer-drinking. The moral is clear; if one drinks, his family declines (as does Kufahakurambwe), whilst if one stops drinking the family changes for the better (as does Mhirimo, Kufa's friend). The book raises many problems. The Shona are in a reserve where making a living is a problem and people have resorted to brewing beer for sale whilst Vhuka, a white settler, has a very huge and fertile farm, which has very tall grass. However, the writer does not examine or explain this disparity. The farm owner, Vhuka, makes people do a lot of work as is the case with Kufahakurambwe who drives the tractor, gives people food rations and writes tickets. Vhuka also makes them work even on Christmas day. There is also a school on the farm where children are instead asked to work on the farm at the expense of their learning. There is poor accommodation at the farm as black people live crowdedly but Vhuka enjoys spacious accommodation. The author waters down everything by saying the white man is good for he pardons Kufahakurambwe who absconds from work for no apparent reason. He also slaughters his workers a beast, makes them take groceries from his shop without immediate payment, gives them gifts and pays them handsomely. In this context, Kufahakurambwe is condemned as irresponsible and in the end, no one sympathises with him as he is eventually dismissed from work. The book ends with his daughter, Mavis, marrying and having a Christian wedding and her female white employer gives her gifts. The novel, like others, raises many topical issues, which however are not satisfactorily addressed. Characters are made to suffer for the sins of the system. The solution he gives even in *Rudo Ibofu* (1966) is that African people should repudiate their ways of living and adopt western ones and should too; accept white people as their rulers.

Few authors identified problems and almost blamed the colonial system for them. Tsodzo's *Pafunge* (1972) is an example. The author exposes problems such as unemployment, vagrancy, theft, poor accommodation, and poor education for blacks all resulting in excessive beer drinking by the victims as they try to soak and forget their problems. Although Tsodzo comes closer to blaming the system, the solution he later suggests is far from convincing. Joe and his group are imprisoned whilst Rudo goes back to Mharapara Mission. The author again punishes the victims. The land issues related to these problems are never alluded to. Such solutions are far from being connected to the causes of the problems in concern. As Malcom X (1970: 51) remarks, the drug addict is not the problem, but the one who manufactures and brings the drugs. Similarly, character malformation is not the problem, but the cause of such asocial behaviour is the real problem, which needs rectification.

Another group of novels is that which does not even mention the white man. Black people are simply shown as being in problems, which they are blamed for. Examples are *Gehena Harina Moto* (Kuimba 1963), *Kurauone* (1976), *Gonawapotera* (1978) and *Museve Wade Nyama* (1983) all by Zvarevashe, and *Kumazivandzoka* (Marangwanda 1959). In the first three, Shona customs are ridiculed. Africans are shown fighting each other over trivial issues, killing each other. Traditional way of life is presented as very shameful, implicitly justifying colonialism. Yet, conversely such way of life is being lampooned at the instigation of the white man. In the last two, the African is shown as unfit for city life because he totally fails to adjust and to remain morally upright. The authors seem to fail to appreciate that since the values that govern city life are alien; the African understandably fails to cope. Unfortunately, he is criticised, laughed at and made to suffer for the problems that have been created for him. The source of the problem, the white man, is never mentioned and this makes readers believe that the white man has nothing to do with the suffering, experiences and failures of the blacks yet he has everything to do with these.

It is therefore clear that Shona fiction of the colonial period has not treated the current issues of its times satisfactorily. Writers have not lived up to most if not all the responsibilities expected of them. As Karenga explains, "Black art must expose the enemy, praise the people and support the revolution" (in Gayle [ed], 1971: 32). Colonial fiction was found wanting in this regard. Maybe

this was a result of the Literature Bureau, which censored all literature that was published then, but writers should have crafted ways of exposing reality without coming out in the open. As Achebe (1975: *xiii*) says, a writer needs never offer excuses for writing.

The advent of independence saw the birth of fiction that celebrated the liberation struggle as well as the advent of independence. Among such fiction are *Mutunhu Une Mago* (Nyawaranda, 1985) and *Zvakanga Zvakaoma MuZimbabwe* (Hamutyinei, 1984). These novels show that by colonising Africa and alienating the people's land, whites had courted trouble for themselves. In most cases, the guerrillas and masses are shown as very resourceful and wiser than the enemy who is usually depicted as stupid, naïve and cowardly. These works deify freedom fighters whom they hardly show as capable of being defeated. Such novels, though they celebrate the achievements of the fighter and the advent of independence pay a disservice to society because they are based on misinformation. Although Zimbabweans emerged victorious, it was not victory on a platter. The guerrillas and masses suffered as did the enemy and in some cases, worse than the enemy. Such kind of literature makes contemporary readers fail to realise and understand why former fighters and some politicians describe independence as "hard won". More so, such literature makes people get carried away in the celebrations forgetting to examine what the celebrations should have brought.

The Shona novel's depiction of socio-economic issues throughout the greater part of history has been compromised through one-sided representations. In some cases, the authors have deliberately stumbled along the path of reality and in others, did so unintentionally. In most cases, the Shona novelist has just managed to expose the problems affecting African people but without going beyond to identify the exact causes of such problems as well as suggesting relevant and meaningful solutions to the problems in question. Thus, the Shona writer has failed to live up to the roles expected of him by society. It is the intention of the current study to examine if Shona novelists whose fiction was published as from 1990 have been capable of being real community leaders or they have fallen into the same trap of being inept leaders of society.

## 1.8 The Shona writer and his responsibility to society

African society in general and the Shona one in particular thrives on roles and responsibilities shared in accordance with one's gender, age, social group, experience and capabilities. In a cosmology in which even the dead are expected, and evoked to carry out their duties (which include looking after the living, guaranteeing bumper harvests, prevention of illnesses), Shona writers are no exception. They too must participate fully in their duties for the well-being of society. Like anyone else, writers are and should be criticised and blamed for letting down humanity and society if they are not committed to their expected tasks. They indeed are and should be community leaders who have or should have a clear sense of where society is coming from and where it should go and the kind of home they want the Shona to build.

The various experiences and historical periods which Africans have undergone (which include pre-colonial life, colonialism, liberation struggle, independence and post-independence and the betrayal of the promises made thereof) all demand a writer of high calibre, one with a sense of duty to society.

The pre-colonial era bore an artist whose sense of duty took precedence over personal interests and gains. The artist of the time was the voice of the voiceless. He criticised that which was worth the scorn and praised that which was praise-worthy. He mapped the direction that life and society took; he indeed was a ruler (p'Bitek, 1986: 40) who carved his moral standards on wood and stone. He painted his colourful 'dos and don'ts' on walls and canvas and used his voice to sing to the accompaniment of the harp, twisting his body to the rhythm of drums to proclaim his rules (ibid). It is the writer, the descendant of the traditional artist, who needs to be committed to his duties.

The Shona writer of the colonial period lost his sense of duty and championed colonial interests. The colonisation of Africa has seen Shona writers who together with their masters, despise and scorn Shona culture, labelling it as barbaric, child-like and in some cases as superstitious and non-existent. Among such writers are Chakaipa (*Karikoga Gumiremiseve*, 1958; *Pfumo Reropa*, 1961; and *Rudo Ibofu*, 1966), Zvarevashe (*Kurauone*, 1976 and *Gonawapotera*, 1978), and



Kuimba (*Gehena Harina Moto*, 1963). These writers have championed the theme of Africa as a dark and pre-historic continent, a land devoid of civilisation and her people and culture as primitive, fetish, mindless, cruel, violent, uncivilised, shameful and needing western intervention and civilisation. These writers' presentations show as if Africa heard about culture, history, civilisation and dignity for the first time from the coloniser. Such an approach by these African writers has led Achebe to boldly claim that Africa has been the most insulted continent in the world, with its very claim to humanity questioned at various times, its persons abused and their intelligence insulted and that the duty of African writers is to bring them to an end for Africa's own sake, for the sake of her children and indeed for the safety and happiness of the world (1975: 78).

In other words, the responsibility of the writer in this case is that of rescuing the African and Shona past from the colonial misrepresentation and biased stereotyping to which it had been subjected (Etim in Emenyonu and Uko [eds], 2004: 251). The writer needs to rehabilitate the disparaged image of Africa. The artist is therefore in a sense, a historian (p'Bitek, 1974: 156) who goes back into the past to expose life as it was lived and celebrated then. He does this to help his society get on its feet again and do away with the complex years of denigration and self-abasement (Achebe, 1975: 44). As Achebe rightly argues, the writer's role is to dispose of the very first theme:

That Africa did not hear of culture for the first time from Europeans, that their societies were not mindless but frequently had a philosophy of great depth and value and beauty, that they had poetry, and above all, they had dignity. It is this dignity that many Africans all but lost during the colonial period and it is this that they must regain (Emenyonu and Uko [eds], 2004: 252).

To Achebe, the African writer cannot be excused from the task of re-education and regeneration that must be done. He must march right in front (1975: 45). As a result, he testifies:

I would be quite satisfied if my novels (especially the ones I set in the past) did no more than teach my readers that their past – with all the imperfections – was not one long night of savagery from which the first Europeans acting on God's behalf delivered them (ibid: 45).

Achebe's view of the responsibility of the writer in this case is that of a teacher who recreates the past in the present in order to educate the reader and give him confidence in his or her cultural heritage. The African writer should also enlighten the foreign reader and help him readjust the false impressions about the African culture acquired from centuries of cultural misrepresentation. Hence, contemporary Shona writers who set their novels in the past, for example, Mutasa (*Nhume Yamambo* 1990 and *Misodzi, Dikita Neropa* 1991), Zvarevashe (*Dzinza RavaGovera VaChirumhanzu NaMutasa* 1998) and Matsikiti (*Rakava Buno Risifemberi*, 1995) are discussed against this background of correcting the wrongs that had been propagated by early writers and foreigners. In line with this, one contemporary Shona novelist who writes about the Shona past testifies his intention:

*Chinangwa changu chikuru ndechokuda kudzidzisa, zvikuru zvizvarwa zvamangwana, nhorooondo yekutanga kwedzinza, magariro aiiwa navakare namabhindauko avaiita kuti vararamise mhuri dzavo. Tinofanira kudzidza nezvemadzitateguru edu kare kuti tizive kwatakabva. Munhu wose anofara kana achiziva kwaakabva (Zvarevashe, 1998: xi).*

My main aim is to teach, especially the new and coming generations, the history of the origins of the clan, their way of life and the activities they engaged in as a way of looking after their families. We must learn about the past life so that we know where we came from. Everyone is happy if they know their history.

This concurs with Killens's observation and mandate when he states:

As a writer, I must believe that most of what has already been said is a pack of lies, or, in some instances, mistakes, to be more charitable to makers of the myths. It is up to the writer to create a new vision for mankind (in Gayle [ed], 1971:361).

It is clear from Killen's view that the African story has been a distorted one. A lot of falsification has characterised early Shona fiction. This has resulted in Africans accepting racial inferiority and in them repudiating their culture and values. Therefore, the sublime task of the contemporary writer is to restore to his people a good opinion of themselves because their association and interaction with Europe has covertly and overtly denuded their self-confidence.

More importantly, this exercise of re-education and re-orientation needs not be compromised, so it requires earnestness, commitment and truthfulness. The contemporary Shona writer's

responsibility is therefore to reclaim that which is genuinely theirs and not romantically portray this past. They again need not fall into the same trap of conveying colonial myths about this African past. As Hughes (in Gayle [ed], 1971: 172) argues, “We know we are beautiful. And ugly too.” The writer’s duty is thus to expose both the beauty of the Shona past together with the pimples of ugliness so that contemporary readers can see for themselves the values and practices to uphold and those to dispose of. Their duty is that of searchers of truth, and telling the truth as best as they know it. There is no reason for obscuring the truth (Furusa, 1994: 3). As Niane (1965: 1) puts it, “royal griots do not know what lying is.” It is therefore imperative that writers be researchers of the past and other contemporary events so that as teachers, they teach that which they adequately know.

The past is so important that Chidyausiku (1984: *vii*) has remarked that:

Only a foolish generation forgets its history. Those who forget their history are doomed to repeat it. Worse still is that generation which not only forgets but mutilates its heritage.

Hence it is the duty of the contemporary writer to make people aware of, or not lose sight of where they came from; their history. Such views are important in the analysis of the role being played by contemporary Shona writers (identified earlier on) who write on the Shona past.

For the other socio-economic issues of the new dispensation, the writer’s role as put across by Chinweizu et al. (1980: 253-4) is that of perceiving social realities and making those perceptions available in works of art in order to help promote understanding and preservation of, or change in, the society’s values and norms. Among the issues that a writer needs to be vigilant about are: injustice, corruption, immorality, abuse of positions, abuse of economy, underperformance by leaders in various sectors of society, low status position of the female gender and the challenge of HIV and AIDS. In all these cases, the writer should cast light upon all that is happening; revealing all that lies hidden or concealed by darkness (Ngugi, 1982: 7-8). This is because a lot happens in workplaces, refreshment places, houses, families, governmental and non-governmental departments that readers are unaware of and that the powerless victims are incapable of voicing. The writer therefore becomes an interpreter who explains reality to the

public so that they understand it. He also becomes the voice of the voiceless, whose voice is the voice of the people and therefore of God, (Ngugi, 1982: 8). He agitates on behalf of the suffering, the exploited and the downtrodden. Such duties expected of writers are important in understanding novels like *Minisita Munhuwo* (Chitsike, 1999), *Zvibaye Woga* (Mukwazhi, 1996), *Ndozvudza Aniko?* (Nyandoro, 2006), *Totanga Patsva* (Zimbabwe Women Writers, 2005) and *Sekai: Minda Tave Nayo* (Mutasa, 2005) which focus on among others, economic incapacitation among the majority of blacks, underperformance by leaders, the HIV and AIDS pandemic and land redistribution. Here, a writer needs to be a social crusader, a commentator on society's present course, a critic (Etim, op cit p.253). He tells much of the truth, as he knows the painful truth to be (Killens op cit, p.360). He is, in Ngugi's words, the sensitive needle of his society (1972: 47) who is quick to discern when and where society errs and how that can be corrected. No one worth his mettle can refuse to be society's gadfly, its social critic who must have the courage of his conviction to expose and attack injustice, social inequality, corruption and all its forms, and further be prepared to fight for all right and just causes. As Achebe observes:

If an artist is anything, he is a human being with heightened sensitivities; he must be aware of the faintest nuances of injustice in human relations. The African writer cannot therefore be unaware of, or indifferent to, the monumental injustice, which his people suffer (1975: 79).

In the contemporary Zimbabwean society where most people's acts are now driven more by personal greed and selfish ends, the writer becomes a prophet of justice (Ngugi, 1982: 8) who exposes and passes judgement on any wrongdoing. Again, most African countries as observed by Achebe (1983: 10) are what they are because their leaders are not what they should be. The problem of such states is simply and squarely that of leadership, their failure to live up to responsibility. Leaders of various sectors of society have betrayed nations by indulging in various forms of exploitation and injustice. Some contemporary Shona writers deal with these issues and it is important to measure these writers' degree of competence in dealing with issues such as these.

The writer also needs to remind such leaders that in the past where religion played an important role in shaping politics, no one got rich by corrupt practices. Rather:

In those days wealth meant the strength of your arm. No one became rich by swindling the community or stealing government money. In fact a man who was guilty of theft immediately lost his titles. Today we have kept the materialism and thrown away the spirituality, which kept it in check (Achebe, in *Nigerian Magazine*, 1964: 5).

The task of the writer is therefore that of a philosopher who carves out morals and values that are ideal and that should govern people in moulding a humane society. He suggests the checks and balances that should govern human contact. In such a situation, he cannot afford the luxury of writing on trivial or peripheral issues but should tackle the big social and political issues of his time; what Chinweizu et al. describe as “political engagement” (1980: 254). In dealing with such issues, he needs not just expose the problems bedeviling society, but also needs to identify the causes of such problems. He must, in Achebe’s words, “show us where we went wrong, where the rain began to beat us” (1975: 44). This is because in order for us to clearly understand our present predicament, we need to have a full conceptualisation of our yesterday.

Issues like poverty among African peasants and workers dealt with by some contemporary Shona writers, for example, together with the incapacitation of women have their roots in the land issue. Unless writers identify such causes of problems, their exposition of them and the ultimate solutions they suggest may be wayward and awkward. Examples of poor solutions to problems are witnessed in Chakaipa’s *Garandichauya* (1963) and Zvarevashe’s *Museve Wade Nyama* (1983) where leaving the city with its problems and one going back to the rural areas is seen as the solution to the given predicament. Yet, the writers forget that the characters are in the city largely due to the poverty and life-threatening problems in the very reserves the characters are forced to go back to. Why people indulge in acts like corruption, self-aggrandisement and the farm invasions also needs to be contextualised. The root causes are important in determining the kind of solutions that writers suggest. It would also be important to note whether the educated and highly paid have the great enthusiasm about land to the extent of wanting to leave their jobs as Mutasa shows in *Sekai: Minda Tave Nayo* (2005).

Therefore, the other important duty of the writer is to suggest solutions to the problems he raises. Gorky (1953: 444-5) states that what we need to know are not just two realities; the past and the present in which we participate to a certain extent, we also need to know of the third reality, that of the future. In concurrence, Ikiddeh (in an Introduction to Ngugi, 1972: *xiv*) succinctly puts it when he says literature should show us not only where the rain began to beat us and how severely, but also how to prevent ourselves from perpetual exposure and our house from flood. In other words, the writer's duty is not just limited to exposition and lamentation about problems, but should map the way into the future. As such, Ngugi (1987: 85) has described the writer as a pathfinder, one who maps the way out of various problems. Writers who do not suggest solutions to the problems they raise are criticised and their art labelled as invalid. As Karenga (in Gayle[ed], 1971: 36) remarks, literature should not lead us into resignation but should contribute to the revolutionary change; if it does not, it is invalid. It should spur people into action. Commenting on the role of art and therefore of the artist, Killens says:

I am a writer, first of all, and precisely because the world stinks and I want to change it. Yes, I mean it, and any writer worth his salt is up to the same subversive business. This is the way things always were, the eternal contradiction between the artist and society. Every time I sit down to the typewriter, with every line I put on paper, I am out to change the world, to capture reality, to melt it down and forge into something entirely different (in Gayle [ed], 1971: 361).

Literature should thus help people tackle and solve the challenges or crises they encounter in life. It is for the above reasons that novels like *Ndabva Zera* (1992), *Minisita Munhuwo* (1999), *Chemera Mudundundu* (2002), *Ndozviudza Aniko?* (2006) and some short stories in *Totanga Patsva* (2005) that end pessimistically, at times with imprisonment of characters are criticised. This group of literature is weak in two ways. Firstly, it fails to suggest possible practical solutions at all. By ending with imprisonment, such fiction condemns the characters to perpetual suffering. It fails to advocate for the establishment of new cultural norms to rehabilitate citizens. Those novels, which provide answers to the questions they raise, are thus examined with the view to establish the authenticity of the solutions given.

## 1.9 Scope of research

The research has five chapters. Chapter I is the introduction, which exposes the aims, justification and observations of the research. The chapter also outlines the methods used to collect information and the various standpoints from which the collected information is interpreted and analysed. Again, in this chapter, critical works and other relevant books on the issues discussed in this study are analysed and their relevance outlined. The chapter also examines how Shona fiction has treated contemporary issues of its various historical periods as well as the responsibilities which writers in general; and Shona ones in particular have in their society.

Chapter II deemed “Historical background to the selected socio-economic issues,” exposes one to the circumstances surrounding the issues raised in the selected texts. It discusses the brainwashing effects of colonial instruments like Christianity and Christian-oriented education, the negative impact of the Rhodesian Literature Bureau to both the positive development of the Shona novel and the objective portrayal of Shona people’s culture. All this is done in a bid to justify why the Zimbabwean government, as shown through a number of selected novels has embarked on the processes of decolonisation and cultural regeneration. Colonial land policies and the Lancaster House Agreement are both discussed as a prelude to issues like rural poverty and land reforms, which are conveyed through novels such as Hwendaenda’s *Mubairo* (1993) and Mutasa’s *Sekai: Minda Tave Nayo* (2005). The advent of independence, together with its benefits and shortcomings is also discussed as premise to issues that come out in novels such as *Magamba eChimurenga: Josiah Tungamirai* (Makari, 2003), *Vavairo* (Choto, 1990), *Chakwasha* (Chimhundu, 1991), *Minisita Munhuwo* (Chitsike, 1999) and *Ndozvudza Aniko?* (Nyandoro, 2006). Amongst these issues are the enjoyment of the fruits of independence by a few people and lack of accountability on the part of leaders. Such issues, coupled with poverty among some Africans are shown as a clear recipe for prostitution and the transmission of the HIV and AIDS virus. It would be important if writers like Mukwazhi in *Zvibaye Woga* (1996) and women writers in *Totanga Patsva* (ZWW, 2005) who write on these identify such causes.

Chapter III entitled “Shona novelists and their treatment of socio-economic issues of the pre-colonial era” discusses novels set in the past. It focuses on the ability of the concerned novelists to reclaim a genuinely African cosmology, to realistically capture African people and culture, situating them in their proper context. The chapter also exposes and explains the differences between these contemporary writers on the Shona past and those who published before independence. It also seeks to determine the importance of the Shona past in today’s Zimbabwe. In the process, the chapter unearths positive attributes from that past meant for a new Zimbabwe.

Chapter IV entitled “Empowerment versus disempowerment in the new dispensation” is the mainstay of the study and it analyses fiction that deals with a variety of contemporary issues like the portrayal of the empowerment brought about by independence, continued poverty among both rural and urban blacks, the emancipation of women and the HIV and AIDS scourge. The chapter attempts to answer a host of questions and among them, whether writers such as Choto (*Vavariro*, 1990), Chimhundu (*Chakwasha*, 1991), Makari (*Magamba Echimurenga: Josiah Tungamirai*, 2003) have been able to depict the empowerment brought about by independence from a humanistic point, exposing both the positive and negative gains. It also shows whether writers like Hwendaenda (*Mubairo*, 1993), Chitsike (*Minisita Munhuwo*, 1999) and Nyandoro (*Ndozviudza Aniko?* 2006) have been able to identify the causes and ways of dealing with contemporary African poverty. In addition, the chapter also examines novels on empowerment of the female gender. It examines how male writers like Moyo in *Ndabva Zera* (1992) and *Chemera Mudundundu* (2002), Mutasa in *Sekai: Minda Tave Nayo* (2005) and Chitsike in *Magora Panyama* (1999) perceive government policies of female empowerment. The way female writers themselves (Makayi in *Makudo Ndomamwe*, 2004 and in *Masimba*, 2004) explain their problems and worries and what they see as the sources of these problems and the ways they suggest as solutions is examined. The chapter seeks to determine the differences in perception concerning the issue of emancipation of women, their problems, worries and solutions between male and female writers. The chapter intends to show whether male writers are at all capable of depicting the female gender’s problems and concerns. Ultimately, the chapter examines Shona writers’ vision of the HIV and AIDS pandemic, the factors behind its transmission and ways of dealing with it.



Chapter V marks the end of the research and it summarises the issues raised therein. It gives a general conclusion on the competence of writers of Shona fiction in exposing the selected socio-economic issues that have bedevilled the country as conveyed through the analysed fiction.

### **1.10 Conclusion**

In Africa, the focus of any literary work is and should be life as lived and celebrated by the African people. As such, each historical period has a kind of literature that captures its problems, challenges, worries and wishes. The same is true of independent Zimbabwe, whose experiences a variety of writers have captured. Of importance to ask is how the writers' works of art portray or present these happenings. This is important as it helps both the country and writers to remain focused on their responsibilities and values.

Whereas literary works published before independence have received useful analysis from literary critics, works of art published after independence, and in particular, since 1990 are yet to benefit from such informing observations from critics. In the absence of critical works on Shona writers' depiction of the new issues, it is therefore imperative to carry out research of this nature so that literary production is matched with literary analysis. In the absence of the latter, there will not be any measure to establish whether writers are creating works of art that are relevant and serve important functions in society. An analysis of works of art dealing with the new experiences in the country might help come up with solutions to the challenges facing the country because literature is a form of social consciousness, which teaches and urges society to change for the better.

Unlike the novel in English from both Zimbabwe and other African states, the Shona novel of both the colonial and immediate post-independence period has generally failed to live up to its duties of explicating and changing reality for the better of mankind. Since real life experiences inform works of art, it is the duty of novelists to study these experiences and make their observations available in their works. Again, since in history people always struggle to change and improve life, it is also crucial to observe whether artists are aware of this reality and how they manipulate it in their works of art. The worthiness of a work of art is thus judged by the

degree of artistic truth it embodies; that is, how much historical truth has been objectively captured in it. It therefore becomes important to note how contemporary novelists explore historical truth in their works of art and in what ways they differ from their predecessors and among themselves. Hence, it is important to continue stressing the significance of literature in shaping life so as to cultivate a sense of commitment in writers.

One notes that literary writing, just like other social responsibilities in society, requires earnestness, commitment and sacrifice. It is a serious endeavour, which calls for intensive and extensive research coupled with informed and unbiased interpretation of life experiences and use of realistic characters. This is something that predecessors of contemporary Shona writers failed to honour, hence, it is important to continuously remind writers of this indispensable fact until words translate into reality and action. The novel written in English together with its criticism, newspapers and interviews with citizens of the country all help determine how competently contemporary Shona writers explore reality. This is because most of what today's Shona writer writes about is contained in the aforementioned.

## Chapter II

### Historical background to the socio-economic issues

#### 2.0 Introduction

The chapter provides a wide historical background to the socio-economic issues raised through fiction published as from 1990. It exposes and explains the circumstances behind the birth of such issues. It seeks to dig out and lay bare the situations and experiences that modern Shona writers are responding to as well as the covert situations and experiences that influence these writers today, which never-the-less are usually not taken into account when trying to understand such writers' works of art. Fiction, like any other form of literature, is born out of history, responds to history and in doing so, that same history shapes it. It is therefore imperative to devote a whole chapter to historical background so that the issues that contemporary Shona novelists grapple with are situated in their social context.

The chapter seeks to answer among others, the following questions: What were the goals of colonialism? What was the missionaries and settlers' attitude towards African people and their culture? What impact did such an attitude have on African people, including African writers? What are the reasons behind the land reform exercise, and in general, what have been the causes behind African people's poverty and suffering? At independence, what policies did the Zimbabwean government embark on and what did it seek to address? What were gender relations like before and during the colonial period? Who is to blame for the contemporary female being's subservient position? How has the Zimbabwean government tried to narrow the gap between Zimbabwean men and women and how meaningful are the efforts? These questions are crucial in determining whether Shona writers are capable of telling the true African story. It is also important to establish whether Shona writers are aware of the causes of Zimbabwean people's problems and the potential solutions to these.

## 2.1 Background to decolonisation and cultural regeneration

An indisputable truth about the written African novel by African writers in general and Shona writers in particular is that it appeared after novels on Africa had been written by non-Africans, Europeans in particular. Until 1952 and 1956 when Tutuola's *The Palm Wine Drinkard* and, back home, Mutswairo's *Feso* respectively were published, almost all prose fiction on Africa was written by, chiefly Europeans. More importantly, the foreign novels and some by early Shona writers embody elements, which current Shona writers are reacting against whenever they sit to write.

Firstly, foreign writers on Africa express in their writing, prejudices and preconceptions that distort the picture of African life. In some cases, the writers consciously work out these distortions but in others, the misrepresentations are unconscious projections. In either case, the result is an Africa quite different from that projected by most of the current crop of Shona writers. To Obiechina (1975:18), the contrast is so clear that African novelists, as evidenced by the contemporary Shona writers, cannot help reacting to such works by non-Africans. Hence, contemporary Shona novelists are at one level, consciously or unconsciously writing counter discourses to the Europeans' view of Africa and her culture.

Chiwome (1996: 64) writes that much that was heard and read about Africa was through the work of foreign geographer-explorers and Portuguese historians. During the fifteenth century, and towards the end of the nineteenth century, this awareness was reinforced by the writings and memoirs of European explorers, merchants and missionaries who visited or lived in Africa, and also through the slave trade and colonial contact (Obiechina, 1975:18).

By the eighteenth century, Africa was a popular setting in European novels. Defoe, in his *The Life, Adventures and Piracies of the Famous Captain Singleton* (1720) describes an Africa whose detail he got from travel journals and geography books of his time (ibid, p.18). The novel embodies:

Most of the stereotypes, which were to characterise European writing on Africa – the irrationality and gullibility of the African who would barter food, cattle and their necessities for a few pieces of European coin and silver frippery; the poverty of Africans' material culture (often equated with absence of a civilisation); the fabulous wealth of the continent waiting to be exploited by the resourceful Europeans; the fear of the white man's might (usually the fear of his gun), all this supporting that unbridled paternalism, the sense of the "civilising mission" of the white man, which reached its full development during the Victorian age (Obiechina, 1975:18-19).

At the core of this quotation is that the very first whites to land on African soil carried back to their countries, distorted versions and perceptions about Africa, which were embraced, believed and later disseminated by their successors. By the end of the nineteenth century, writers like Rider Haggard, Edgar Wallace and others were exploiting extensively the popular European image of Africa. In books like *She* and *King Solomon's Mines* (by Haggard) and *The Green Crocodile* (by Wallace), truth is deliberately sacrificed for wayward European imagination (ibid). The African's rationality is portrayed as childish and the persona as a savage who is then contrasted with the super-human resourcefulness of the European colonial adventurers. In *The Green Crocodile*, the writer describes nerve-breaking adventures against the background of witchcraft, magic and sinister mysticism, which are all, identified with Africa (ibid). In this novel, Africans are portrayed offering human beings as sacrifices to a sacred crocodile and the foolish Africans again regard diamond and gold as ritual objects. The theme of Africa as a primitive scene, as a backdrop and as a land infested by barbarism is further conveyed through Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. Therefore the Africa in most European novels was as imagined by Europeans and not as it really was.

As for those Europeans who treated real African themes, they were still handicapped by their ignorance of African culture and their lack of understanding of African psyche (Obiechina, 1975: 22). When they write about Europeans in Africa, they can easily and realistically explore their predicament but as soon as they begin to explore Africans, whether traditional Africans or those affected by western influence, they run out of depth (ibid). The major problem is that such European writers only see African culture from outside since they are and can never be participants in the concerned people's culture. The other problem is that even if such writers were willing to dissociate themselves from their cultural presuppositions, the superior-inferior relationship which donned many European minds would make it impossible for them to adopt

the necessary humility and serious concern for truth normally expected in any work of art. In short, the popular mythology of Africa has permeated the European mind so deeply to the extent that no matter how hard a European writer tries to objectively depict African people and their culture, s/he will sooner or later fall prey to the imperialist version of African realities. As a result, tribal and communal violence constantly crop up in African novels written by Europeans. Obiechina says that with Joyce Cary's novels, except *Mr Johnson*, no matter how peacefully they might begin; they are eventually engulfed in violence – dynastic violence (*The African Witch*), religious violence (*Aissa Saved*), and inter-tribal violence (*An American Visitor*). Cary, in an introductory remark to *The African Witch* writes that "...just because it is dramatic, demands a certain kind of story, a certain violence and coarseness of detail, almost fabulous treatment, to keep it in its place" (ibid: 23). Hence, Cary's view is that for the novel to be truly African, it has to have violence at its core.

What is evident is that such European writers on African people and their culture have never developed an interest in reality and authenticity. They depict an Africa they wish to be – one of tribal, inter-tribal or communal bloodshed. Cary's novels, together with Huxley's *The Walled City*, as observed by Obiechina (ibid: 23), perversely suggest that violence is in the nature of the African and of the African environment rather than being a product of a certain kind of social and cultural situation. Africa to them is a place of religious hysteria and ritual murder, of witchcraft, magic and superstition. The view implicit in their description of African religion is that Christianity liberates its followers and binds them by love, whereas traditional religion enslaves through fear and superstition. This shows that Europeans, in their description of Africa are only interested in one side – the negative side, consciously or unconsciously shelving the positive one, relegating it into oblivion. There is a remarkable contrast between such expositions and those propagated by contemporary Shona writers of the African people and their culture. Hence, the anthropological nature of contemporary Shona novels on the Shona past is a result of them wanting to explain Shona traditional life to especially Zimbabweans who have, by reading non-indigenous writing disparaging this life, were unconsciously influenced into believing such accounts. In other words, the Shona writers are trying to correct the false images of African life conveyed in foreign writing on Africa.

At another level, the Shona novelists are trying to correct such ill-conceived ideas, which some early Shona writers also impounded and propagated. Put differently, the negative image of Africa was not only proclaimed abroad, but even locally, and was not only done by foreign writers alone, but by Europeans on African soil and worse still by some Shona writers who should have voiced against it. Therefore, contemporary Shona writers like Mutasa in *Nhume Yamambo* (1990) and *Misodzi, Dikita Neropa* (1991), Matsikiti in *Rakava Buno Risifemberi* (1995) and Zvarevashe in *Dzinza RavaGovera VaChirumhanzu naMutasa* (1998) also re-write on the Shona past so as to correct the misguided views that some Zimbabwean people adopted from missionaries and colonialist writers like Haggard and Conrad.

In approaching the rest of humanity, Zimunya (1982: 44) writes that Europeans were filled with the overwhelming assumption that the rest of humanity outside Europe were primitive and that their minds were blank slates that therefore needed the ink of western civilisation and sophistication. As such, in their conquest of the minds of most mankind, they have always conveyed the message that without the white race, civilisation would not have existed (Ani (1994: xv).

In Zimbabwe, like in most formerly colonised African states, the settler and the missionary were two sides of the same coin; of colonialism, whose aim was to control and plunder the people's wealth. As Ngugi (1987:16) rightly puts it, economic and political control could never be complete without cultural and mental control. It is the cultural bomb wielded by imperialists, which ultimately shook and destroyed the people's very core of existence – land and religion.

As foreigners, missionaries had no knowledge whatsoever of the people and their cultural values but surprisingly they claimed to be well acquainted with these. Achebe (1975: 46) succinctly puts it when he says no one can ever understand someone whose language he cannot speak. The foreigners were self-acclaimed propagators of the civilisation they had claimed to bring. However, this civilisation could not take root when the so-called pagans were still practising their less developed culture. As Zinyemba (1986:17) presents it, to the missionaries, the indigenous people's culture was not supposed to be changed, but to be completely uprooted so

that seeds of civilisation could be sown and nurtured. Hence a widespread crusade against African culture was initiated and persistently pursued.

Logically, being foreigners, one would never have expected Europeans to be knowledgeable with the African environment, cultural and belief systems. In an introductory remark to Ani's *Yurugu: An Afro-Centred Critique of European Thought and Behavior*, Clarke says that Europeans declared most things they could not understand to be primitive (1994: xv). They laughed at the gods of other people, sometimes calling them pieces of wood and stone (as in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, 1958:105) and, through propaganda and misuse of the Bible, taught other people to laugh at their chosen gods and adopt a god of their conqueror. Ani (ibid) adds that, for the Europeans, one-god idea, like the written word, represented a socio-technological advance along a revolutionary spectrum. The new religion viewed others with a multiplicity of gods as evolutionary inferior. Those who did not worship the one god either "worshipped images" or were irreligious. To the missionaries, it was impious and immoral to worship many gods, as it was stupid and backward. Because of this perception, the violent hostility towards all other religions was justified as it was viewed as morally imperative.

The European perception of African people and culture were imparted into some African people and writers who later championed this crusade against Shona people's values. Shona traditional religion was labelled as pagan, superstitious, fetish, primitive and in other extremes, as non-existent. Both missionaries and early Shona writers constantly blamed this religion, together with the so-called primitive culture, as the chief causes of African people's problems and suffering. On the other hand, Christianity and acceptance of white rule were depicted as the only practical solutions to these problems. In *Ndakambokuyambira* (1968) for example, a diviner is brought into the plot to counsel conflicting characters. His inaccurate divination leads to worse trouble in the family and one of the explicit morals at the end of the play is that diviners are not consulted by serious seekers of truth (Chiwome and Gambahaya, 2000: 92). In his poem "N'anga Dzan'en'enura Nyika", Literature Bureau (1969), Kumbirai the poet impersonates the wise old man advising another not to consult modern diviners who have been corrupted by the greed for money and the counselled old man agrees that consulting a healer is a mark of intellectual mediocrity (ibid: 93). Part of the poem reads thus:



*Hakuna n'anga dzandichambofa ndakanobvunza  
Kana ndine hoshwa ndinonanga kuchipatara  
Kwandisinganodyiswi muswe wegwereveshe  
Ndiko kwandinoenda kunorumikwa netsono (Mabvumira Enhetembo, 1969: 54).*

I never consult a diviner any more  
If I have an illness I go straight to the clinic  
Where I am not made to eat a snake-lizard's tail  
That is where I go to be given an injection

Chidyausiku in *Pfungwa Dzasekuru Mafusire* (1960) reiterates the message that traditional healers are incapable of diagnosing, let alone treat sick people and that wise and knowledgeable people consult the clinic (ibid: 93). Hence colonial literature shows African people as naïve. Writers always preach the need to be modest enough to seek expertise from hospitals, which they depict as hygienic and quite to the contrary, as cost-effective too. In their juxtaposition, the Shona traditional healer represents death and ignorance while the modern clinics and hospitals represent genuine knowledge and efficiency. Western-trained medical practitioners are shown never to let down a patient while a traditional healer is rarely shown to succeed in saving the sick. Such depictions are despite the fact that in Shona culture Shona traditional healers were, and have largely remained community leaders whose popularity rested on the perceived importance of their roles in society (ibid: 89) as will be seen in the new novels about the Shona past.

The missionaries also introduced conventional European dress, new hygienic and dietary standards (Clements, 1969: 48). Traditional clothing was despised as nakedness (Chiwome, 1996: 105). This 'nudity' according to the whites was because of the backwardness and primitive nature of the concerned people. African healing places were deemed unhygienic and hospitals and clinics were to replace them. Open wells were condemned and taped water was hailed as the best alternative. Earthen pots and utensils were scorned and in their place were metal utensils, which however only a secluded few could afford. Everything African was labelled unhygienic and everything western as hygienic. The statement 'Cleanliness is next to Godliness' was popularised. Traditional foodstuffs were condemned as fit for a pre-historic man and for the animal kingdom. New foodstuffs in the form of sugar, jam, tinned foods and others were

popularised. Consumption of traditionally made beer was banned. Bhebe (in Dachs [ed], 1973: 51) says in the Ndebele-speaking areas, traditional rainmaking ceremonies, ancestor worship and dances were all prohibited. New dances, musical instruments and music choirs were introduced to attract outsiders. Traditional instruments like *mbira*, *ngoma* (drum), *hosho* and *hwamanda* (horn) were demonised and labelled unsuitable for true worship. They were associated with heathenism and idolatry.

The missionaries fought to eradicate polygyny, *lobola* and other practices that differed from their religion and culture. *Kuzvarira* (pledging of a daughter for marriage) was condemned as ‘infant marriage’, the payment of *lobola* (bride-wealth) as “purchase of a wife by a man and so on” (ibid: 45). Monogamy and the nuclear family replaced polygamy and the extended family. Monogamy was viewed as a Christian marriage, which was bound by true love while polygamy was despised as immorality and sexual dissatisfaction. The reasons for the Shona people’s indulgence in such practices and values were never examined and this made the practices appear worse than they actually were. Samkange in *The Mourned One* (1975) aptly captures the behaviour of missionaries in colonial Zimbabwe when he says:

In the quarterly meeting a list of names of people recommended for baptism and admission into the church was presented. In considering their fitness for public recognition as Christians, the Rev Percival Ockenden ruled that those who completely gave up polygamy, drinking of beer, being married by a polygamous man and the practice of pledging their children to marry men not of their choice, and who were married in church and undertook never to ask for, or pay bride-wealth, would be received in the church – which was understood by the people of *Mariga* to be the same thing as being admitted into Heaven (p.48).

Baptism and admission into the church only came as a result of total denunciation of African culture, quite synonymous with self-denial. As a result of this, Samkange says that not only were homes broken up as husbands and wives living in perfect harmony were separated, but also in the name of God, son was taken away from mother and daughter away from father. Some previously united nuclear and extended families broke up as labels such as “Christian,” “heathens,” “saved,” “unsaved,” “born again,” “traditional” took their toll. These people could not see each other eye to eye.

The Christian-inspired break up was not just limited to families, but was extended to genealogies and clans too. Ranger, in his *The Invention of Tribalism in Zimbabwe* (1985: 3-20) recounts how early missionaries, in their zeal to invent a common writing system for the Shona language, also invented and heightened tribalism among a people that previously did not identify themselves along tribal lines. More to this, the missionaries, each in their zeal to defend their own writing systems based on their spheres of influences, marked and labelled people differently. Worse still, the rivalry amongst the churches even split the once homogenous group. Up to today, even some of those relatives who were converted into different churches do not have good relations among themselves despite all claiming to be born again. The Pentecostal churches look down upon and encourage their members not to marry from, and into the Ecumenical churches. Such division was also important to the coloniser who turned brother against brother, ethnic group against ethnic group instead of them uniting against the tyranny of colonialism. It is these that some of the contemporary Shona writers try to heal with their literature on the Shona past. Ironically, the Europeans claimed to have come to Africa to unite warring tribes, to instil peace in violent families and communities. What one sees is that if the Europeans did not create and justify the divisions, they exaggerated and worsened the ones they found in place.

Traditional education was dismissed as irrelevant and non-existent (Chiwome, 1996: 4) despite the deep philosophies that contemporary scholars are unearthing from this despised education. In its place, was introduced the formal school. Onsellen (1976: 22) observes that education is one of the most intensively used tools of social control in settler-dominated societies. The reason is that such kind of education has little if anything to do with self-empowerment. The government of the day designed a syllabus that transmitted values that were designed to make the Shona see their subordination as natural and God-given. More importantly, the first groups of people to offer this education in Zimbabwe were missionaries. It was mainly meant to make the Zimbabweans able to read the Bible. As a result, the education was Christian-oriented. Schools were seen as more effective platforms for preaching (Chiwome, 1996: 13) and controlling Africans.

With the missionary-delivered kind of education, conversion was used as a key criterion for admission into primary and secondary schools. Shona religion with its so-called backward traits

impeded students who looked for places at these schools. Ultimately, the students repudiated their religion for them to boost their chances of progressing up the educational ladder. In this education, Europe was the centre. African children were being introduced to and were being taught western culture. In distinct subjects, for example, Geography, focus was on Europe and America, with topics such as “glaciation”, “the prairies of Canada” and “monsoon climate”; issues quite distant from the African child and his environment. In history, figures like Christopher Columbus, David Livingstone, Napoleon, Hitler, Mussolini and Bismarck reigned whilst locally it was a study of defeated Africans. Hence white citizens and Hebrew figures (drawn from the Bible) were reference groups and models for the new personality. These were not supposed to be depicted negatively in the fiction that was to be studied or written. Hence, Shona children could not proudly identify themselves with any of their oral artists or local heroes. This was also partly because the other general feeling among whites was that African people did not have any history before the coming of the whites. Their history only started with slavery and colonialism. In the same vein, literacy was also associated with modernity and advanced knowledge while oracy was associated with ignorance and a backward lifestyle (Chiwome, 2002: 27).

Missionaries instilled in converts, some of whom became prolific writers, the practices and world-view of the western system. It is from this background that writers like Zvarevashe, Chakaipa, Kuimba and Kumbirai come. Hence, it is not surprising to see most of these writers castigating African people and their culture. These born-again writers imbibed and disseminated colonial myths about Africa, her people and cultural values. The most pervasive myth of European imperialism as observed by Chiwome (1996: 62) was the equation of colonialism with civilisation. Civilisation in its simplest and most practical form meant the adoption by Africans of European behaviour, clothing and other western customs (Bhebe, in Dachs [ed]. 1973: 45). Cultural, linguistic, political and economic imperialism were advocated under the guise of development. The myth justified the universalism of European culture; that for all races to be deemed developed; they should emulate and follow the footsteps of the west. As such, writers like Chakaipa portray the Shona traditional world as a backward setting.

In *Pfumo Reropa*, he (Chakaipa) pants to the colonial myth that Africa was a jungle that Europeans discovered and transformed. He says:

*Munyika yatiri kutaura, nyika yedu ino iri pakati paZambezi naLimpopo yakanga iri matondo namatondo. Makanga musina migwagwa seyatinoona zvino. Vanhu vaifamba nemutunzira tudikidiki kana kuti nomusango (p.3).*

In the country that we are talking about, this country between the Zambezi and the Limpopo was a vast area of forests. There were no roads as the ones we see today. People walked along thin pathways or through forests.

The novelist further says:

*Muno ndimo maiva mumusha memhuka dzesango. Imhuka ipi yawaishaya? Shumba, nzou nengwarati zvakanga zviru fakafaka. Nyama yakanga isingambobvunzwi, nokuti varume vamazuva iwayo vakange vari vahombarume chaivo. (p.4)*

It was the habitat of wild animals. What kind of animal could you not find? The lion, elephant and eland were in their abundance. There was a lot of meat because there were great hunters those days.

With this in mind, one is no doubt made to believe and thank Europeans for bringing development to the previously barren landscape. Such a portrayal of the Shona past vindicates lyrical descriptions of the landscape which were found in the English media:

Its numerous rivers are either flowing, or have plenty of water in them, there is too, abundance of cattle and corn and wood, and above all, it is very rich in gold, copper and other minerals. Fever is unknown and white children could be reared, which is a *sine qua non* in a country if it is to be colonised by white men. (Chiwome, 1996:1)

Therefore, to the whites, colonisation of Africa was necessary for social development. The contrast of paths and roads made by Chakaipa justifies colonialism. In other words, Chakaipa blankets colonialism with a flowery cloth so that people do not see its evil nature. Such roads were meant to exploit African wealth and labour but the writer seems oblivious of this fact. Contrary to Chakaipa's admiration of the system, to Shona peasants, colonialism had brought more misery than happiness hence their engagement in the liberation struggle.

In *Karikoga Gumiremiseve*, the same author shows that the Shona past was characterised by a hostile political climate between the Shona and the Ndebele. He writes:

*Nhasi uno tave kungosweromwa namaDzviti. Kare zvakanga zvisingaitiki... zvino kwava kuti munhu akanzi neDzviti ndinokurova unonzwa achiti kunyepa. (p.35)*

Today we spend the day drinking together with the Monsters (the Ndebele). In the past such a thing would never happen... now if a Monster (Ndebele) says he will beat a person, that person strongly disagrees.

The author attributes the peaceful co-existence of the Shona and the Ndebele to European intervention. Settler propaganda is portrayed as historical truth. To Chakaipa, as would befit a colonial mind, the Shona are *vanhu* (people) whilst the Ndebele are *madzviti* (monsters or ravaging locusts and not people). The Shona past is therefore described as a nightmare, a long night of savagery from which the European, acting on God's command delivered the people from. The same can be said of both *Gonawapotera* (1978) and *Gehena Harina Moto* (1963). In the former, a bloody feud of chieftaincy among the sons of Chipeperekwa erupts and the people are incapable of conducting any peaceful installation ceremony. *Gonawapotera* is depicted as a pool where witches, together with those killed for chieftainship were thrown to drown. Again, it was infested with snakes of all kinds. Hence, the sacred pool is depicted as a place for ritual murder. The writer does not dwell upon the proper significance of the pool in Shona life. The endless wars in the novel together with those in *Gehena Harina Moto* (Kuimba, 1963) and *Kurauone* (Zvarevashe, 1976) bear testimony to the European myth of Africans as by nature violent people whose solution to problems is only exhaustion from a bloody encounter and not reason. It supports Charles Dickens, the novelist who says:

My position is that, if we have anything to learn from the noble savage, it is what to avoid. His virtues are a fable, his happiness a delusion, his nobility, nonsense. And the world will be better when his place knows him no more (Van Wyk and MacLenann, 1983: 147).

Dickens was moving a motion to annihilate African people whom he viewed as not human beings. To him, there are no positive values to talk about in Africa or about Africans.

The inferiority complex indoctrinated in Africans by Europeans also manifested itself in Chakaipa's works, *Pfumo Reropa* (1961) and *Rudo Ibofu* (1966). When he visits the Portuguese to barter his goods, Tanganeropa, *Pfumo Reropa*'s hero is perplexed at such beings:

*Tanganeropa akashamiswa nokupfeka kwakanga kwakaita vanhu ava. Vaiva neshangu nemachira. Vanhu ava vaiva nevhudzi rinoerera. Vakanga vane runako runopinda rwavanhu vose vaakanga aona. (p.78)*

Tanganeropa was surprised with the way these people were dressed. They were clad in shoes and cloth. They had long hair. They were more beautiful than any other person he had previously come across.

In this extract, Europeans are depicted as more attractive than the Shona; their dressing is more advanced and their culture more superb. Implicit is also the fact that Tanganeropa was humiliated at his nakedness, bare-footedness and ugliness. Worse still, the European is shown as more handsome as compared to any other Shona person that Tanganeropa has come across. Yet beauty is something that is cultural. Hence such an expression of self-hate as depicted by the author is an admission of inferiority complex. Even in *Rudo Ibofu* (1966), the clothes that a white employer gives to his servant, Zingizi, despite being "second hand" are said to have caused a stir in Zingizi's village. When he is in these cast-off clothes, Zingizi's mother forgets him and, each mother in the village wishes Zingizi could propose love to her daughter. Thus Shona readers are made to feel ashamed of their personality, their skin, dressing and above all, their culture. This would ultimately make them accept and admire the European as a superior and more advanced being who had God's mandate to rule them. Albert Schweitzer's concept of the African being his brother but a junior brother (Achebe, 1975: 3) was thus being vindicated.

Polygyny and beer drinking are again depicted in a clear falsification of Shona life in Zvarevashe's *Kurauone* (1976). The conflicts that sustain the story are generated from an anarchic remote past in which dangerous sexual passions, alcoholism and other blood-curdling habits cannot be restrained until they have run their full course (Chiwome, 1996: 70). The moral of the story is very clear; polygamy and beer drinking exacerbate problems. The author castigates polygamy from the start of the novel:

*Musafunga kuti barika ndiko kuti nzanga ikure. Kubarika ndiko kunonzi kuwanza marinda pamusha. Kubarika ndiko kunonzi kuzvidyarira mhodzi dzoruvengo nenhamo, nokuti kubereka kunobereka kuwanda kwenhamo. Kubarika ndiko kunonzi kuzvitsvakira ngozi. Kubarika ndiko kutsvaka chokufa nacho. Kubarika ndiko kunonzi kusiyira vana nhaka yenhamo, yedaka nehama mutorwa aripo (p.29-30).*

Do not think that polygamy means enlarging the family. Polygamy means increasing the number of graves in a family. Polygamy means sowing for yourself, seeds of hatred and problems because more births also mean more problems. Polygamy means inviting avenging spirits. Polygamy is a sure way of courting death. Polygamy means leaving your offspring in a large pool of problems.

Polygamy is depicted as the source of enmity, poisoning and death. It is the source of African poverty. Such is anticipated from a Christianised writer who has accepted monogamy as holy matrimony. However, his image of the institution is untruthful. Chiwome (1996: 71) claims that Gararirimo's advice to his children given above represents the new thinking of the period. In the early twentieth century, Father Prestage wanted the British government to help him abolish polygamy, *lobola* and pledging of daughters in marriage. His views were as follows:

African marriages were devoid of love and that polygynous marriages were always infested through and through with jealousies, quarrels and dislike therefore he argued that *lobola*, by encouraging polygyny, cultivated laziness. For, the more wives a man had, the less he was inclined to work as his wives supplied him with all the labour he required (Bhebe in Dachs [ed]. 1973: 45).

As Chiwome (op cit: 71) rightly comments, Father Prestage is worried about the negative aspects of an institution before examining its function in the agrarian *pasichigare* (traditional) society. In other words, the lifestyle of the given time gave rationale to the practice. Customs should fall away not because of coercion, but because they no longer serve a purpose. As such, both Zvarevashe and Father Prestage did not stop to think of what was in this cultural practice that had made it survive up to that day. The Father's worry also emanates from the European myth that Africans are by nature lazy, a myth that was meant to justify the settler's use of a whip to drive Africans. The same cultural practice is portrayed negatively in other Shona novels like *Pfumo Reropa* (1961). However, lack of an objective portrayal of the practice made the custom appear more irrational than it actually was. Again, Zvarevashe's condemnation of Gararirimo's beer drinking habits is unjustified as it is untruthful. In the traditional society, no one would



drink beer like a destitute without being reprimanded by the ever-responsible members of society, as does Gararirimo. There was productive beer, which was drunk at *nhimbesh* and *majakwaras* (work parties) and not destructive beer as portrayed by Zvarevashe. Only frustrations caused by modernity in today's world cause people to drink like destitutes as they try to soak their problems in beer and temporarily forget them.

In *Karikoga Gumiremiseve* (1958), traditional role allocation is also misrepresented. Chakaipa says:

*Vakadzi vanhu vakanaka kwazvo. Vanotiberekera vana, kumunda vanosevenza zvokuti uyai muone. Kana vobva kumunda vanosvikobika sadza iro zirume rakangoti go, richimirira kuti sadza riuye. Kana vanhu vapedza kudya mukadzi anosuka ndiro, pasure peizvi wodziyisa mvura kuti murume ashambe, kana apedza ndokuzozorora.* (p.10)

Women are very good people. They bear children for us and they work very hard in the fields. When they come from the fields they cook whilst the husband is aimlessly seated, waiting to be served with food. After eating, the wife boils water so that the husband can bath and then after that, she rests.

This is not true of the Shona past whose setting is the context. As p'Bitek (1986:19) argues, no one is born free in the African world-view, but each one is born with a bundle of duties attached to him or her by society and a bundle of duties that society owes him. 'Everyone' includes the newly born infant, the husband, the wife, aunt, grandfather, and even the ancestors. In this scenario, everyone had clearly outlined roles and responsibilities. Men did more difficult and laborious tasks such as clearing the land of trees, hunting and tilling of land. It is the coming of modernity and industrialisation that turned these roles up-side-down as men were now forced off their responsibilities due to the illegalisation of hunting, the appropriation of African people's land and the establishment of factories, mines, farms and cities which forced some of these men into seeking for 'gainful' employment. Women were left behind, in the reserves now doing all the responsibilities, including those that previously fell under the domain of men. Hence, Chakaipa uses the colonial experiences as something typical of the Shona past. Historically, he goes wrong.

The myth of the Shona man as lazy is both unjustified and alien. By nature, the Shona past was an agrarian one, which thrived on hard work and achievement by its various members as conveyed through clan praise poetry. This kind of poetry was recited as both an acknowledgement and a challenge to members to work hard and achieve great things for, more importantly, the community. This was true in a society that had no room for loafers. Thus colonial Shona writers' view of the African past was not different from European writers' view of the same. In fact, the latter informed the former.

Further distortion of Shona people's cultural values is again witnessed in Mutasa's *Mapatya* (1978). Mutasa's exposition lacks the relevant detail as to why twins were killed in the past. He describes the custom in touristic terms, making it easily susceptible to misinterpretation and condemnation. He says:

*Rudzi rwedu rwakaipa sei runogwinyira mukutevedza tsika dzekuzvitapudza pane kudzidzira kurwa neuta nemiseve. (p.46)*

Our tribe is bad for it follows this custom of eliminating its progeny instead of concentrating on the skill of using the bow and the arrow.

Mutasa seems unaware of the fact that, being an agrarian society that the Shona was and being people with great love for children (the more the better), and again being strong believers in *ngozi* (avenging spirit), the Shona would have been the very last people to kill or throw away twins, a blessing of two people at a time. More importantly, the Shona could not do anything without first consulting the will of their ancestors. Mutasa does not explore the philosophy and complexity of this custom. Such a superficial exposition of the custom paints the Shona as not only primitive and superstitious, but as cruel too and this makes the contemporary generation too glad not to have belonged to that shameful past. That the custom ended with the coming of the white men is not a reason good enough to thank the coloniser. Rather, it will be a way of accepting racial inferiority and giving in to foreign domination. As Achebe (1958: 52) rightly observes, every culture is only good for those who practise it. There are also European cultural practices, which, though good to the westerners, are bad in the eyes of Africans.

The image of the western culture and of the African past as desired by the whites and as imbibed and disseminated by some Shona writers is summarised by Ani (1994: 307) in the following table:

**Europeans are rational**

“critical”  
 “scientific”  
 “logical”  
 “civilised”, “advanced”  
 “modern”  
 “lawful”, “orderly”  
 “responsible”, “adult”  
 “universal”  
 “energetic”  
 “active”  
 “enterprising”  
 “creative”  
 white

**Others are irrational**

“non-critical”  
 “superstitious”, “magical”  
 “illogical”  
 “uncivilised”, “primitive”  
 “backward”  
 “unlawful”, “unruly”  
 “childlike”  
 “parochial”  
 “lazy”  
 “passive”  
 “apathetic”  
 “imitative”  
 black

Ani (1994: 478) further outlines what the Europeans thought of themselves and other races and what they hoped should happen to those other races as follows:

<b>European Ideology</b>	<b>+</b>	<b>European Self-image</b>	<b>=</b>	<b>Culture other image as</b>	<b>so</b>	<b>Cultural other must be</b>
Christianity		Religious, Moral, Cultural being		Heathen, Non-Religious, Immoral		Saved
Idea of Progress		Progressive, Modern		Backward		Developed Advanced
Evolutionism		Civilised		Primitive		Civilised
Scientism		Scientist, Knower		Object		Studied Known Controlled
White Supremacy		White, Pure, Human		Black, Dirty, Non-human		Avoided, Pitied, Enslaved, Destroyed

What one notices is that Shona people and their cultural values, together with the rest of Africa have always been condemned and described using all sorts of negative terminology by both Europeans and some Shona writers who were taught and made to absorb such a warped vision. This is why Okeh (in Smith [ed], 1976: 74) says that Africa has been the most humiliated and most insulted part of the world. It is undoubtedly clear that people who have no confidence in themselves and who are not clear of where they are coming from and where they should go can never confidently pursue issues pertaining to development. As a result, African governments, including the Zimbabwean one have embarked on the processes of decolonisation and cultural regeneration. The idea is to return to the African, the dignity, identity and the confidence, which the many years of foreign domination eroded. Self-discovery, according to Chiwome (1996: v) is the point of departure for any people pursuing decolonisation, nation-building and development. Hence, contemporary Shona writers are revisiting the Shona past, reclaiming a genuine African cosmology for the benefit of today's Zimbabweans. Chinweizu et al. (1980: 256) say that in the decolonisation process, we need to reclaim an authentic African past with its strengths and weaknesses because we cannot afford to re-build our continent on distortions. It is against this background that works by Mutasa (1990, 1991), Zvarevashe (1998) and Matsikiti (1995) are discussed.

Equally important, the Christian church which was also chiefly behind the denigration of the African people and their culture has changed its stance. The Roman Catholic in particular, has since 1959, started siding with African people. In the late 1970s, the same church started accommodating some of the African practices it had previously vehemently preached against, including ancestral veneration and beer drinking. This U-turn by the church has also been important in shaping the vision of Reverend writers like Zvarevashe. Prior to the new stance by the church, Zvarevashe was a chief critic of Shona tradition but in his recent publication, *Dzinza RavaGovera VaChirumhanzu NaMutasa* (1998), he claims that he is writing the novel in order to teach the Shona people of their past. He claims that he wants to give an objective analysis of the Shona past, correcting all the lies and distortions that had been perpetrated by the white regime. Therefore, his novel can best be understood in the context of both decolonisation and the new thinking in the Roman Catholic Church where the writer is a practising priest.

## **2.2 Background to economic disempowerment and land reform**

This section strives to account for the poverty among many contemporary Africans (especially the Shona of Zimbabwe) and the reasons behind the land reform programme. It seeks to explain why and how white settlers, despite being third class citizens in their countries of birth easily became first class citizens when they came to Africa (Chiwome, 1996: 2). The section as well strives to explain why despite having come without any land or cattle, they later boasted of having large tracts of virgin and fertile land and massive herds of cattle. It also attempts to explain why Africans continue to suffer despite the advent of independence.

The section intends among other things to answer the following questions: Why are Africans the poorest despite being a very hard working people? How did Europeans create poverty among Africans? Why did independence fail to improve Shona people's (and other blacks') lives? What were the reasons behind land invasions and the land redistribution exercise? In doing so, the section intends to show that some writers, by blaming laziness and beer-drinking as causes of African people's poverty continue to uphold settler and colonial myths about Africans. It shows that such writers do not identify the root causes of such poverty and as a result, do not suggest practical solutions to these. The section also seeks to show the impact of the Lancaster House Agreement on the continued suffering of Africans in Zimbabwe. It also tries to clarify why it took close to twenty years for the Zimbabwean government to address the land crisis among its citizens. Writers' prowess will therefore be judged against their ability to capture the root causes of these issues, their ability to truthfully expose reality as well as the practicability of the solutions they suggest.

The very first white settlers who came to Africa were in search of minerals and ivory as missionaries who had earlier toured the continent had reputed it as an abundant source of gold and elephants. Schmidt (1992: 36) says men of the pioneer column were soon joined by a wave of adventurers, fortune hunters, land speculators and mining prospectors. The given adventure was however short-lived. The pioneers who came to Zimbabwe in search of mineral wealth soon turned to agriculture when the promise of mineral wealth was not fulfilled (Batezat and Mwalo, 1989: 1). The evidence shows that white settlers' aim of coming to Africa was not to civilise (as

they had claimed) but to control its wealth, what the people produced, how they produced it and how it was distributed (Ngugi, 1987: 16). They came to Africa to exploit its wealth for their own material betterment.

The development and success of white settler agriculture depended heavily on the availability of land, labour and capital. Unfortunately, the settlers had no land on which to practise the agriculture. They therefore employed various devices to alienate large tracts of fertile land from Africans. Legal instruments such as The Land Apportionment Act of 1931 and The Land Tenure Act of 1969 were both used to expropriate African people's land. With the latter, land was equally shared between the indigenous population and the white settlers such that the settlers who comprised a mere 5% of the population had the same size of land as the Africans who comprised 95% of the total population in the country then. History indicates that some land was even reserved for unborn white children whilst blacks who were in severe need of it were pushed to barren land like the Gwai and Shangani reserves. As Barnett (1966: 32) observes, the settlers had urged that land reserved for "natives" be cut so as to prevent them from having enough for a self-supporting level of production. By taking away African people's land, the settlers were paralysing African people's livelihood.

The above adventure was even made possible by the settlers' use of the gun and the bible. The effects of the gun were so devastating and frightening that Africans were easily stripped of their fertile land. It inculcated in them a culture of fear, which made it easier for the coloniser to expropriate tracts of African people's land. Christianity was also implemented in the land alienation process. Critics of the new religion say it emphasised on heavenly life, thereby lifting the eyes of Africans from the things of this world to the things above to which they had no certainty. Earthly possessions, of which land was one, were trivialised by the new religion. Some of the Christian songs bear testimony to this. Examples are:

*Zvese, Jesu, ndazvipira, Tenzi pamberi penyu  
Ndarega pfuma dzepasi, Mundigashire Jesu  
(From Kristu muNdwiyo, Seventh Day Adventist Hymn Book)*

All, Jesus, I have committed, before you

I have forsaken all earthly riches, accommodate me Jesus.

Another also reads:

*Ungatore hako pasi, nerufaro rwaro rwese,  
Asi ndipe hangu Jesu, anogara narini (ibid).*

You can take all land/the world with all its happiness,  
But give me Jesus, who lives forever.

Hence, Christianity emphasised the fact that people's treasures should be in heaven and not on earth where there are moths to destroy them. Critics of the religion argue that as Africans were being encouraged to be more concerned about the future of their souls, the missionary's counterpart, the settler, was busy crafting legal instruments to alienate and hoard earthly possessions like land, cattle and other forms of wealth. More so, instead of helping Africans to fight and regain their lost heritage, land, the new religion encouraged them to be subservient and to respect those in authority and hence not to confront the settler regime. Rather, the people were persuaded to leave everything in the hands of the Lord who would rectify the situation at the most appropriate time. Therefore Ngugi (1981: 22) argues that land was alienated through deceit, by preaching humility, forgiveness and non-violence to the oppressed, through preaching gratitude, kindness and forgiveness to the robbed. As a result, African poverty had roots in the alienation of their land. This is because the Shona people's economy in the nineteenth century and for thousands of years was basically an agricultural one (Schmidt, 1992: 44). The production of food crops was the most important activity of the majority of the people. All other activities including hunting and gathering, the herding of livestock, mining, manufacturing and trade, were subordinate to agricultural production and could not have taken place in the absence of land (ibid). Now that the settler had expropriated large tracts of fertile land, it meant that African people's survival line was shaken to the core. To the Africans, land was life, and to deny them land was tantamount to denying them life. As Paton (1976: 7) remarks, "guard it, keep it, care for it, for it guards men, keeps men, cares for men. Destroy it and man is destroyed."

The success of settler agriculture and other of their endeavours like mining, manufacturing did not only depend on land, but on labour too. As a result, the coloniser resorted to tactics to induce

and force Africans to offer their labour. One such step was to apportion to the whites as much fertile land as possible and drive Africans to poor areas, which would make it difficult for them to earn a living. The reserves to where the Africans were pushed were not economically viable. Bannerman describes such areas as “more like graves than places to live in” (1970: 103). The same scholar again claims that it was actually easier to die than to earn a living by tilling such a wasteland (ibid). The colonial policies now made it difficult for Africans to shift to new land once the one in use was exhausted. Magona explains this:

My people could no longer heal the land. They could not restore it when it was exhausted. The law forbade them to move pasture. A person's place of dwelling became their place of dying ... Fenced in and forced to till exhausted land, we could not feed ourselves. But, you see, even that were no accident. The no-colour people had planned it all (1992: 9).

The policies made it difficult for Africans to rotate land and leave part of it to regain fertility. As these policies took their toll, production diminished subsequently. According to Schmidt, by 1920, the grain yield per acre dropped (1992: 45). Only 23 544 acres were tilled and yield per acre continued to decline as women struggled to weed, soil erosion and overuse of the land depleted its fertility. Agriculture was fast becoming a meaningless adventure for the colonised Africans.

In an attempt to further induce local African men to work for Europeans' burdening rent payments, state-imposed taxes and levies, state subsidisation of European farming ventures and legislation of marketing arrangements that favoured Europeans over Africans were introduced. Barnett (1966: 32) says that the white settlers had realised that taxation was the only other possible method of compelling the native to leave his reserve for the purpose of seeking work. A single village could be charged up to 300 pounds, administrative hut taxes were 1 pound and a further levy of ten shillings for each wife (Martin and Phyllis, 1981: 52). The taxes were raised each time the settler witnessed that not many Africans enough for labour had been forced off to work. The upward spiral of hut taxes, rents and grazing and dipping fees and other levies imposed by the colonial state eroded whatever cash earnings the peasants could manage to acquire (Schmidt, 1992: 69). Worse still, the African labourers were paid pittance again as a means of generating labour for the settler. As Barnett (1966: 32) remarks, the settlers believed



that to raise the rate of wages would not increase but diminish labour. A rise in the rate of wages would enable the hut and poll tax of a family, sub-tribe or tribe to be earned by fewer workers.

Due to the severe hardships they were facing, Shona men had no option but to accept employment on European farms despite the paltry pay they received. Their female counterparts, including children later joined the labour force out of desperation and they were usually paid substantially lower wages than those paid to men and in some cases were paid in kind. Chakaipa in *Dzasukwa Mwana-asina-hembe* (1967) ambivalently captures such experiences.

Already weakened by the deterioration of the reserves and the dramatic decline in maize stock prices, the peasant economy underwent further stress in the 1930s (Schmidt, 1992: 74). With the onset of the Great Depression, wages fell, mines and factories were closed and many people were thrown out of work. The supply of African labour in the Goromonzi District, for example, was greater than the demand and between 1931 and 1934, wages again dropped considerably due to excess labour (ibid). Native department officials recorded cases of adult men being paid as little as six shillings per month for farm labour (ibid). Another fear among Europeans was that African producers would force them out of the local market onto the extremely competitive international market (ibid). They therefore pressed for the passage of new protective legislation hence the establishment of the Maize Control Act of 1931. These and subsequent legislations were highly in favour of the Europeans and the argument was that “It costs a white farmer five shillings to grow one bag of mealies, it costs a native nothing. Therefore the white farmer is a big loser” (ibid). The African farmer thus continued to experience discrimination.

As grain sales declined as a source of cash for tax payments, Africans began to sell their cattle, but again discriminatory laws in favour of the whites were crafted. Due to overgrazing it was difficult for Africans to keep large herds of cattle, more so, the payment of dip tax and poll tax became a burden to Africans. The Land Husbandry Act of 1951 forced Africans to dispose of their cattle, which largely were a major sign of one’s wealth. Under the new legislation, a household was no longer allowed to keep more than eight beasts. Since Africans had large herds of cattle, they were forced to dispose many, which they sold to the white settlers at a price that

was determined by the settler himself. Observing a similar scenario in South Africa, the short story writer Sindiwe Magona, satirically observes:

They (settlers) came with no cattle. But today we are the ones without cattle, while they boast ever-swelling herds. Our land has been stolen. We live in fenced-in toy plots. Look at their farms! You can ride across them for the whole day without reaching the other side (1992: 8).

Chakaipa, the Shona novelist, in *Dzasukwa Mwana-asina-hembe* (1967) captures the fact that the white man, Vhuka, has a very large and extremely fertile farm with tall and healthy grass where the supervisor, Kufahakurambwe struggles to cycle across. Again, on this farm are large herds of well fed cattle. In contrast, in the reserve where he is coming from, villagers have poor soils and they have resorted to selling beer, as a way of making money and again, the soil is poor and malnourished. Sadly, Chakaipa just ends at exposing this detail without linking it to the socio-economic and political situation of the time. Part of such large herds were African people's cattle that strayed from overstocked reserves to graze on the tall grass on the white men's farms and were impounded; or those sold out due to the legislations on the maximum number of cattle Africans were supposed to keep.

As the plight of rural folks worsened, rural-urban migration increased as African men sought gainful employment. However, the influx was so huge that many prospective workers found themselves jobless. Unemployment was therefore rampant in the cities. After they had exhausted all the socially acceptable options of earning a living, many young unemployed men turned into devils who preyed on people. A case in point is Tsodzo's *Pafunge* (1972) where Phainos Kamunda and Joe Rug's gang ultimately become thieves because they have tried everything noble to earn a living, including queuing for work but without success. Satirically, Tsodzo, as a critical realist lampoons the colonial Rhodesian system for failing to create employment for its citizens. The author describes Joe Rug's experiences as he sought for gainful employment:

*Kwaakanyanya kutsvaka kumaindasitiri. Pamwe paidikwa vanhu vashanu akaita zvekufumira. Akawana patova nemudungwe murefu wavamwe vanhu, iye ndokusvikomirawo mumudungwe. Vanhu vakati vatanga kuuya shure kwake! Nenguva pfupipfupi mudungwe wakanga wasvika panzira yemota. Sezvo kumira munzira kwaityisa, raini rakati kugona hukwira nenzira ndichienda kurukisheni rweMukoba.*

*Rakafamba kwazvo, asi rakazosvikazve pane imwe nzira, rikati inga kuMukoba ndaganhurwa. Rigoti kona, zvino roenda kuVhitori, richibva razoneta apo zuva rakanga richangobuda; ndiye kwaro tumbi (p. 40).*

He sought (for work) mainly in the industries. At another place five people were required so he went there quite early. He found that a long queue had already formed and he joined it. Then many people started joining the queue behind him. In an instance, the queue was so long and reached the road. Since it was dangerous to stand in the road, the queue then lengthened, along the road towards Mkoba location. It continued to develop and then came to another road and then turned, now facing Fort Victoria and then tired at sunrise. No more people later joined it.

Ironically, only five people were required to fill the posts and everyone expected to be offered the job. In that critical situation, the supervisor, who was to recruit the employees, fell prey to corruption as many sought to appease him and get his favours. Having failed to achieve a meaningful living through decent means, Joe's group degenerates into die-hard thieves.

The same can be said of the girl child. Having found the going getting tough in the reserves, some girls escaped into the city, which were not friendly either. There were laws that forbade females from being in cities, as this was believed to negatively affect men's production. Since she was pushed to the fringes of society, the girl child turned into a prostitute in order to earn a living and to have shelter (because only men were allowed in cities). This is why many Shona novels have stereotyped female characters of the rural good and the urban bad. Examples are Muchaneta in Chakaipa's *Garandichauya* (1963), Magie in Mungoshi's *Ndiko Kupindana Kwamazuva* (1975), Miriro in Zvarevashe's *Museve Wade Nyama* (1983), and Sabina in Hamutyinei's *China Manenji Hachifambisi* (1981). The Shona novelists unfortunately blame and whip these female characters for immorality, indecency, material greed and cruelty. In doing so, the novelists focus more on the faults in human nature than on the socio-historical origins of the vices. In reality, prostitution is an economic necessity to socially stranded women. As Ngugi (wa Thiong'o) and Ngugi wa Mirii rightly observe:

Let's not call our children prostitutes.  
A hyena is very greed  
But she does not eat her young.  
Our children are not to blame.  
Gathoni (*the daughter in concern*) is not to blame

When a bird in flight gets very tired  
It lands on the nearest tree (1986: 104).

In other words, those youths who become immoral should not be blamed for such ills because such bad behaviour will be the ultimate way of trying to survive after all humane options will have been tried and failed. These youngsters are therefore not to blame, but the system that gives birth to such practices. The female characters are made to suffer for the sins of the system.

The same applies to male characters in the city, farm or mining area. Novelists blame their poverty on beer drinking, laziness, womanising and refusal to shun tradition. Examples are Kufahakurambwe, alias Dzasukwa in Chakaipa's *Dzasukwa Mwana Asina Hembe* (1967), Rex in Mungoshi's *Ndiko Kupindana Kwamazuva* (1975), VaMasango and others in Tsodzo's *Pafunge* (1972), Morris in Hamutyinei's *China Manenji Hachifambisi* (1981) and Matambanadzo in Chakaipa's *Garandichauya* (1963). These men are shown to be failures in life because of the weaknesses they are purported to have. The writers blame the poverty more on individual weaknesses as if the individual's choice of a lifestyle is stronger than the economic situation. The writers underrate the impact of the capitalist economy on the habits of the African consumers. Hence, during the said period, African people's poverty had more to do with the setting than individual character.

In such a life-threatening environment, schooling was believed (by Africans) to be the highest goal in life. It was painted and envisioned to be the best way to combat economic and political hardships (Chiwome, 1996: 114). The poem "Mhanya zvako kuchikoro mwanangu" captures the thinking of the time:

*Mhanya zvako kuchikoro mwanangu*  
*Dzidzo ndiyo nhaka makore ano kusina mombe*  
*Di di di kuchikoro, di di di kuchikoro*  
*Nebhurukwa rakatengwa nesaga renzungu* (Popular poem recited in the colonial era,  
Interview with D. Chidakwa 7 July 2006).

Run to school my dear child  
Education is the only heritage these years since we no longer have cattle  
Step step step to school, step step step to school

Putting on a short that was bought by money obtained from selling groundnuts.

The poem observes that cattle, a symbol of wealth and an object of inheritance were scarce among Africans but it falls short of identifying the reasons behind their scarcity. It again captures the hunger and thirst for education that lay in Africans of the time. The general feeling was that through education, Africans could then be able to live a life akin to that of the colonial masters: wealth – cars, good houses, good jobs and better wages. However, colonial education was itself impoverishing to the Africans. Martin and Phyllis (1981: 56) remark that European children, whose parents were well-to-do, were provided with free and compulsory education from 1930. In contrast, African children, whose parents were already living in abject poverty having been condemned to barren Native Reserves or earning pitiful slave-wages in farms, or factories, paid school fees at both missionary and state schools. Most of them ended up selling their cattle to raise fees for their children. Worse still, the colonial education system was pyramidal in structure, with a broad primary base, a narrowing secondary middle and an even narrower university apex. In other words, African children became fewer and fewer as they proceeded up the educational ladder.

The other problem inherent in colonial education was its euro-centric nature. Learning inclined more towards indoctrination than education (Chiwome, 2002: 27). As such, African children usually came out of this schooling system thoroughly washed white, having adopted the values and tastes of their colonial teachers (Veit-Wild, 1993: 50). The product of such a school system was a black skin in a white mask (to use Fanon's expression 1986), an African only black in skin colour but with a white man's mentality. The education was meant to produce an African who would be useful to the coloniser and was never meant for the economic emancipation of blacks. Due to its inclination towards capitalist production, Ikiddeh (in an Introduction to Ngugi 1972: *xii*) rightly observes that:

Colonialism and capitalism are ... two brothers whose mission is to exploit the material wealth of the subject peoples, and who in order to gain acceptability and perpetuation, enlist the services of their more sly but attractive first cousins, Christianity and Christian-oriented education whose duty is to capture the soul and the mind as well.

Although Ikiddeh writes on the Kenyan situation, his observations are also valid in Zimbabwe where the Christian religion and education were misused by the colonisers. Worse still, those who had gone to dizzy heights in search of education thinking it would better their condition were frustrated at the end. The colonial system still marginalized them due to the colour of their skin. A white man with similar qualifications to the black man and doing the same job with the black man was paid five times more than his black counterpart. The African therefore, despite having his expectations raised by education, remained poor. Hence it was mythical that Africans were poor because they were not educated. Rather, they were poor because of the colonial system that marginalized them.

A liberation struggle was therefore necessary for the creation of an alternative society. This struggle was so protracted that it threatened the privileged position of the colonial settlers. The pressure led to the need to create an African middle class that would be able to look after colonial interests. This power transfer was effected largely through the Lancaster House Agreement of 1979 that also gave birth to the politics of reconciliation. Reconciliation offered constitutional safeguards for the white settlers ensuring that they retained a place in the new African states.

The representatives of the Zimbabwean nationalities in the Lancaster House Conference were aware of the severe economic damage and loss of human life that a protracted struggle would have yielded (Herbst, 1990: 40). Hence, they negotiated for an independence that guarded the country against continued loss of resources. They still had the hope of getting back the land and give it to the people. Robert Mugabe, who was Prime Minister at independence, acknowledges the importance of giving land back to the people, which was the thinking of the time:

It is not only anti-people but criminal for any government to ignore the acute land hunger in the country, especially when it is realised that 83% of our population live in the rural areas and depend on agriculture for their livelihood (Herbst, 1990: 40).

It was mainly out of the need to stop the war that the participants settled for an agreement. The African participants gave in to the demands of the settler regime whose people feared losing 'their' land. The Lancaster document stipulated that land was not supposed to be wrestled away

from the whites. Rather, it was supposed to be redistributed on a willing buyer willing seller basis (Batezat and Mwalo, 1989: 7). The constitution was not supposed to be changed until after ten years. Whites were also supposed to have twenty uncontested seats in parliament. The result was that the state machinery: the police, public service, the air force and the judiciary remained in the hands of the whites (Mandaza, 1989: 39). Hence, the kind of independence that Africans had fought for was a let-us-forgive-and-forget type of independence.

What is clear is that some of the policies agreed upon had no relevance to the masses. To the peasantry and the guerrillas, independence was supposed to satisfy land hunger that had rocked them for nearly a century. They expected to be given back their source of livelihood (Magwa, 1991: 31). To the workers and the unemployed, independence meant better working conditions, good salaries and more employment opportunities. Yet to some intellectuals, independence meant an opportunity to fulfil their hunger for high positions, luxurious lives and high economic and selfish gains (Ngugi and Mugo, 1984: 45). It also meant living a lifestyle of the coloniser, that of having large and multiple farms. Hence the advent of independence saw in some cases, a white man who had 600 acres of land being replaced by a black man with 600 acres of land (Ngugi, 1972: *xvi*).

However, in some instances, the government still tried to honour its pledge to redistribute land. The major setback was that the government had to buy land for redistribution from willing white settlers. In many cases where the land was sold, the prices were so exorbitant that the new economically crippled black government could not afford them. Therefore, whilst at independence the government had embarked on a programme to resettle 18 000 families on approximately 1,1 million hectares of land (Herbst, 1990: 45), the programme was weakened by militating factors. On a positive note, 8 600 families had been resettled on 52 000 hectares during the first year and half of independence (*ibid*). During the first year of Mugabe's rule, the peasantry and the professional farmers alike were encouraged to cultivate as much land as they could and produce as much grain as was possible (Moyana, 1988: 186). The government introduced uniform marketing prices and did everything to facilitate the marketing of peasant agricultural produce and the peasantry responded to these incentives magnificently (*ibid*).

In due course however, it became clear that the goals or objectives of the programme remained unattainable because there were too many Ministries and Government agencies involved some of whom were not committed to the programme (ibid). The programme moved at a very slow pace such that between 1980 and 1998 only 71 000 families were resettled. Insufficiency of funds from Britain made land reform impossible and up until the year 2000, Government did not have much to show in the way of land reform except for 3,5 million hectares on which it resettled 71 000 families (ibid). Thus, the few farms that were bought for resettlement accommodated very few among many who were in dire need of land. As a result, many peasants remained landless and therefore poor. Former fighter Josiah Tongogara's statement continued to hold water, "Our people are naturally farmers, they like the soil and yet they are deprived of the rich soil" (Martin and Phyllis, 1981: 56). Hence, although land was allocated to the needy, not everyone got it.

In education and health, the new government also made a number of achievements. The government believed that education was a basic human right and not a privilege for only a few and so; it designed education to meet the needs of most citizens. Everything possible was therefore done to ensure education was brought to the doorsteps of every child. A lot was achieved, which include: abolition of racial education, establishment of free and compulsory primary education for all children regardless of race, abolition of sex discrimination in the education system, orientation of the education system to national goals, availing education to every adult who had no or little opportunity to literacy and adult education (Zvobgo, 1986: 30). There was a boom in the number of schools, enrolment, number of qualified teachers and amount of resources allocated to such schools for the provision of education. For example, secondary schools rose from 218 in 1980 to 685 in 1981 and then to 790 in 1983, a 262,4% increase (ibid: 70). Form 1 enrolment grew by 398,7% from 22 201 in 1980 to 110 725, Form 11 increased from 17 125 to 95 539 in the same period, a 457,8% rise while the Form 111 figure rose from 15 891 to 76 572 representing a 381,8% increase; and Form IV numbers increased by 89,6% from 12 926 to 24 509 in 1983. For Form V, the increase was 20,6% from 1 815 to 2 189 (ibid). In health, many clinics and hospitals were built in most remote and rural areas. In most cases, such health institutions offered free treatment to the people. The idea was to guarantee health for all. The government also subsidised many commodities in a bid to make them affordable and accessible to every citizen, and among them, fuel, electricity, and tertiary education. It is against



this background that novels like *Vavariro* (Choto, 1990), *Chakweshu* (Chimhundu, 1991) and *Magamba eChimurenga: Josiah Tungamirai* (Makari, 2003) are analysed. The idea is to scrutinise if they have portrayed the gains of the struggle in full, exposing both the good and the bad.

The alleviation of overpopulation and poverty in the communal areas remained a pipe dream during the period of twenty years following the achievement of independence. Imbalances in land allocation, effected by the Land Apportionment Act continued to exist. The white farmers and other white folk generally continued to monopolise the rich resources while the blacks experienced increasing poverty aggravated by severe landlessness (Moyana, 2002: 186). By 1998, approximately 6 000 white farmers still owned as much as 45% of all the best agricultural land in Zimbabwe and in contrast, some 700 000 African families occupied less than 50% of the agricultural land most of which was in ecological regions IV and V which are of poor soil fertility (ibid). The result of this unfavourable land distribution pattern is that the African areas have continued to experience land degradation and fragmentation, low productivity and overgrazing.

Critics such as Moyana (2002: 187) and Sachikonye (in Raftopoulos and Savage [eds], 2004: 7) say the ten years grace period for obtaining land on a willing buyer willing seller basis (a clause that was in the Lancaster constitution) had collapsed and the people expected the government to do something to return the promised land to them yet nothing materialised. The government's response was that it was not really to blame. The Lancaster House Constitution of 1979 prevented it from tempering with the clauses dealing with land for ten years following independence and when the clauses lapsed in 1989, the British Government which had promised funds for resettlement purposes at Lancaster House, did not come forward with sufficient funds for resettlement. Between 1980 and 1998, Britain paid Zimbabwe only 45 million pounds for resettlement purposes and by the time the Lancaster House Constitution expired; the cost of land was so high that the small amounts of money coming from Britain could not buy land for resettlement purposes (ibid). Worse still, obtaining land on a willing-buyer willing-seller basis as stipulated in the Lancaster document proved tricky as farmers were not always willing to sell this land to government, especially those in high rainfall regions (ibid). As a result, the land problem

though not very much talked about in the early and mid 90s, continued to be the reason behind the people's poverty and suffering.

Hence, problems of poverty among the contemporary Shona rural dwellers dealt with by Hwendaenda in *Mubairo* (1993) are largely a result of the land issue, which had not been addressed, and not due to drunkenness and laziness as the author portrays. One notices that in blaming the individuals, Hwendaenda ignores the socio-historical causes of the poverty currently rocking contemporary Africans. He forgets the yesterday of his characters. Rather, he continues to propagate the colonial and settler myth of the African as a lazy and indolent being who spends money on beer and not on productive activities. As such, the solution that the author and others advocate for in such cases is scrutinised against this background.

The 1990s also saw the Zimbabwean government adopting policies like Economic Structural Adjustment Programme meant to heal the economy. Such policies had drastic consequences like massive retrenchment, escalating of prices of basic commodities because of the removal of subsidies. Ultimately there was a shortage of basic commodities as producers folded their operations citing an unfavourable environment. Patients were now supposed to pay their hospital bills and parents had to finance their children's education. This created suffering on the part of both students and parents who had to face the ever-increasing fees charged by both schools and institutions of higher learning. The drought that hit the country in the early years of that decade worsened the situation. It appeared people had to endure many hardships. Thus, contrary to what they had anticipated, the advent of independence later brought acute shortage of accommodation, escalating prices of goods, massive unemployment and acute poverty and suffering among many Zimbabweans. It is against this background that Chitsike and Nyandoro write *Minisita Munhuwo* (1999) and *Ndozviudza Aniko?* (2006), respectively.

The delay on the part of leadership to solve the land crisis led people, initially those under Chief Svosve to invade previously white owned farms, clearing them for agriculture in 1998. It was a sure testimony that the people felt disowned and let down hence they had resorted to taking the law into their own hands. Unrest also crept into the urban dwellers who also could no longer stomach the continued price increases that were not equally matched with salary increases. As

such, crippling strikes and stay aways were organised and carried out by the then powerful labour body, the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) in an attempt to force both government and private sector to improve the people's living conditions and incomes. The price of maize meal had risen by 36% in October 1997 and by a further 24% in December. In January, the price of rice and cooking oil had more than doubled (Duri, 2006: 16). Demonstrations known as Food Riots emerged and these were witnessed in areas like Harare, Beitbridge, Chegutu, Chinhoyi, Mutoko, Murehwa, Mutare and Bulawayo. The ZCTU again organised a stay away to protest against the government's decision to increase the cost of fuel by 67% and that of basic commodities by up to 40%. There was massive unemployment, mounting poverty, fuel shortages and factory closures. There were also power cuts, high-level corruption scandals and what many viewed as an unnecessary war in the Democratic Republic of Congo (ibid: 19). It is in this context that Nyandoro's *Ndozviudza Aniko?* (2006) is also analysed for he exposes acute unemployment, poverty and corruption. The writer's ability to identify the causes of poverty and corrupt tendencies are examined, together with the solutions propagated.

All being said, most of the current problems that are bedevilling the country, such as poverty among contemporary Africans, the incapacitation of African women and the invasion of white people's farms have their roots on land issues. African people's poverty is directly or indirectly linked to land and the solutions also directly or indirectly again lie in land. It is also against this background that novels such as *Sekai: Minda Tave Nayo* (Mutasa, 2005) have emerged. This novel is thus analysed in relation to the writer's vision of land redistribution as a way of reducing the suffering among the blacks. The enthusiasm of the Zimbabweans upon regaining their land is well presented by Mutasa in *Sekai: Minda Tave Nayo* (2005). The delight of such characters can best be understood in the context of the people having been denied access to their birth right for more than a century. It will be important to note whether such writers have been able to give realistic characters in their exposition of these issues.

### **2.3 Background to women's problems and their empowerment**

One of the pertinent issues in Zimbabwe in particular, Africa and the world over in general is the position of the female being in society. This is witnessed by current efforts by the Zimbabwean

government to create a level playing field for both males and females. This government effort too can also best be understood if placed in its proper context. A discussion on this issue is therefore imperative, as this will make us appreciate women's plight in light of what the causes are and what the solutions are likely to be.

As hinted in the previous section, pre-colonial Africa, including Zimbabwe, had a clearly defined sexual division of labour. p'Bitek (1986: 19) has argued that even at birth, each one has a bundle of duties that society shoulders on that individual. In addition, the statement 'Till death do us part' sounds hollow in the African world-view because even the ancestors too have a role they are expected to play in the life of the living, a role they will be reprimanded for if they fail to play satisfactorily. Fathers normally had some responsibilities different from those of mothers. Aunts were fully responsible for the girl child while grandfathers and uncles were fully responsible for the boy child. Grandmothers generally presided over the welfare of the young and newly weaned children. Men in general were linked to the more arduous and dangerous tasks whilst women usually worked on lighter ones. Ancestors were responsible for the social, economic and political welfare of their progeny because they were the ones who owned the land and who negotiated for rains and bumper harvests on the people's behalf. It was in the social arena that men and women sometimes inter-changed roles, with women performing male roles and vice versa. In such a society, each one did the duties that were expected from him/her to the maximum, failure of which created trouble not only for the individual but the family, both nuclear and extended or society. An aunt who failed to bring up a daughter in the expected manner would bring shame, not only to herself, but also to the rest of her relatives.

Thus, in such a society, everyone had a place, was respected and, whenever and wherever women had responsibilities, they were not helping men but were taking those responsibilities fully. Apart from being respected for childbearing, rearing and agricultural activities, some women held very powerful and important positions like being political or religious figures. Many cases indicate the privileged positions that Shona women enjoyed before the coming of the whites. Schmidt (1992: 15) says that despite their sometimes-subordinate positions, some women attained positions of significant prestige and influence. Elderly women often practised as midwives, performing a function critical to the continuation of the lineage. Respectfully referred

to as *ambuya* (grandmother), midwives were revered both for their age and their long experience of family life. They also received gifts of their own for their services.

Women also played significant roles as healers and visionaries (ibid: 24). Since their role was mainly inclined towards gathering fruits, edible leaves and roots for food, most women were in a strong position to learn the healing properties of common plants. As such, they were great medicine people of the Shona society. Again, women usually held the highly prestigious position of spirit medium. The Shona being a notoriously religious people like any other African group (Mbiti, 1991: 14) it means such women were a very powerful group in life. It implies that it is basically women who were privileged to communicate with all other spirits (when in their trance). More so, spirit mediums were highly regarded for their wise advice and frequently played the role of mediator in family disputes. Schmidt (1992: 25) further says such women tended to be among the most intelligent and upstanding members of the community, since it was believed that people were selected as mediums on the basis of their moral qualities. Such positions according to Schmidt provided women with a degree of status and allowed them to exercise authority both inside and outside the ritual context. Thus, whether in a state of possession or not, these women-mediums generally commanded great respect in the community.

In the Shona past, women also played a very significant role in politics. Schmidt (1992: 29) writes that there are records dating to the early seventh century indicating that the head of Mutapa state had many chief wives who administered their own houses, lands and vassals. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the daughters, sisters and paternal aunts (*vatete*) of the Manyika paramount chief were sometimes appointed as rulers over subject territories, having jurisdiction over such matters as witchcraft accusations, theft and murder (ibid). Many accounts indicate that women ruled as both headwomen and chiefs in the Mtoko, Seke, Chihota, Jindwi and Bocha areas (ibid: 29). One of the most powerful political leaders was Nehanda, a female who led the Chimurenga uprising of 1896 and whose prophecy and spirit are strongly believed to have inspired the Chimurenga liberation that finally brought independence to the Zimbabwean country.

Again, among the Shona, at times an aunt (*vatete*) could stand in as a husband and known as *bambomukadzi/bambomukunda* (meaning the female father), presiding over the affairs of the family, making decisions quite independently of other men and issuing out orders which were obeyed as befitting any husband. The same aunt had a strong say in matters of marriage, bashing men into silence. Since every female was an aunt at one level, it means every female was that powerful. More importantly, these females had possessions that rightfully belonged to them. At their daughters' marriages, they were given *mombe yeumai* (mother's cow) as acknowledgement of the responsibility of bearing and rearing of the married daughter. Such women had the power over such cows together with their offspring and there was nothing that the husband could do with that. Of course the husband was given more cattle at the daughter's marriage because it was him and not the wife who was responsible for paying *lobola* for all his sons when they got married. More to this, the fact that Shona men paid *lobola* when marrying was not that they were buying women and turning them into objects of possession as Europeans like Father Prestage (who wanted the British government to help him abolish *lobola*) wanted to believe. An outsider could never know the reasons behind this. p'Bitek (1986: 37) rightly points out that it is only participants in a culture who can pass judgement on whether a practice is good or bad.

Hence, the pre-colonial past was such that men had certain rights in the female kin and women too had certain rights in their male kin which, if violated, were redressed usually through the intervention of *tete* (aunt) who again happened to be a female. However, this is not to say that women were at par with men. Things like land and children usually belonged to the men. The society was largely patriarchal but all the same, it acknowledged and accepted the presence and influence of the female being. Shona writers have never realistically portrayed this pre-colonial past until recently. Early authors, under the tutelage of the Rhodesian-controlled Literature Bureau spearheaded the demonisation of both patriarchy and the Shona past.

When the Europeans came, they had their own views, prejudices and myths about the kind of people that Africans in general and the Shona in particular were. One myth was that the Shona past had no place for women. Schmidt (1992: 15) has an anecdote of a Jesuit father, A. Hartmann, who visited the Shona chief Chipanga in about 1891 and asked him how numerous his subjects were, including women and children. The missionary claims that the chief reported

that “women are not counted” and the missionary concluded that among the Shona “women are regarded as almost non-existent” (ibid: 15). However, that idea of not counting or not realising women as full beings is a myth transposed from the Jewish tradition where men only, and not women and children are counted as having been fed by Jesus (Matthew 14 vs13-21). In *Nehanda* (1993), Vera captures the missionaries’ mentality on the Shona people’s gender relations of their past. Upon hearing that a female leader, Nehanda, was masterminding the first Chimurenga of 1896 Mr. Browning the white man, has nothing but scorn. He says:

I doubt that the natives can listen to an old woman like her. What can she tell them? The society has no respect for women whom they treat like children. A woman has nothing to say in the lives of the natives. Nothing at all (1993: 75).

Ironically, Nehanda was and still is a widely respected female political and religious figure whose inspiration culminated in the independence of Zimbabwe. Contrary to Mr Browning’s claims, Chinyowa (1997: 6) says that pre-colonial Shona women were not, and did not see themselves as marginalized and oppressed. Schmidt (1992: 15) also says that although women were structurally subordinate to men in the pre-colonial Shona society, they developed diverse strategies for coping with their situation and resisted the most onerous aspects, something they could no longer do with the advent of settlers.

Colonial capital and state, upon their establishment from 1891 onwards, attempted to construct a system in which young men served as migrant wage labourers in the European-oriented economy with African women engaging in agricultural production in the reserves and older men maintaining law and order at household and village levels (ibid: 6). The departure of young able-bodied men from the rural areas in the 1920s and 1930s further transformed the gender division of labour. Women increasingly assumed tasks and responsibilities previously in the male domain (ibid: 71). This means Shona women were now over-burdened; doing roles that originally were for the female sex and in the absence of their husbands, also doing the roles that were presided over by men, including the most difficult ones.

While women and children tended the land at home, young men made an influx into the cities. However, European industrialists and mine owners paid African men barely enough to support

themselves, let alone a family. As a result, women and children shouldered the burden to subsidise male wages through agricultural production at the rural homesteads. Selling of produce and livestock could not suffice. The settler government continued to expropriate best lands by making it difficult for any meaningful survival to take place in the reserves. By the 1910s, according to Schmidt (1992: 54), the massive alienation of African land, the growing burden of rent payments, state-imposed taxes and levies, state subsidisation of European farming ventures, and the legislation of marketing arrangements that favoured Europeans over African producers soon took their toll.

Worse still, since the settler regime had brought its own government and religion, it means Shona women were bound to lose their religious and political roles together with the social ones. Armed with the gospel, European doctors and nurses encroached upon the territory of indigenous healers and midwives undermining their significant roles. The powers previously held by the female *n'anga* (traditional medical practitioner) and midwives were eroded. Missionaries interfered with the beer-brewing activities and others that had prior to this, given women high social standing. As Schmidt (1992: 87) puts it, the Jesuits, Wesleyan Methodists, and the Evangelical Alliance Mission forbade a long list of African ceremonies in which women were heavily involved and forced those who persisted in practising them to leave their land. Rainmaking ceremonies and those in honour of ancestors and other spirits were banned. Wesleyan Methodists at Epworth and the Evangelical Alliance Mission in the Zambezi valley prohibited the brewing and consumption of beer, while the Methodists also outlawed dancing (ibid). At Chishawasha Mission, people who brewed beer for rainmaking ceremonies and for veneration of the dead (*kurova guva*) were charged with devil worship and forced to leave the land, which supposedly belonged to the mission. It is clear that women played very crucial roles in all of the forbidden ceremonies. Spirit mediums (*svikiro*) and diviners/healers (*n'anga*) most of whom were traditionally women were also threatened with expulsion from mission grounds alongside anyone who sought their services. *N'angas* were pronounced as messengers of the devil. While the traditional healers and diviners were being forced to stop these activities, their clients were being wooed away from them through Christianity. As Schmidt writes:



African mothers were a primary target for Christian medical indoctrination. Nurse Dry taught them that delivering their babies “in a nice clean bed in a hospital” was preferable to doing so on “a dirty mud floor in dark smoky hut” (1992: 88).

Traditional midwives and their roles were thus being undermined. The above scholar correctly observes that even grandmothers lost important educative functions as mission schools became increasingly widespread. Children now spent more time away from their traditional teachers and story-telling sessions deteriorated in value as the very values they taught were now fast being replaced by western values.

Female artisans, potters and basket weavers of great repute were forced off their business as people were made to admire the so-called highly made European goods. Farming and gathering, traditionally some of the female jobs, declined in importance. Rather the Europeans fenced ‘their’ farms thereby significantly reducing the size of open and free land. No one was ever permitted to practise agriculture on the land deeded to Europeans. Any activities linked with the plant and animal kingdom, which previously had accorded women some of the highest positions in society, were outlawed and stopped. Since these economic activities disappeared without being replaced by others, the economic position of Shona women was thus severely crippled.

In political matters, African women were “invisible” to the colonial authorities (Schmidt, 1992: 91). Having nurtured the myth that women were perpetual minors in society and presumably played no significant role in social life, Europeans thought these figures too did not have any political function. Yet before the coming of Europeans, there had been no clear distinction between women as political or religious leaders. By virtue of holding important roles as spirit mediums, women were both religiously and politically very powerful figures. The medium Nehanda, for example, was a powerful political figure as she was religiously. With the institutionalisation of a new government and the extinction of Shona traditional life, it can be inferred that the South Rhodesian government did not recognise the right of African women to rule. The role of *vatete* (aunt) in important matters of the family also died a natural death as the traditional life style succumbed to a capitalist mode of production. Thus, European political and religious institutions did not recognise the authority in the forms exercised by women in the pre-

colonial Shona society. The old ways of acquiring status and social recognition became increasingly dysfunctional.

Schmidt (1992: 92) writes that as their social status declined during the 1930s and demands on labour intensified, women began to leave the rural areas in growing numbers. Some ran away to the city, others sought refuge at mission stations (thus placing themselves under the patriarchy of the missionary fathers). Worse still, the settler government had laws that forbade women from going to the city, mine or farm. Only women with marriage certificates could enter these territories. European women contributed to the tightening of controls on African women by opposing their employment as domestic servants in European households. Those women who entered these forbidden areas usually formed informal and temporary relationships with male workers providing them with domestic and sexual services in exchange for shelter and money for survival. The woman's chances of acquiring cash were quite remote in these circumstances. Therefore, the nearest and seemingly easiest option was prostitution. Such women who were found in these forbidden areas were disliked by the settler government (for they negatively affected production in factories and cities) and by missionaries for they indulged in promiscuous, immoral and unchristian activities. Such women were forced back to the reserves and were at times punished (ibid). Thus, the common view was that any woman who was in the city or on a farm without a marriage certificate was a prostitute who was supposed to be mercilessly punished as a warning to others not to take the same route. It is for this same reason that the authors Chakaipa and Hamutyinei ruthlessly punish female characters like Muchaneta, in *Garandichauya* (1963) and Sabina, in *China Manenji Hachifambisi* (1981). They flirt around with married men and they are again in forbidden territories.

On the other hand, some women escaped to mission stations and from the early days of European occupation, junior wives of polygamous men were the most prominent amongst those who fled to such stations. Polygamists were predominantly older, well-to-do men who had acquired young wives to enhance their social status, productive capacities and ability to acquire more children. More often than not, such young women had not freely consented to their marriages but had been forced into them by relatives who were also trying to make ends meet in the new system.

Owing to the harsh economic system of the colonial times, junior wives in polygamous marriages often found their position intolerable (ibid: 95). Under this new system, co-wives always competed for their husband's praises and affection through hard work and obedience (ibid: 95). Understandably, they rivalled one another for the scarce resources now solely controlled and distributed by their husband. Vambe, in Schmidt (1992) recalls his uncle Nherera who was a bit wealthy and therefore accrued a number of wives. These wives knew what ever was being done to each of them by their husband, including the smallest attention given to each by him. This according to Vambe:

Proved to be a constant source of friction. They quarrelled. They fought. Scarcely a day passed without some kind of commotion... Some days, all three (households) would fight for three different reasons, another two would gang up against the other and at times, the three wives and all their children would find common cause against Nherera himself. At every sharing out of meat, money or simple gifts from him, they would claim favouritism and unfairness (Schmidt, 1992: 95).

Polygyny is shown as a haven of restlessness, jealousy and suspicion. Such a scenario is akin to the one Zvarevashe portrays in *Kurauone* (1976), claiming that that was the pre-colonial life-style. One can only appreciate that notwithstanding its bad aspects; polygamy of the pre-colonial era was far from being what the author portrays. Rather, Zvarevashe attributes the polygamy of the colonial period to pre-colonial Africa. Historically, he goes wrong. The problems and skirmishes that he describes in the polygamous marriage he gives were more typical of the harsh economic set up of the colonial period than the communal system of the pre-colonial period.

Some women who ran away were abused by their husbands, or their husbands had married other wives or failed to provide them with sufficient food or clothing, refused to work for their families, or spent too much time and money on beer (ibid: 96). These again, are undoubtedly, problems caused by the new system and not by patriarchy because such problems if ever existent in pre-colonial Shona past would be brought under control by the *tetes* (aunts), *sekurus* (grandfathers) and *mbuyas* (grandmothers), whose duty was also to maintain social and family harmony. As such, women's positions and troubles if ever they were present in the pre-colonial period were worsened and blown out of proportion by the new colonial system.

Having run to mission stations, these women were then brought up under Christian principles, acquiring education. The missionaries, it is said, trained these girls to be good Christian mothers who would place themselves under the leadership of their husband who was regarded as the head of the family. According to Victorian Christian principles, good mothers stayed at home raising their children according to Christian values, while fathers went out to work in order to feed the family (ibid). What one sees is that this Christian ideal augmented well the needs of the colonial state and the settler-controlled economy. Some of the women were trained to become nuns and to shun marriage. A chief Native Commissioner, H.M.G. Jackson in 1930 proclaimed thus:

Native females are acquiring as fast as is good for them the habit of independent action. It is gradually dawning that all women need not marry... some are even becoming nuns (Schmidt, 1992: 98).

It is the coming of whites, which trivialised the institution of marriage. Again, Shona women were judged primarily responsible for the perceived negatives in the African past. Missionaries and settlers blamed African women for adultery, venereal disease, and unhygienic conditions and for the men's refusal to enter wage employment. They claimed that African women's sex drives and overwhelming influence over their men lay at the white man's shortage of labour (Schmidt, 1992: 101). The same author also has a story of a colonial official whose view to amend the Native Marriages Act so as to raise the status of African women was turned down. The idea was that at 21 years, the African woman should be allowed to escape male tutelage, to own and control property in her own right and under certain circumstances to retain custody of their children in the event of divorce. The proposal was denied for fear of alleged "disastrous consequences". Stressing the need to keep African women under a firm control of fathers, guardians and husbands, one native Commissioner said:

Until quite recent years, this was the condition among our own race. The native woman of today has not the brain power or civilisation of the mothers and grandmothers of the present white generation; her brain is not sufficiently balanced to allow her to think and act in all matters for herself, and I consider the male should be encouraged and assisted to exercise tutelage, with all reasonable bounds, over his women folk (Schmidt, 1992: 102).

Hence, the whites had myths concerning African people and women in particular. They thought that since womenfolk in their own countries had until recently occupied low status positions, it meant also that womenfolk in other child-like races would be occupying far less positions and therefore needed more time under male domination. Therefore, Shona women were denied their economic independence. One native commissioner later had this to say, “In any scheme for advancement it would be impossible to give equal opportunities to both sexes” (Schmidt, 1992: 102) and he added, “the male as bread winner goes out to work and naturally comes in touch with civilisation. The woman does, or should remain at the kraal, the home and so the progress of both sexes never and never will be, on parallel lines’ (ibid). Hence the colonial system determined and maintained Shona women’s new position. Again, instead of attributing the increase in adultery to the migratory labour system’s disruption of family life, colonial officials asserted that the problem lay in the fact that few men were going out for work. Colonial courts frequently charged women with having left their husbands without just cause or reason, but without precisely stating what the state considered to be just.

To coerce African women into staying with their husbands despite all odds, the colonial government employed mechanisms such as the customary law. This law exploited some facets of tradition that tended to coincide with the interests of the ruling system. Schmidt remarks that whilst Shona custom had been both sensitive and adaptable to extenuating circumstances, ‘customary law’ was not. Male control over female sexuality thus became increasingly important to the coloniser and many court cases were ruled in favour of Shona husbands (ibid: 109). African mothers were generally deemed unfit to raise their own children – unless they themselves were under male authority (ibid: 110).

With regards education, it was rare to find Shona parents sending their children, especially girls to school. The general argument of the time was:

If they send a girl to school, they would get nothing from her, because after she finished she would go and get married... they said, ‘If I train my daughter, what do I gain after all? I gain nothing.’ A son could work, providing his parents with a range of material advantages, but a daughter would only marry. All her subsequent labour would be for her husband and his kin. In the case of girls, the parents reasoned there would be no return on their investment (ibid).

It is clear that Shona society was hesitant to send the girl child to school. Such a stance by the Shona was not without plausible reasons. Firstly, Schmidt reports that some mission stations charged an annual school fee of three pounds for boys and four pounds for girls. This means that the settlers had made it more expensive to educate the girl child as compared to the boy child, influencing Shona society to act accordingly. Again, owing to the harsh economic conditions they lived under, it was difficult for Shona parents to educate children of both sexes. As a missionary at Waddilove noted, there were few girls in schools “...entirely due to money. The natives haven’t the money to send the girls to school, especially if there is a boy (who) needs educating, he must be the first consideration” (Schmidt, 1992: 141-2). Hence, that the girl child has been disadvantaged is not wholly because of patriarchy, but also because of the new and difficult economic system that the Europeans brought with them. Schmidt (ibid) adds that what the Shona elders dreaded most was not that their independent daughters earn money per se, as their households would also benefit from such earnings. Rather, their deepest concern was loss of control, which in many cases led the family to lose out on bride-wealth since most of such girls entered in informal union with a man or series of men. Thus the new system made people come up with all sorts of survival strategies and so patriarchy is not wholly to blame. It too is a victim of the new system. People who blame Shona customs are whipping the already whipped; are blaming a victim and not the root cause of the female gender’s problems.

The liberation struggle threw Shona women back at the centre stage. Primarily, the prophecy and spirit that is believed to have inspired the struggle is that of the female religio-political leader, Nehanda. More importantly, it was not only Zimbabwean men who held guns but cadres too in the form of Joyce Mujuru (alias Teurai Ropa), and Magaret Dongo among many others. These women went for training together with their male counterparts and also fought at the battlefield. They were, like their male partners responsible for many activities that crippled those of the settler enemy. More to this, women had also participated in the struggle in the form of *chimbwidos* (young females who ran errands for guerrillas). These, like their male counterparts, the *mujibhas*, were equally responsible for spying the enemy, carrying foodstuffs and guns and running other errands. They too were beaten, harassed and tortured and some of them were killed, but never sold out the country. In the villages, mothers of the revolution were also

witnessed in the form of grandmothers and other elderly women who cooked food for the guerrillas and who were also chiefly responsible for incapacitating the enemy. Indeed, there was no notable difference between the role that women and men played during the liberation struggle. Independence was achieved because of equal effort from members of both sexes.

After independence, the Zimbabwean government adopted policies that were meant to raise the status and position of women. This was mainly because during the war of liberation, women had proved beyond any reasonable doubt that given equal opportunities or the same platform with men, they too could do what men are capable of doing. Thus they broke the stigma attached to them, of being considered a weaker and vulnerable sex. Many legislative measures have been adopted in order to address the problem. Among them are: the Customary Law and Primary Courts Act (6:1981), the Legal Age of Majority Act (15: 1982), the Labour Relations Act (16: 1985) and The Matrimonial Causes Act (33: 1985).

Prior to independence, the Legal Age of Majority Act enabled only whites, regardless of sex to attain majority status at the age of 21. This Act was reframed in 1982 and it now gave Zimbabwean men and women of all races full contractual rights on attaining the age of 18 (Batezat and Mwalo, 1989: 50). This Act was considered a great victory for Zimbabwean women because it ended their minority status and enabled them to own property in their own right, contract a marriage if they wished, without the need for parental consent, to become guardians to their children despite that the children are born out of wedlock, be able to sue or be sued as individuals. It is this Act, which is at the core of Moyo's *Ndabva Zera* (1992) [literally meaning 'I have achieved legal Age of Majority – 18 years]. In *Ndabva Zera*, Kudzai, Frank and Dorcas' daughter believes that she is empowered by this Act to be out at night with whomever she wants even against the consent of her parents. When her mother tries to exercise control over her behaviour, Kudzai says, "*Regai zvenyu kundityira amai nokuti I am over 18*" [p.21] (Do not worry about me mother, I am over 18).

The same Act enables a woman to enter into a marriage contract with a husband of her choice even without the consent of her parents or guardian. In *Ndabva Zera* (1992), Kudzai, without the involvement of any of the two parents enters into a marriage relationship with Jaravaza who then

buys her a flat. In *Chemera Mudundundu* (2002), Victoria gets married to Vasco Antonio against the will of her children and relatives (after the death of her husband). Therefore the Act enables these women to become fully independent beings. The same applies to Dorcas who, through the Equal Rights Act, is now free to go out with whoever she wants and at whatever time she wants. The same act makes her design a cooking roaster in which she has to alternate with her husband because according to this Act, men and women are the same and there is no more division of responsibilities. Men can and must now also do the duties that previously lay in the domain of women. Hence, the Act provides a level playing field between the boy and girl child and between husband and wife.

The Customary Law and Primary Courts Act (6: 1981) repealed the African Law and Tribal Courts Act (Chapter 287) and amended *inter alia*, the Maintenance Act (Chapter 35). The new Act empowers community courts to order maintenance for deserted and divorced wives and children regardless of the type of marriage (Batezat and Mwalo, 1989: 51). With this Act, unmarried women can now be granted maintenance for their children and, unlike previously when fathers got automatic guardianship of the children due to their having paid *lobola*, today the courts have to decide in the interests of the children. Through this Act, Joyce (in *Ndabva Zera*, 1992) enjoys maintenance from two well-to-do men as stated by Jane, “*Uya ari kutambira maintenance kubva kumashefu maviri akamuitisa vana and ari kuzoita mari wena*” [p.49] (That woman is getting maintenance from two very rich people who begot children with her and she is making a lot of money). It is this Act again which makes Dorcas (in Moyo’s *Ndabva Zera*, 1992) have guardianship of children after her divorce with Frank and Victoria (in *Chemera Mudundundu*, 2002) to have custody over her children after the death of her husband unlike having them under the custody of her husband’s relatives.

The Matrimonial Causes Act (1985) was passed in a bid to correct the injustices that were inherent in the customary law. This Act now allows for equitable distribution of property between spouses on divorce in a registered marriage (Tichagwa, 1998: 8). The law takes into account a woman’s economic or domestic contribution to the well-being of her family. The same Act allows even the girl child to inherit wealth and other proceeds from her father. In *Ndabva*



Zera (1992), this Act enables Dorcas to have half of the furniture and the house they had accrued when they were still together with Frank.

In 1990, *The Infanticide Act* which previously shouldered blame on women who abandoned or killed their babies was re-looked at and made to include men since it was viewed that women were being made to suffer as individuals for a crime that involved both parties. Another policy was The Administration of Estates Amendment Act of 1997, which now allows women to inherit from their husbands. Unlike in the past where only children and relatives could inherit from a deceased man, the Act now rules that women can inherit wealth from their husbands and dispose of it as they wish. This Act, together with the Deceased Person's Family Amendment Act of 1987 (ibid) enable Victoria in *Chemera Mudundundu* (Moyo, 2002) and Mary in *Magora Panyama* (Chitsike, 1999) to inherit after the death of their husbands, among others, the business enterprise, the houses they had, domestic animals at their rural home, their cars and farm. Victoria later disposes of much of this wealth without consulting anyone from her former husband's relatives.

The policies are meant to free women from what is largely viewed as the grip of patriarchal society. Both patriarchy and men are largely viewed as the causes of women's disempowerment and as such, some feminist writers have written advocating for women to join hands to fight men in a bid to solve their crisis. Shona patriarchy is roundly criticised for denying the girl child a chance to acquire education, linking her with household chores where as the boy child is accorded the platform to advance with his education. Shona men are blamed for raping women, for domestic violence and generally for the low status of women. In some cases, women, especially young girls are used as objects with which to settle problems of avenging spirits; in others the unfounded myth that they are a cure to HIV and AIDS makes them vulnerable to infected men. Again, there are cases where young girls are lured by very rich men into immoral acts like bestiality, pornography and sometimes as wives of goblins, meant to boost the material position of men in society. Some of these issues are brought out in fiction, which include *Makudo Ndomamwe* (Makayi, 2004), *Sekai: Minda Tave Nayo* (Mutasa, 2005), *Magora Panyama* (Chitsike, 1999) and *Masimba* (Zimbabwe Women Writers, 2004).

What is important to note is whether or not these writers are really capable of identifying the actual causes of women disempowerment (or they are whipping the already whipped) and whether they are articulate enough to suggest practical solutions to these problems. Sometimes there is a tendency of writers to blame and punish men and Shona customs for such practices without getting to the root cause of why they engage in such practices. Harsh laws and penalties may be passed for such men to the satisfaction of women but if the root cause of such malpractices is not exposed and attended to, prisons may be filled up with wrongdoers without any meaningful change being brought to society. It appears the force behind most if not all of these issues are economic problems and intentions. In most cases today, people are killed for economic reasons. Even the goblins have an economic backup. The same applies to cases where the girl child is being used as recompense to an avenging spirit, it usually will have emanated from economic hunger or greed. The worst development is that today's society distinguishes between religion, politics and economics and as such, religion does not permeate and control economic practices neither does it govern today's political practices. As such there is nothing more to control people's behaviour except prisons and the punishment from the law. This is no deterrent. Hence, the study strives to find out if contemporary writers, both male and female are capable of going beyond the myth of blaming men and patriarchy for wrongs they do not initiate and whether any meaningful solutions apart from the traditional imprisonment and punishment are suggested.

## **2.4 Conclusion**

It is apparently clear that contemporary Shona writers are heirs in tradition of literary production. Like anyone else, when they write, they respond to certain circumstances and it is imperative that such circumstances be understood if a meaningful appreciation of the issues they raise is to be arrived at. The tendency towards a literature that focuses on the past is necessitated by the need to decolonise Africans from the fetters of colonialism, to re-educate Africans and return to them, the dignity and self-belief that had been defaced by colonialism so that the future of Zimbabweans is laid on a strong foundation. This is because the Shona past has largely been a distorted and condemned one and this has been mainly at the hands of fellow Shona writers

under the tutelage of the Rhodesian Literature Bureau. There is great need to correct these wrongs so that current generations have an authentic source to draw inspiration and lessons from.

The gains of the liberation struggle need to be understood in their proper context so as to examine the successes and failures of contemporary society. Poverty among Africans is at the centre of survival and, can also best be understood in the context of colonialism, its effects, the liberation struggle and the gains thereof. Without examining the impact of colonialism and assessing the aim of the struggle and its output, it will be difficult to understand why Zimbabwe's rural peasantry is amongst the poorest citizens of the country today. More importantly, it will be difficult to appreciate land redistribution as one of the basic ways of alleviating people's suffering in Zimbabwe.

Again, policies on empowerment are also crucial in matters of development and it is important to understand why such policies are being adopted as well as the implications such policies have on the public. It is also important to note whether writers are clearly aware of the histories of the characters whose experiences they portray in works of art. This also makes it possible for an authentic evaluation of solutions suggested by writers to be done. More importantly, works of art on such issues if placed in their proper context allow the Zimbabwean society to have a thorough self-analysis and introspection.

## Chapter III

### Shona novelists and their treatment of socio-economic issues of the pre-colonial era

#### 3.0 Introduction

The previous chapter focuses on the circumstances that gave birth to the socio-economic issues presented by fiction analysed in this study. Such background is also the guidepost from which the selected fiction is analysed. The current chapter explores the way current Shona novelists view and portray the socio-economic issues of the Shona past. The analysis seeks to establish if the writers' presentation of these issues is objective and how different their world-view is from that espoused by early and colonial writers. Among the contemporary writers to be analysed are Zvarevashe and Matsikiti both of whom are writer-priests, and it would be interesting to note how their perception of the issues on this past departs from that conveyed by early Christian writers like Chakaipa and Kuimba. Equally important to note, is how Zvarevashe's vision today differs from that of the colonial period (since he happens to write in these two eras) and the reasons behind such disparity. The chapter examines a number of customs and values of the Shona as conveyed through Mutasa's *Nhume Yamambo* (1990) and *Misodzi, Dikita Neropa* (1991), Matsikiti's *Rakava Buno Risifemberi* (1995), Zvarevashe's *Dzinza RavaGovera VaChirumhanzu NaMutasa* (1998) and Tsodzo's *Mudhuri Murefurefu* (1993). Among issues to be discussed are the election and installation of traditional leaders, war and peaceful coexistence and the depiction of Shona religion. It also discusses the killing of triplets; depiction of marriage customs such as *kuzvarira*, daughter-pledging and *kutema ugariri*, mortgaging one's labour to have a wife; the images of women and beer-drinking together with contemporary writers' attitude to the colonial myth about the Shona people's industriousness. In addition, this chapter strives to determine if the Shona past is of any significance to today's Zimbabwe.

#### 3.1 Election and installation of traditional leaders

Mutasa's *Nhume Yamambo* (1990) and Zvarevashe's *Dzinza RavaGovera VaChirumhanzu NaMutasa* (1998) portray the traditional Shona custom of electing and installing a leader. The

two are well-researched works of art by a traditionalist and a Christian writer respectively. The two writers' motive is to correct the wrongs that earlier Shona novelists had propagated through their fiction. These two novels satisfactorily fulfil two of the important tasks of committed African writers – being researchers and searchers of the truth about a people's history (Niane, 1965: *viii*) and being teachers of this history to contemporary and future generations (*ibid*: *vii* and Achebe, 1975: 45). They have gathered a lot of true information about the people's way of life in the past, which they present for the benefit of the contemporary Zimbabwean society. Their portrayal of past life is more realistic if compared to that by early writers on the same subject. In the prologue to his *Nhume Yamambo* (1990), Mutasa boldly makes his intentions known:

*Chiindai munodzima nhema dziya dzamunosiudzana panyaya yerudzi urwu* (1998: 7).

*Imi mose muri kundinzwa totali nomazvo mugozvitsetsenura sezvazviri kuhama neshamwari dzenyu musingadarikiri kana chinhu chimwe* (*ibid*: 8).

Go and do away with all the lies that you have been circulating about these people [the Rozvi].

All of you, who are hearing me, get everything well and relate it to relatives and friends without omitting even a single aspect.

In the same vein and spirit, Zvarevashe in his prologue to *Dzinza RavaGovera VaChirumhanzu NaMutasa* (1998) also states that:

*...ndaitsvaka kuziva nhoroondo yechokwadi yeMhazi kuti ndigoinyora zvakanaka; kwete zvayakaitwa zvekukanywa-kanywa navarungu vasingazivi kunyora...* (p. *vi*).

*Chinangwa changu chikuru ndechokuda kudzidzisa, zvikuru zvizvarwa zvamangwana...* (p. *xi*)

I strove to know the true history of the Mhazi clan so that I could write it well; and not distort it as was done by the whites who do not know to write ...

My main aim is to teach, especially the future generations...

What is clear is that these novelists acknowledge the existence of literature that distorts the Shona people's past life and culture. These misrepresentations have been championed by, both missionaries and some early Shona writers. The two novelists feel that it is their mandate to present truthful experiences, images and world-view about the Shona people. Such true presentations would help today's citizens to have an informed view of their history and achievements.

One of the social institutions that these two writers portray objectively is kingship/chieftainship. It contradicts Zvarevashe in *Gonawapotera*, (1978) who presents the election and installation of a Shona traditional leader, a chief, as marred by violence, brutal murder and self-centredness in the form of Chipeperekwa's sons who murder each other in succession. Mutasa in *Nhume Yamambo* (1990) and Zvarevashe in *Dzinza RavaGovera VaChirumhanzu NaMutasa* (1998) show that the institution of kingship, though with its negative characteristics, was largely orderly, peaceful and admirable.

In *Nhume Yamambo* (1990), after a heated dialogue on why Mabweadziva, the Shona religious cult supports the lazy, greed and self-acclaimed king Dyembeu, instead of Chirisamhuru the rightful heir to the throne, Mavhudzi, the religious priest testifies to Chuwe Tavada, Chirisamhuru's emissary that:

*Umambo madzoro hunoravanwa. Hauzi hwamai saka hunoinda nedzimba. Nhasi uno huri mumba maDyembeu... Dyembeu mukuru kuna Chirisamhuru. Itsika yepi yokuti munun'una atangire mukoma kugara umambo?* (1990: 111).

Kingship alternates. It is not tied to one house; it revolves around families. Today Dyembeu is the king...Dyembeu is an elder to Chirisamhuru. Whose custom is it that a younger brother sits on the throne first before the elder?

Mutasa brings out two truths about Shona leadership. One is that the election of a traditional leader was done by alternating the royal families and by following a definite pattern, of age groups (Gombe, 1998: 196). According to the custom, being elderly, Dyembeu had both the privilege and right to sit on the throne before his younger brother Chirisamhuru. The latter could only assume leadership after the death of the elder brother. The other truth is that this norm was

not always observed as some could usurp the throne from deserving members or families (ibid). This usually came in the wake of some households or individuals who did not want to patiently wait for their turn to be in post. By ignoring and bypassing the need to rotate households, turmoil erupted.

That royal families take turns to sit on the throne is observed by Zvarevashe in *Dzinza RavaGovera VaChirumhanzu NaMutasa* (1998). He presents the various royal families that alternate the throne of the Chihota chieftainship of Tembo as follows: Tunha is the first to be named Chief Chihota, followed by his son Bindu who is then followed by his young brother Mudzudzu (Zana). After Mudzudzu, Zimheni is installed, followed by Manjanga, Bindu's son, then Chipitiri who is succeeded by Nzvere, Manjanga's son. Nzvere is succeeded by Pasipamire of Bindu's family, followed by Savanhu, Nzvere's son, and then comes Zihowa of Chakabvapasi's family, followed by Chakanetsa and lastly, Pauro Mutero. In the Manicaland area, after the death of the recalcitrant King Govera, Chapuwanyika his eldest son is ordained king; and when he dies fifteen years later, his younger brother, Pfete, is next in line. In another instance, in Gutu, after the death of Mhepo, Mutanga, being the eldest among those who had come along with the deceased, is ordained the overseer and chief of the dynasty:

*Pakafa Mhepo, Mutanga ndiye akaitwa sarapavana sokuti ndiye akanga ari mukuru pana vamwe varume vaya vakauya naMhepo* (p.87).

When Mhepo died, Mutanga was elected as the overseer because he was the eldest among those who had come along with Mhepo.

Zvarevashe, like Mutasa acknowledges the importance of the rotation and age in the succession system. Succession is presented as orderly in cases such as these. Gombe (1986: 90-91) and Bourdillon (1976: 106-107) both prolific scholars on Shona traditional values and practices concur with the novelists that the hallmark of Shona traditional philosophy on succession was, “*Ushemadzoro hunoravanwa*” (Kingship/chieftainship alternates). This alternation was meant to instil peace and order since every household and age group or generation would have a chance to sit on the throne. Again, the fact that such succession followed definite generations was a sure way of avoiding young and inexperienced people from ruling, worse if they have to rule over

their elderly whom tradition normally associates with wisdom. As Mkanganwi observes, “as a normal person, it is impossible for you to be wiser than your father” (in Chiwome and Gambahaya [eds], 1998: 13). Hence, at each given time, the eldest and accordingly and ideally, the wisest of all people alive was king or chief, a position that required wisdom.

The Shona had plausible reasons as to why a traditional leader had to be experienced and knowledgeable. The king or chief, was a representative of the spiritual world on earth, was a guardian of the fundamental values of *rupenyu* (life) and was largely responsible for the prosperity of his people (Bourdillon, 1976: 111). He was expected wherever and whenever it was necessary and through correct and expected channels, to consult, talk to, rebuke and command ancestors and even God to undertake their responsibilities (without offending them), which included guaranteeing their progeny peace, security and bumper harvests. A young, inexperienced and therefore foolish king would run out of ideas in times of calamity or even offend his ancestors and further condemn his subjects to eternal suffering. In some cases, calamities like drought were blamed on general incompetence and stupidity of a chief or king. It is plausible that although young people could be clever or more intelligent, they were in no way wiser than their elders (Mkanganwi in Chiwome and Gambahaya [eds], 1998: 13). Wisdom was accrued owing to the experiences that one had undergone and reflections that one had made in life. That is why a traditional Shona society prioritised definite procedures in the appointment of its community leaders. Presented this way, the institution of kingship/chieftainship proves quite noble contrary to the skirmishes and disorderliness that Zvarevashe presents as the norm in his early novel, *Gonawapotera* (1978) in which such a pattern and philosophy are neither considered nor alluded to.

Notwithstanding the good values identified above, the two writers also show that the same appointment of a king/chief at times had negative aspects in it. It was not always the case that all people agreed to someone’s appointment as a traditional leader. At times, there could be as many claimants to the throne as there were royal families, especially after a number of generations when the question of seniority becomes exceedingly confused (Bourdillon, 1976: 107). It was therefore not uncommon for claimants to fight their way to the throne. In Mutasa’s *Nhume Yamambo* (1990), Dyembeu himself had cheated his way to the leadership of the Rozvi Kingdom



by hiring the Ndebele to murder Chirisamhuru's father who by being the elderly of the two, was the rightful heir to the throne. Tavada, the author's mouthpiece narrates that, ignoring laid down procedures, the power-hungry, cunning, asserting and recalcitrant Dyembeu had rigged his way to the throne by also giving the Mabweadziva contingent of Mavhudzi, Vhudzijena and the *nyusas* (male religious attendants) a lot of wealth to the dismay of the spiritual world. He thus became king through unorthodox means. Despite his father's family being the rightful claimant to the Rozvi leadership, Chirisamhuru has to engage in a fierce and protracted war with Dyembeu to regain the kingship. He summons the help of other chiefdoms and clans as well as religious figures in order to defeat his greed opponent who had acclaimed himself king. He does not easily regain his father's kingship. His way to the throne is not at all smooth and noble because it is catalysed by violence and deaths: "*Pakachibuda kubayana, kuchekana kugurana nokuurayana kwaityisa*" [p.197] (There erupted fierce stabbing, cutting and killing of each other).

These ugly scenes show that apart from identifying the good, the author also observes and acknowledges the existence of bad aspects that were also inherent in the same traditional succession system. It being a system that was orderly did not save it from reactionary forces. In observing the good and the bad, he is unlike early Shona writers who emphasised and depicted the bad only as if it was the norm. In *Dzinza RavaGovera VaChirumhanzu naMutasa* (1998), Zvarevashe also succinctly captures this fact where he shows the confusion that erupts after Pfete Mutasa and Mhepo's deaths in Manicaland and Gutu respectively. After Pfete's death, Juru succeeds him but only rules for a month before being murdered by Bvumbi, leaving Mudembererwa with the throne. The Jindwi people then murder the new leader after he has killed their relatives leaving the throne to his younger brother Matida. Bvumbi who had murdered Juru murders Matida again and assumes leadership before being killed by Tendai, Matida's son, revenging the death of his father. In Gutu, Mutanga, the eldest and appointed leader rules for a very short time. Chitutu who is the second eldest equally claims legitimacy to the throne and usurps it from the elder brother. In the process, he kills Maokomavi and Mutizirapi his younger brothers whom he suspects of also nursing interests in the leadership of the Chirumhanzu dynasty. The situation then degenerates into anarchy as many aspirants crop up. The death of these elders begets more anarchy and arguments:

*Kuzoti vakuru vapera vose kufa, ushe hwakatanga kunetsa. Shumba dzakatanga kuitirana nharo nokukakavadzana (Dzinza RavaGovera, 1998: 87).*

Now, when all elders had died, chieftainship became problematic. The descendants of the Shumba clan started conflicting and quarrelling.

Descendants of Nherera claim the chieftainship belongs to Nherera arguing that the Mutanga and Chitutu families had had their chances for the throne. Other claimants see it otherwise. These incidents show that the noble institution of leadership and succession is sometimes too riddled with deplorable aspects. It is both a beautiful and ugly institution. With these presentations, one notes that the two writers give a holistic and more realistic picture of the political system of the Shona society as compared to early writers. In concurrence with the presentations made by the novelists, Bourdillon (1976: 107) states that succession to the chieftainship has always given rise to some debate, and many chiefdoms have traditions of feuds between branches of the chiefly families with rivals (even brothers) murdering each other.

It is also important to note that such chaotic situations, if ever they erupted, could not go unabated as was presented and made to be by Zvarevashe in *Gonawapotera* (1978) where war, murder and fighting are presented as the only solution to such crisis situations. To instil sanity, Shona religion always presented checks and balances. Among the Shona, it is the spiritual world that had the final say in the appointment of a king or chief. No one's reign could prosper or last long if it did not have the blessing of the spiritual world (Gombe, 1986: 91). Being the general overseer and guidepost, Shona religion regulated and determined the fate of any leadership. It is this reality, which troubles Chirisamhuru after being urged by his relatives to reclaim his father's kingship from Dyembeu. Fearing and hesitant that the spiritual world might not be on his side he says:

*Asi upenyu hwangu nohumambo hwangu hungareba kusvika kupi kana Mabweadziva asinganditsigiri? (Nhume Yamambo, 1990: 27-8).*

But how long will my life and reign be if I am not supported by the spiritual world?

Chirisamhuru knows well that any leadership that does not enjoy both the support and blessings of the spiritual world is very short-lived. It is the same spiritual world that also guarantees one of life without whose mercy one's life is also cut short. It is clear that religion determines both life and politics. Ultimately, Chirisamhuru is persuaded to fight Dyembeu after noting that the spiritual world at Mabweadziva is behind his quest. It is the support of the Mabweadziva cult that spurs and gives Chirisamhuru and his fighters the hope and conviction that they are fighting a just war, which they are sure of winning. Just because he had unrightfully forced his way to the throne, Dyembeu's reign is not only short and infamous, but also marred by unrest. On the other hand, with the help and blessings of the spiritual world, Chirisamhuru's reign is largely peaceful, prosperous and lasts relatively longer.

The same is true in Zvarevashe's *Dzinza RavaGovera VaChirumhanzu NaMutasa* (1998). In the midst of chaos among the Chirumhanzu political aspirants of Gutu soon after the death of Mhepo, religion comes in to play a crucial role in settling the succession dispute. Goreharipenyi, Mhepo's spirit medium, Matihavo, Kaguve Chirongo's medium together with Nyamubvambire's medium in their trance all concur to pronounce and endorse Chidyamakono as the rightful heir to the throne:

*Zvino varume vose vakazobva vabvuma kuti Chidyamakono, Nherera, ndiye akanga asarudzwa kuva Ishe Chirumhanzu. Izvi ndizvo zvaitika pasichigare, nyika ichatongwa nokutungamirirwa navadzimu namasvikiro namakombwe. Nhasi kuzvita urira chizvarwa chazvino dzenge ngano...Kare, kana svikiro rainge rataura hakuna aizvipikisa kana kuzviramba. Vaiti zvaitika, zvapera, svikiro ragura nyaya (p. 91-2).*

Now, all men then agreed that Chidyamakono, Nherera, was duly elected as Chief Chirumhanzu. This is what the norm was in the past, when the spiritual world, spirit mediums and clan spirits ruled and governed life. Then, if a spirit medium had spoken, no one doubted or quarrelled. They believed all is done, the medium has said nothing but the truth.

It is clear that religion had a strong influence and impact in politics. It presided over the election of traditional leaders who were then viewed as representatives of the spiritual world on earth. This also explains why traditional leaders were not just respected, but feared and obeyed. It also explains why they took the initiative to summon people, organise religious festivals and even spoke to the spiritual world on behalf their community. The above are cases to demonstrate that

Shona religion was always there to safeguard communal interests and not to champion selfish ends. The spiritual world, being the most powerful and being concerned about the social well being of its progeny, always provided ways of establishing and safeguarding order in society. Among the Shona it was hardly expected of anyone to argue against the spiritual world and disturb the peace it had established (Gelfand, 1973: 119).

Religion even tested an elected king or chief to authenticate his appointment. In a typical fashion of a teacher, Mutasa explains what King Chirisamhuru has to undergo upon his appointment: he has to be smeared with oil extracted from dead bodies of one's ancestors. If one is not from the royal family and wants to cheat his way to the throne he dies there and then. If he has hurried to become king before his time is due, he develops 'burns' all over his body. Again, he will be made to eat a mixture of fresh faeces gathered from various people – *manyusa* (male religious attendants), *mbonga* (female religious attendants), *masvikiro* (spirit mediums), *mhondoro* (clan spirits), *harahwa* (elderly people), *murwi* (fighter) and *mucheche* (young one) [*Nhume Yamambo*, 1990: 29 – 30]. If successful in all these, he then is asked to be intimate with his sister in public and then taken to his ancestors' graveyard where he has to spend the entire night. If any ancestor were not happy with his appointment, his spirit would kill him. Similarly, Zvarevashe, in *Dzinza RavaGovera VaChirumhanzu NaMutasa* (1998) shows that Chidyamakono was ultimately confirmed chief after testifying that he had slept alone in the dreaded Muteyo forest and had swum across the mythical Gonawapotera pool, both of which were expected of a genuine chief and were only accomplished by one whose election was supported by the ancestors.

All the above activities were of great value and meaning among the Shona. The smearing of one with ointment from dead bodies was meant to establish whether one was also the choice of the spiritual world, failure of which led to the death of the individual (Gombe, 1998: 196). This limited cases of opportunists and politically greed people who wanted to force their way to leadership positions they did not deserve. The mixed food was also a gesture, which meant one's submission to the need to serve the interests of all members of the society, religious leaders, elders, fighters and the youths. A king's reign was supposed to boarder on altruism, guaranteeing and safeguarding people's interests and welfare (ibid: 194). It was a testimony of self-denial; of

one's commitment to the duties expected of such a position in society. It was believed that one who successfully ate the food mixture was also the choice of the spiritual world. Those who merely did it to try their luck always vomited, a sign that they were not the suitable candidates. Intimacy with one's sister was again believed to have religious significance. This was only applicable to the right aspirant. Sleeping in the graveyard was another test, which sought to establish one's resilience, bravery and authenticity. Opportunists would not dare undertake this move as it was a sure way of courting a premature death, it was a move only left to the chosen ones, whose being would be looked after by the spiritual world.

The contemporary world would view the above tests of genuine leadership as a violation of one's individual rights, as being unnecessarily perfectionist, unfair and unhygienic. This may make today's people view traditional religion as cruel, unfeeling, superstitious and inconsiderate. They may consider the tests as impossible to accomplish. In spite of these seemingly negative aspects, the truth is that they indeed were accomplishable but only to those whose nomination was vindicated by the spiritual world and they helped distinguish genuinely elected leaders from self-acclaimed ones and hence, quashed many succession disputes that could erupt at each time. This helped to maintain peaceful existence. In addition, as the most respected living being who again was the living's point of reference to the spiritual world, the chief or king's appointment was not supposed to be doubted. This doubt was removed by one passing all these tests that were lined up for the rightful heir.

The two novelists again show that the installation ceremonies of both Chirisamhuru and Chidyamakono respectively were well-organised, jubilant, peaceful and unforgettable functions. During the installation of Chirisamhuru, many beasts were slaughtered and a lot of beer drunk as people sang, whistled, giggled and clapped. In the same fashion, at Chidyamakono's function, a lot of meat and beer were availed, punctuated by song, dance and ululations. Zvarevashe says this ceremony went on well because it was under the guidance of God and the ancestors. Such presentations are in total contrast to that when Masango was installed in *Gonawapotera* (1978) where the ceremony was conducted before sunrise, with no food or beer. There was little happiness too because the self-acclaimed chief had lost his nose in the battle for the throne.

What Mutasa (1990) and Zvarevashe (1998) show now is that, on issues of succession, election and installation of traditional leaders, Shona religion played a very significant and indisputable role. It was the guidepost for it provided the dos and don'ts. For as long as religion was accorded its rightful place, issues like brutal killings, butchery, cruelty, self-centredness and lawlessness which early writers present as typical of the Shona past become true falsehoods. Such events as presented in early Shona novels are in fact, settler myths about Africans. Such myths were borne out of wishful and a-historical thinking and not out of realism. By merely depicting the negative aspects of the institution of kingship/chieftainship, early writers deny and suppress the humanistic aspects and elements that were provided by the Shona people's religion. By denying religion its proper place, such writers distort history and reality. Yet with religion, the institution of traditional leadership is seen to have more admirable aspects than negatives. Contemporary writers thus write to help clear the dust so that people can properly perceive their yesterday. Zvarevashe testified that his intention now is to tell the truth about Shona people's past life because he had been made to distort it by the now defunct Rhodesian Literature Bureau and negative influence from missionaries (interview, 28 October 2006). He claims that, today, unlike in the colonial era, there is no more serious intervention from an editing board such as the Literature Bureau to make one directly or indirectly distort their past. He also testified that latest research has shown that Shona practices can be and must be integrated in Christian worship, a move adopted by the Roman Catholic Church where the writer is a practicing priest.

### **3.2 Peace and peaceful coexistence**

Mutasa (1990, 1991), Zvarevashe (1998) and Matsikiti revisit the Shona people's socio-political relations. Earlier novelists, Chakaipa (*Pfumo Reropa*, 1961), Kuimba (*Gehena Harina Moto*, 1963) and Zvarevashe (*Kurauone*, 1976) present the Shona as a restless and ever-fighting group. Contemporary writers, Mutasa (*Nhume Yamambo*, 1990 and *Misodzi, Dikita Neropa*, 1991), Zvarevashe (*Dzinza RavaGovera VaChirumhanzu NaMutasa*, 1998) and Matsikiti (*Rakava Buno Risifemberi*, 1995) on the other hand all show that amidst temporary restlessness that could grip society, the Shona were largely peaceful and treasured peaceful coexistence more than anything. War or fighting was never the first step or only option to deal with a crisis. It really was the last

resort, when all other peaceful and humane options would have been exhausted. Again, in some cases, war or violence could be necessary if they were for the good of society.

The novelists show that the Shona had several ways of establishing and maintaining peace among members of the society. Among these were: paying of tribute, marriage, exchange of gifts, use of superstitions, clan praises, trade and the killing of perpetrators of unrest.

Mutasa (*Nhume Yamambo*, 1990) shows that, in a bid to avoid war (on succession) with Chirisamhuru, Dyembeu first sends a delegation with an escape package. Chirisamhuru is tasked to avert the fight by giving away fifty herds of cattle as recompense for having killed *mbongas* (female religious attendants) and for eating a *haka*, pangolin, when he is not at all installed as king. If he does not pay, that is when a gruesome war would be waged against him and his people. It is clear that despite feeling offended and angered, Dyembeu does not rush to wage a war against his opponent. What comes into his mind first is a very amicable way of settling the misunderstanding. He simply meant to scare Chirisamhuru into compliance and remorse. It is true that if Chirisamhuru had submitted himself to paying the said fine, Dyembeu would have gladly received it and totally shelved the idea of fighting Chirisamhuru thereby maintaining peace.

Mutasa also explains that superstitions were another sure way of instilling fear into and among people so that they did not pick up unnecessary quarrels, grudges and wars. The Shona would never engage in a war without the blessing of the spiritual world. Anyone who did so was surely going to lose, die in the war or suffer tragically. Among the Rozvi, there was a myth that:

... *kana vakarwa vari divi risina Mwari vose vanoshanduka kuita makudo. Varume ava vakanga vasingadi kushanduka kuita makudo uye vaitya masimba azame* (*Nhume Yamambo*, 1990: 71).

... if they fought without God's blessing, they would change into baboons. These men did not want to change into baboons and they feared God's powers.

The myth shows the Shona as holding the belief that to engage in a war that was not sanctioned or blessed by the spiritual world was a sure way of courting unnecessary trouble. Being very

powerful, God was capable of punishing people in any possible way including changing them into baboons. No one surely nursed thoughts of wishing to cease to be fully human. As such, they never blindly went against what religion had decreed. Despite its seemingly stupid and foolish nature, the superstition curbed unnecessary turmoil and, being a very religious people that the Shona were, they were therefore the last people to engage in war or violence. In this case, their world-view is akin to that of the Igbo who would never embark on what was known as a war of blame, one waged without the support or concurrence of the spiritual world (*Things Fall Apart*, 1958: 9). It is clear that a superstitious society is far from being primitive. Rather, it is an advanced society, which has very noble ways of establishing and maintaining healthy coexistence and human relations. In contrast, the so-called civilised societies, which try to use legislation to maintain sound relations hardly succeed because the laws can be broken, and appeal made to lawyers to extricate the same people from their mess. Superstitions, being closely linked to religious instructions rarely witness trespassers.

The Shona also heavily employed clan praises as a way of reducing tension and anger in offended people and ultimately do away with possible disastrous conflicts. After Chirisamhuru is angered by the suspected poisoning of his beer, the elders present calm him down through reciting his clan's praises and his anger subsides (*Nhume Yamambo*, p. 58). The same is shown by Zvarevashe in *Dzinza RavaGovera VaChirumhanzu NaMutasa* (1998) where a fuming Chief Goveranyika, angered by his sons and army's failure to locate Mhepo, is calmed down by Muparutsa through recital of his clan's praise. The Shona have a conviction that once plea is made through one's ancestors, a person's anger becomes controllable and manageable. Shona women usually manipulate this technique to calm down their angry husbands and it averts possible disastrous incidents.

Zvarevashe (*Dzinza RavaGovera VaChirumhanzu NaMutasa*, 1998) also presents the institution of marriage as another "successful way of establishing and maintaining sound relations and having a good opinion of each other" (Gelfand, 1973: 181). The author says the Mutuke, Dehwe, Nhomboka, Chipembere, Hama clans and others sought to have good relations with the Govera clan of Mhazi through marriage and it was successful. Among the Shona, marriage is so unifying that there is usually a constant flow of emissaries and goods between married groups as they hold



feasts and festivals, communing together. Like among other African people, among the Shona “marriage is not an individual contract, but a contract between clan and clan, tribe and tribe, family and family” (Fanon, 1959: 114). It is an institution that brings people together, makes them view, consider and treat each other as one thereby downplaying chances of nursing grudges against each other. The Shona philosophy, “*Daka nehama mutorwa aripo*” (Nursing a grudge against a relative instead of against a stranger) shows that among the Shona, it is uncalled for, inhuman, uncultured and unnecessary for one to begrudge or stir up conflict with his relatives. Interestingly, among the Shona, “*Munhu wose ihama yako*” (Everyone is your relative) and so the idea is to establish and maintain order and tranquillity with and among all societal members.

This however does not mean that the Shona never engaged in conflict, dispute, war or violence. They did, and, with conflict, there were various levels at which the people attempted to solve it, corresponding with a hierarchy of courts of appeal (Bourdillon, 1976: 127). Some cases were solved at the family court, others at the village court and others at the chief or king’s court. In Matsikiti’s *Rakava Buno Risifemberi* (1995), Bvunzawabaya’s marital dispute against Pasipamire is amicably solved by the family court headed by Nyanzira. His case is that he wants VaMbambara, his in-law to return all he had given him as bride price for Yeukai who had been pledged to him; the cattle, goats and milk they had gotten from his livestock. This is because Pasipamire who has been working for VaMbambara to have Yeukai as his wife has come back from Hwedza where he had been sent to extract iron. He has come back with plans to take back his impounded would-be wife. At the court, Bvunzawabaya is asked to make a list of his claims so that the court verifies both the logic and the modalities of paying back. His demands are discussed, trimmed to size and met and the gathering dismisses. The way the case is solved fits Rukuni’s presentation of how traditional cases were resolved, that, using dialogue, consultation and including more and more people, some with knowledge, some with wisdom, some with creative ideas, an issue is discussed until consensus is reached (2007: 59). Unlike Kuimba (1963) who presents a family leader, Mudziwapasi, as helpless, powerless and incapable of solving a domestic dispute that results in several deaths, Matsikiti gives a positive image of a traditional family leader who, through consultation with other elders of the family, manages to bring the volatile situation back to normalcy.

At a higher level, the king or chief was responsible for establishing and safeguarding peace. He could do this by ruling his subjects fairly. In *Dzinza RavaGovera VaChirumhanzu NaMutasa* (1998), Zvarevashe describes Nherera II's reign as quite outstanding and admirable because the chief wisely resolves disputes and conflicts among his subjects. Concerning the way he presided over people's cases, the author says:

*Ayitonga mhosva noruenzaniso asingaiti rusaruro, asingadi fufuro kana kugamuchira fumbamuromo kana kutonga negadzingai ravahosi navamurongo. Ainyatsoongorora mhosva imwe neimwe achibatsirwa namakurukota ake. Aipa zvirango zvakaenzanirana nemhosva dzinenge dzaparwa (p.115).*

He tried cases justly without taking sides, he did not accept any bribe or involve himself in corrupt practices, neither did he try with the jealousy of an elderly wife at a polygynous marriage. He analysed each case with the help of his advisors. He gave each case a very suitable judgement.

In the novel, Nherera II is presented as a just, impartial, incorrupt, incorruptible, democratic, responsible and wise chief who always consults his councillors, advisors and religious figures on matters affecting his chieftom and subjects. Resolution to cases and conflicts are arrived at and passed in accordance with the gravity of each case and done to most people's satisfaction. The advantage of reaching a consensus is that the decision is likely to be embraced by the greater community and has a better chance of being executed effectively (Rukuni, 2007: 59-60). King Nherera's approach to people's cases is tilted more towards resolving problems and maintaining good relations than imposing fines on the subjects. As Gombe (1995: 21) observes, the guiding principle underlying such deliberations was conciliation and restoration of good neighbourly relations. For those who ask for forgiveness, lighter punishment is meted. Nherera is also shown to be conspicuous for consulting the spiritual world in both sorrowful and happy moments and as such, manages to maintain a largely peaceful reign. The same can also be said of Chirisamhuru in Mutasa's *Misodzi, Dikita Neropa* (1991) whose peaceful reign transforms the Rozvi into a vast and very powerful empire. His subjects enjoy bumper harvests, abundant rainfall and boasts of a lot of livestock. They later think of building *Ndarikure* (watchtower and capital city) and *Nhururamwedzi* (ladder to collect the moon) because they have no external threats. Mutasa writes:

*Panguva idzi zvikara, nharadada namabhinya zvose navanyunyuti zvakanga zvapera kuti tsvai. Ndakazviona kuti varwi vakanga vasina pokutapudzira simba ravo. Shungu dzavo dzaiva dzokushaya pokuputsira hashu nokuratidza unyanzvi... Nhamo yakanga yavapo ndeyekushaya wekurwa naye (p.12).*

At this time, dangerous animals, bandits and all disgruntled people had been exterminated. I saw that the army had nowhere to use their strength. Their worry was that there was nowhere to unleash their anger and virility... Unfortunately, there was no one to fight against.

Life is largely peaceful because the perpetrators of unrest have been done away with. Whilst some have been killed so as to establish order, the establishment of a very just and democratic leadership has also helped silence other dissenting voices (Gombe, 1998: 195). Such leadership addresses and satisfies the needs of most subjects, leaving few with any complaints. It is true that an unjust leadership style gives birth to disgruntlement and emergence of opposing voices usually with disastrous consequences. Apart from settling all cases and disputes peacefully, Chirisamhuru has also forgiven and co-opted into the Rozvi clan even those who were once his enemies when he fought against Dyembeu. Such concerned and responsible leadership helps not only establish, but also maintain peaceful coexistence. Like Nherera II in Zvarevashe's novel, Chirisamhuru also consults the spiritual world on most issues affecting society thereby enhancing peace between the physical and the spiritual worlds.

What Zvarevashe and Mutasa present now is quite different from what early Shona writers, including Zvarevashe himself, portray about this same past. In recent novels, these two novelists show a truism about Shona society which early writers never referred to – that in conflict situations, Shona people's aim was reconciliation rather than imposition of a judgement or winning a case. Wrongdoers were rehabilitated and re-oriented into the dictates of society and were never condemned to perennial suffering as happens today.

Another important aspect that the three novelists (together with Matsikiti now) present unlike earlier writers is the democratic nature of traditional courts and authority. The family headman, chief or king is now being accorded his real position and image. He is shown to be always consulting and being advised by fellow elderly people, councillors or spiritual figures. It was not

a one-man show. Gykye's observation about the Ghanaian situation is akin to that of the traditional Shona society, that, "One head does not go into council" (in Wiredu and Gykye, 1992: 249). This exposes the political value of consulting; the fact that discussion by several heads or minds on matters of public concern is always cherished. The adage is a warning to every traditional leader that he cannot and must not singly consider and adopt any policy or action that affects others because he is an individual with one head. Yet, wisdom is not in one head (ibid: 248). The logic therefore is simple, if wisdom is not in one head, then one head cannot and must not make decisions on public matters where the exercise of wisdom is required. Put differently, matters affecting the whole society also need to be deliberated by members of that society. Contrary to Chakaipa's claim in *Pfumo Reropa* (1961) that Shona kings ruled in a way that pleased them, without anyone coming to protest, contemporary writers show that in traditional Shona, matters were never settled until everyone had had a chance to speak. They would talk and talk until they arrive at a consensus (Gykye, 1996: 111). In agreement, Rukuni (2007: 59) states that there was no issue, big or small that would be abandoned just because the court had run out of time as sometimes happens today. Hence, current Shona writers present the truth that traditional leaders were largely democratic and not autocratic and that, through this, they managed to safeguard peace in society.

In cases where the Shona would engage in war, it would be the last resort and usually after it had been sanctioned by the spiritual world. In *Nhume Yamambo* (1990), Chirisamhuru finally confronts Dyembeu in a war after being given a pat on the back by the spiritual world. Even so, the idea of a war is not always to kill. Shona people's intention is always to avoid the spilling of blood. As a result, they attempt to scare each other and if possible, avert the fight. That is why it takes more than two days for Chirisamhuru and Dyembeu to engage in a real fight. They first engage in a war of words whose aim is to scare the enemy and avoid confrontation. Chirisamhuru's group performs all kinds of superstitious behaviour so as to convince Dyembeu's allies that they better give in and avoid any physical confrontation. Chuwe Tavada personifies Mavhudzi of the powerful Mabweadziva religious cult so as to impress upon Dyembeu's fighters that the all-conquering religious contingent is on the side of Chirisamhuru. This would scare their opponents into peaceful submission. Again, their womenfolk appear undressed before Dyembeu's army. It was general belief among the Shona that this would weaken the opponent

and seriously affect their performance in battle. Those who took sight of naked women were contended that they were surely going to lose the battle or war. Knowing their fate, the best way out was to choose the safest way; of either submitting themselves into the hands of the enemy or running away. Either way was meant to avoid confrontation and the shedding of blood.

In *Dzinza RavaGovera VaChirumhanzu NaMutasa* (1998), Zvarevashe also shows that though generally peace-loving, the Shona could sometimes engage in war or restlessness. After the peaceful reign and death of Nherera II, various kinsmen are presented fighting in a bid to occupy the Mhazi chieftainship. The succession disputes leave several aspirants and people dead. After Pfete's death, the following people die in succession battles: Juru, Mudembererwa, Matida and Bvumbi. In Gutu, Chitutu murders Mutanga, Maokomavi and Mutizirapi. Later, Rashamira also hires the Ndebele to come and destroy Nherera's kingdom. Apart from succession disputes, strained social relations also disturbed peace. After the accidental stabbing of King Goveranyika's son by Mhepo's, the king instructs that all the boys with whom his son was playing be killed as a way of dealing with the situation. Noting the danger awaiting his son Mhepo flees and Goveranyika instructs his sons and army to look for, capture and bring back Mhepo. He warns them not at all to return should they fail to locate him. As a result, his people spent many years away from not only their people, but also wives and children, looking for Mhepo without success. When they finally return, without him, they are hardly allowed to rest and relate with their families but are immediately sent back on the unpopular mission vehemently opposed by the spiritual world through Kaguve's medium, Maita. Noting the lack of concern on the part of the king, the messengers secretly escape, each to their maternal grandparents, leaving the beleaguered king still in anticipation of success. Hence, strained social relations also threatened peace among the Shona. However, some of these wars and unrest were not justified since they were meant to fulfil individualistic and selfish ends.

In cases where individuals were bound to fulfil selfish and destructive ends as above, Shona religion again came in to regulate people's behaviour. In *Misodzi, Dikita Neropa* (1991), when Chirisamhuru later degenerates into a boastful, recidivistic and ego-centric king by embarking on unsanctioned projects of building *ndarikure* (watchtower and capital city) and *nhururamwedzi* (ladder to bring down the moon), the spiritual world warns him of his empire's demise. King

Chirisamhuru instructs his subjects to dig up mountains and hills, drag them to his place where he nurses the plans of establishing a magnificent capital. At the same time, others are made to cut tall poles and dig massive pits meant to support the structure, which would enable them to bring down the moon for the king's stool. As the work intensifies, people are subsequently ordered not to return to their homes, not to bath and not to feed. All these activities are viewed as derailing and delaying the quick completion of the given projects. The religious figure, Chuwe Tavada, in his trance warns and rebukes the king for making his subjects suffer and die by digging up mountains and hills meant to build the envisaged capital. In the same fashion, in *Dzinza RavaGovera VaChirumhanzu NaMutasa* (1998), Zvarevashe shows that when Goveranyika vows that no son or army member of his should rest or stay at home unless and until they find Mhepo (even after several years of futile search), he is criticised, rebuked and warned by the spiritual world. The spirit medium complains:

*Ko ngenyi uchionesa varwi vako njandaya yakadaro? Ngenyi uchivabatisa maneka kudaro? Mhepo unomutsvaka kuti umuuraye? Iwe hauna pwere dzinoshaisa? (p.50).*

Why do you trouble your army like that? Why do you make them suffer like that? You are looking for Mhepo so that you can kill him? Do not you have children who err?

The king is criticised for being self-centred. He does not consider that his fighters are family men who have social, economic and biological responsibilities to fulfil in their homes. Again, like any other human being, they deserve time to rest and relax. He also disregards that Mhepo's son had committed the crime inadvertently and so to want to make him and the rest of the family suffer is to be myopic and insensitive. More importantly, it is not the norm to solve crises through killing. The spirit medium takes pains to explain, remind and make Goveranyika not only see but also appreciate the Shona people's worldview that fighting and killing are never the best way to approach and address problems in life. Therefore, the two novelists show that despite the expected good, there were sometimes reactionary forces bent on disturbing peace but religion would always check on their behaviour.

It is, therefore, clear that the presentation of the Shona by early writers as a bloodthirsty, senseless and cruel group whose solution to conflicts was exhaustion and not reason (Armah,

1973: v) is unjustified. Such presentations only make sense if the significance of traditional religion in regulating behaviour is not specially referred to or is not objectively portrayed, in which case one makes a tragic mistake. What contemporary Shona writers show is that, although there were wars at times, they were very few and not as destructive and annihilating as painted by early novelists. The wars were largely noble and civilised as they could at times just be verbal and, or psychological or meant to co-opt the enemy. Again, the case of Chirisamhuru fighting Dyembeu who had usurped the throne by murdering Chirisamhuru's father and without approval from the spiritual world (thereby threatening peace), as presented by Mutasa shows that it was not always a point that war was bad. At times, it could be a good and justified war if it was for the well being of society.

The current writers are unlike early writers who describe war and its causes without contextualising them. Today's writers give enough and important detail as to why the Shona at times engaged in violence. Without such relevant detail, war becomes irrational and susceptible to misinterpretation. Surprisingly, the Shona are unarguably known to have been an agrarian society, something that they could not have been known for if they were everfighting. It is a fact that agricultural activities require that there be peace so that people can have time to clear land, plant, nurture crops to maturity and also harvest them. It is paradoxical and senseless to equate agriculture and restlessness. It is also important to note that, Shona religion, with its emphasis on the belief in *ngozi*, the avenging spirit, was enough to scare people from unnecessarily killing each other, as this would be catastrophic to not only the individual, but also society at large (Gombe, 1998: 133). The Shona were very much aware of the impoverishing, psychological and physical effects of *ngozi*. If anything, the Shona would be the very last people to kill each other for no apparent reason. It is therefore unfortunate that early writers present only the negative and seldom cases as if they were the typical.

### **3.3 Depiction of Shona religion**

Early fiction has portrayed Shona religion, in one extreme, as non-existent and at another level, as backward, cruel, superstitious, idolatry, powerless and devil worship. This religion, together with traditional medicine had been largely criticised, condemned and blamed as the chief causes

of the Shona people's poverty and suffering from which the victims were supposed to extricate themselves if ever they had any hopes of developing in life (Rukuni, 2007: 32). Writers like Chakaipa in *Rudo Ibofu* (1966) had urged Shona people to repudiate their simple, retrogressive and inhuman religion for a more sophisticated, civilised and progress-oriented Christian religion. Unfortunately, some Shona people heeded to this call.

As genuine writer-historians and philosophers of Shona culture, Mutasa (1990, 1991) and Zvarevashe (1998) to a large extent and Matsikiti (1995) to a lesser extent, re-look at Shona religion, putting it in its proper perspective. They show and explain that the people had a religion, which affected their day-to-day activities. Again, although their visions differ, they all acknowledge the existence and influence of traditional medicine and medicine men.

### **3.3.1 Shona religion and its importance in people's life**

Mutasa (1990, 1991), Zvarevashe and Matsikiti (1995) show that contrary to whatever claims, the Shona had a religion. They believed in *Mwari* or *Musikavanhu* (God) whom they approached through their ancestors via spirit mediums and *n'angas*, traditional medicine men (Gelfand, Mavi, Drummond and Ndemera, 1985: 3). In *Nhume Yamambo* (1990), Mavhudzi, Vhudzijena and others are the intermediaries between God and people and vice versa whilst in *Dzinza RavaGovera VaChirumhanzu NaMutasa* (1998), Kaguve Chirongo, Chaminuka and Nehanda perform that role and all are linked to the Shona people's God at Mabweadziva, now Matopos.

The writers show that the Shona lived a religious life. They did not have a definite or specific day and time to practise their religion (Nyevera, in Shumba et al., 1983: 17). Rather, all their daily activities, political, social or economic in nature, were influenced, shaped and governed by their religion.

Shona religion played a vital role in the political affairs of the people. As already seen in one of the previous sections, it is the spiritual world that had the final say in the appointment and installation of a traditional leader, a king or chief (Gombe, 1998: 196), having also tested these



leaders to verify their authenticity. It again reprimanded and warned traditional leaders against misusing and abusing their powers.

Socially, the Shona people's life was also not manageable without religion. As such, the people consulted and informed the spiritual world of all their endeavours and worries in life. The simple act of forgetting one's *mudzimu* (ancestral spirits) would be followed by punishment in the form of sickness or death (Gelfand, 1973: 119). These beings must always be in the minds of their descendants. In *Dzinza RavaGovera VaChirumhanzu NaMutasa* (1998), since his escape from the wrath of Goveranyika, Mhepo commits his family's life and security into the hands of his ancestors and God. When his wife gives birth to a baby, he again informs and commits it to the ancestors because it is them who safeguard their progeny. It is because these family spirits care and guard the interests and welfare of the family nuclear unit (ibid: 114). When Chapuwanyika, Goveranyika's son and his army track him, Mhepo pleads with the spiritual world to guarantee them safety:

*Imi baba Nyamubvambire makatungamira,  
Navakuru venyu vose vari ikoko,  
Newe Kaguve Chirongo gombwe guru resure,  
Nemi Mwari wedu Musikavanhu;  
Seiko kutipinza mungwaniwani yakadai?...  
Dzimaidzai pfumo raGovera rasvika (p.38).*

You father Nyamubvambire, who passed away long back,  
And your elders, who are together with you,  
And you Kaguve Chirongo, the clan spirit,  
Why letting us into this great trouble, ...  
Confuse the Govera army, which has arrived.

The religious incantation conveys a number of issues about the people's beliefs. Firstly, at the core of Shona people's religion are the ancestors. These departed spirits are believed to have power and authority over the living. They protect and help the clan and separate families constituting the clan (Gelfand et al., 1985: 3). They safeguard all against illnesses, threats and guarantee good harvests for their progeny. The ancestral spirits are again an intermediary to God since it is never permitted for anyone to approach directly an important figure, such as one's

father, on an important issue, whom he can only approach through an intermediary such as the father's sister or younger brother (Gelfand, 1973: 111). This emanates from the respect that the Shona accords to one's father. The same applies to God, whom the Shona view as so important and awesome to be bothered by common people, hence has to be approached through the ancestors, who in the hierarchy are close to him.

It is clear that the Shona knew and believed in the existence of God, the creator who is equally believed to look after and guarantee people of a happy living and without whose protection people feel their life is endangered. They did not learn or hear about God for the first time from white missionaries, confirming Rukuni's (2007: 78) assertion that no one has the monopoly of knowledge of God and so no one can lecture to the other about spiritual connection to God. The Shona always referred to him and called upon him to intervene in critical situations such as above. The God, through ancestors too, immediately responded to the people's needs. After Mhepo's prayer captured above, there is immediate darkness and an unexpected heavy downpour and the enemy's army is struck with great confusion and powerlessness and it then aimlessly wanders away, with some even losing their weapons in the incident.

In Matsikiti's *Rakava Buno Risifemberi* (1995), when Gorerenhamo escapes the gruesome death of his child (one of the triplets) and wife, he continuously pleads with the ancestors to look after them, and such security is guaranteed. Again, when Mudziwepasi's delegation leaves for Hwedza to get iron for making several gadgets, each prays to his ancestors for a safe journey back and forth, which they are granted. Once notified of such endeavours, the spiritual world safeguards its progeny from threats from wild animals, evil spirits and robbers.

In religion, there are also myths and taboos meant to maintain good and healthy social relations. Mutasa (1990) and Zvarevashe (1998) both show that this could be done by avoiding the following: incest, stepping on sacred places, hunting without consulting or informing territorial spirits, farming on forbidden days (*chisi*), murder, adultery and hatred. Incest was abhorred because at one level, it resulted in the birth of zombies or weaklings. It was again taboo to step on sacred places. Such places housed important religious spirits who needed to be accorded the respect they deserved. Territorial spirits owned and looked after the territory and so they had to

be informed of any activities taking place in their environment. This also made them look after and provide for their siblings (Gelfand, 1973: 112). It was unexpected to farm on forbidden days as this not only showed disrespect to the spiritual world, but also denied the people a chance to rest and revitalise their strength. Belief in witchcraft, like belief in *ngozi*, the avenging spirit also made people live peacefully with each other as they were afraid of harming or offending a witch or one who could hire the services of a witch to fight their case. This made death an unfamiliar occasion among the Shona (ibid: 114) and that is why each time someone died they had to consult diviners so as to establish the cause.

In all these cases, it was imperative for the Shona to observe such decrees, as failure to carry out any behest even to the smallest detail would invariably be followed by the wrath of the offended spirit (Gelfand et al., 1985: 3; Gelfand, 1973: 119). Again, it was far better to obey and not to ask too many questions (Gelfand, 1973: 117). This is because religion is about believing in things you cannot prove (Rukuni, 2007: 21), is deeply situated in assumptions and beliefs most of which are not tested or even testable.

The spiritual world was powerful economically as it was socially. It is ancestors who owned land and guaranteed its fertility, especially the spirit of the founder of the clan, the *mhondoro* (or ethnic group's spirit), which cared for the whole chiefdom ensuring the fertility of the soil and production of rain (Gelfand et al., 1985: 3). They kept the fields and crops away from destruction by animals, pests or enemies. Hence, they guaranteed the health of both crops and livestock *ipso facto*, guaranteeing good life. In *Nhume Yamambo* (1990) and *Dzinza RavaGovera VaChirumhanzu NaMutasa* (1998), the writers explain that when there was drought, the chief or king would organise a rainmaking ceremony whereupon he would rebuke, reprimand and plead with ancestors and God to perform their duties. With everything having been perfectly done, rain would certainly fall. Sometimes the chief would send a delegation to Mabweadziva in consultation with spirit mediums and this would definitely bring rain. In *Nhume Yamambo* (1990), the narrator, Tavada says that at Mabweadziva:

*Vaichema mvura vaiti kana vabvisa zvipo zvavo voudzwa kuti pakudzoka vasati vayambuka rwizi rwokuti sokuti Sangana, Runde, Kwekwe, Save, Mutirikwi zvichibva nedivi ravakananga, mvura inenge yatonaya kumusha kwavo. Isu takaisa zvichemo zvedu*

*takananga kuti tidzivirirwe zvirwere, nhamo nepfumo. Zvakatendwa tikabva hedu tadzokera kwaNjerere* (p.80).

Those who asked for rain would be told that on their return, before crossing the river, for example, Sangana, Runde, Kwekwe, Save, Mutirikwi, depending on where they were heading, rain would have fallen in their areas. We presented our plea, asking to be safeguarded against diseases, suffering and war. It was accepted and we returned to Njerere.

Writing on a similar idea among the Basotho, Jingoos says:

In our tradition, I never saw a drought that lasted over six months like those we are having... The principal chief would send out a word that all men should gather on a certain day to go on a communal hunt, *mohitsoane* to bring rain. It often happened that rain would fall even before they left on their hunt... I do not know of any *mohitsoane* when men did not return wet with rain from the hunt... it would rain for certain it would rain. Even women could also bring rain through their own ways (Perry, J and C, 1975: 34).

These cases show that traditional religion honoured its responsibility of guaranteeing people with rain. It also granted people food in times of dire need, especially those who embarked on long journeys. In both novels and in Matsikiti's *Rakava Buno Risifemberi* (1995), those who embarked on long journeys and got hungry on the way asked for food and were given. They were usually granted an assortment of food upon their proper presentation of a plea.

All the cases show that once religion has been removed, the Shona never see their life as worth living. It becomes meaningless. Their world, just like that of the Igbo, is an arena for interplay of various forces (Achebe, 1988: 62), one where the dead, the natural and the living interact. The Shona world is therefore one, not two; there is no difference between the sacred and the secular. The ancestors who are the intermediaries between people and God are talked to, rebuked and reminded to perform their duties. The people do not quite worry about offending God, but about trespassing against ancestors who should mediate on their behalf. Ancestors are so central that Vera writes that:

Whatever you do you must not offend your *mudzimu* or those of others. If you do many problems will result. A *mudzimu* is like a shadow. It follows you wherever you go. Each of us is looked after by a *mudzimu*. But we must also look after them. That is why we

pour beer to the ground, to appease and thank our *mudzimu*... They are not dead. They are always around protecting us. There is no living person who is stronger than the departed. When the whole village prays together, they pray to the ancestral *mudzimu* of their clan (Vera, 1993: 31).

Explicit in the view is that ancestral spirits always look after the well being of the living and in turn the living commune with them, augmenting the oneness between the two worlds. Again, the ancestors are very much alive and are therefore active participants in the lives of the living. In concurrence with the above assertion, p'Bitek (1986:19) writes that:

In African belief, even death does not free him (man). If he had been an important member of society while he lived, his ghost continues to be revered and fed; and he in turn is expected to guide and protect the living... 'Till death do us part' the Christian vow made between man and woman at the wedding ritual sounds hollow in Africa.

This cult makes the living and the dead a united whole, they are together in times of happiness or sorrow. Hence, important aspects of the Christian doctrine that when one is dead one becomes powerless and has nothing to offer to the living do not apply to the Shona world-view where one becomes more powerful when he is dead. In fact, the dead in Shona cosmology are considered as the living dead for they continue to exist and influence events in people's lives. If anything, the Shona world-view has great reverence and respect to any advice from the living dead. No one can refuse to carry out any ritual or recommendation declared to be necessary by the spiritual world.

What the writers present also show that Shona religion is anthropomorphic; even God is taken to be human. He is asked for rain. Contemporary writers show that Shona religion is authentic. It is as real and self-satisfying to the Shona as Christianity is to those who believe and follow its principles. In fact, Shona religion is presented as better. Unlike Christianity, whose God (if people ask for rain or something) is normally said to provide late answers to which people have to wait patiently, in Shona religion, the God responds as quickly as the right procedures are followed by those who ask for anything (Gombe, 1998: 162). Again, it turns out to be plainly mythical that the Shona people's poverty and suffering were a result of their refusal to shun their religion. Rather, their religion was the key behind their prosperity: wealth, bumper harvests, good health, peace, joy and good living.

The more one reads Mutasa and Zvarevashe's contemporary novels, the more one approximates knowledge of the Shona people's religion and, on the other hand, the more one reads novels by early writers on the same subject, the less one is informed of its complexity. With enough detail, one cannot help but appreciate that Shona religion is far from being retrogressive as was both the colonial and Christian thinking.

### 3.3.2 Contrasting images of traditional medicine and medicine men

Whilst Mutasa and Zvarevashe present traditional medicine and medicine men objectively, Matsikiti continues to champion the colonial mentality about them.

The first two writers show that traditional medicine and the practitioners were useful for safeguarding, protecting and enhancing life. In *Nhume Yamambo* (1990), Chuwe Tavada, Chirisamhuru's religio-political emissary explains that he used this medicine to protect his ox, Mazviyitireni when he left it in the mountains near Mabweadziva and found it quite safe on his return. During his inauguration as king of the Rozvi, Chirisamhuru hires the services of these men so as to flush out any enemies and those who nurse grudges against him:

*Zvaiti kana wapedza kuvhendenyurwa navarwi waipinda muboka ren'anga dzine hakata. Idzi ndidzo dzainzi dzidzimbunyure zviru mupfungwa mako. Dzaitarisawo kuti dzione kana uri musori waDyembeu namadzishe anomutsigira. Hakata dzaikandwa patatu. Kana pose ukaita mhururuchirume wopinda norugare. Asi kana dzikati rutsva tende, newewo waiona chakati tende. Maizoti kana masvika pasuwo reguta mokushwa mvura zhinji yaibva mugate guru. Iyo yaiva nemushonga wemamhepo. Kana une zvakakugara waisutswa ipapo uchitaura zvose zvivi zvanzvenga pahakata (p. 158).*

After the fighters searched you, you then proceeded to the group of traditional medicine men who had divination bones. This group flushed out what was in the people's minds. They also discerned if one was not Dyembeu's spy or from any other chief who sided with him. There were three divination points. If you succeeded at all the three points you entered peacefully. However, if you failed, then you got yourself into great trouble. Ultimately, when you reached the main gate you had water sprinkled on you, coming from a very huge drum. This water had some medicine in it. If one was possessed by anything, one got into a trance, divulging all that the traditional diviners might have failed to discern.

Traditional diviners are depicted as a very powerful category of people whose services are sought by the greatest and renowned members of society. The medicine men were endowed with powers to discern what was in the people's minds. This was quite possible because they could communicate with the spiritual world, which was the ultimate overseer of all actions and intentions (Gelfand et al., 1985: 3; Gombe, 1998: 141). The three divination points referred to above are in line with the Shona people's practice of consulting traditional diviners. The Shona are known never to have acted on advice from one diviner. They too knew very well that some diviners could not discern or tell the truth and so it was always not only necessary but also imperative to consult more than one diviner for them to be sure of what course of action to take. If all or more diviners concurred on one thing the Shona would be sure of it and then act accordingly.

The diviners were also capable of discerning that Harunandima, whom the king had always desired to have, as his wife was not the one people had brought him. Instead, they had brought Harupindi for him. In the given cases, the practice of consulting traditional diviners is shown not only to be a serious and complex one, but a dependable and enlightening exercise. People have complex situations unravelled and clarified. The writer too accords traditional medicine the respect it deserves. It is shown as capable of unveiling secrets in people's lives. This medicine is again shown to be quite dependable and not to fail its users as was the belief and attitude espoused by early and Christian writers. The writer shows that under the influence of traditional medicine, people were made to proclaim all the other unknown spirits, actions or intentions under which they were operating. Even in his later reign, King Chirisamhuru again engages traditional diviners to eliminate witchcraft and they do so quite expertly. The diviners' prowess in identifying such secrets is admired by the writer.

In another incident, at Mabweadziva shrine, Chuwe Tavada is told and taught the skill of using traditional medicine – in healing those bitten by snakes and dangerous animals and those given food potions, stabbed by spears, those who broke their legs or scrapped their skins. He again is initiated into the skill of amputating and rejoining broken bones as well as digging, drying and storing medicinal roots. Hence, Gelfand et al. (1985: 6) state that not only is the *n'anga* a diagnostician but he is also a therapist, employing herbal medicines to overcome ailments. It is

this rich heritage, which he (Tavada) explores and exploits in treating those people who get injured during the uprooting of hills to build *ndarikure* (watchtower and capital city). Traditional medicine men are shown as powerful and awesome figures who interact with the spiritual world. In his trance, Chuwe Tavada explains that Chirisamhuru's reign will painfully end due to his revolting against the spiritual world. He narrates that initially there will come black foreigners from the south that will destroy his rule, and those new rulers will be defeated by a new white race. The people will suffer terribly under the rule of this alien race until such a time when they will liberate themselves. After that they will live happily in their ancestral land.

The prediction comes to fruition when the Rozvi are defeated by Nyamazana, a female leader of a break away race from Zululand. Later, white settlers make inroads into Rozviland and the capital, as had been predicted by the man of traditional religion, Tavada, is shifted to Harava, now Harare. Other historical sources also authenticate Mutasa's presentation. Mutswairo, a renowned historical writer also presents an incident when Chaminuka the prophet of Shona religion indicated that the Shona would be colonised by a white race (1988), which later proved to be a fact. Another notable religious figure, Nehanda is also on record, as saying her bones shall rise, in reference to the Second Chimurenga in which black Zimbabweans joined hands to fight and defeat the colonisers. All these statements were fulfilled and these depictions show that traditional religious figures were quite powerful interpreters of events who could foretell and forth tell.

In *Dzinza RavaGovera VaChirumhanzu NaMutasa* (1998), when Mhepo and his family run away from the wrath of King Goveranyika, they are protected from dangers of the forest partly by the medicines the family leader uses around each of their resting places. He uses *Chivhunamusana* (That which breaks the back) and *Marambakukombwa* (That which refuses to be surrounded) both of which bar any danger from befalling them. *Chivhunamusana* destroys the enemy's back so that he cannot manage to continue drawing close to his intended victim. Ultimately, the enemy becomes powerless and leaves his victim unscathed. It is believed that a strong back is what usually drives around many people and other creatures and once the back is broken, even a very dangerous animal becomes harmless. When used, this medicine weakens all those who approach others with an evil mind; they will never have the power to get to their victim.



*Marambakukombwa* was also a special medicine that made it impossible for the enemy to surround its victim. It was popular practice among the Shona to surround one's victims (if they were many) and then attack them. Once surrounded, it was easier to defeat people because they had nowhere to retreat to or hide. They became cornered. This medicine was powerful enough to disallow that. It shattered all hopes or plans to engulf the victim. Through it, Mhepo and his family are safeguarded from possible danger, including from wild animals and King Goveranyika's people who were tracking him in a bid to kill him.

Even in his later reign, Mhepo boasts of great medicine people who used their prowess to save babies orphaned at suckling stage by inducing milk in those mothers or girls who were not at suckling stage. It is clear that they had a society that was developed and had advanced ways of saving human life. Mhepo's people also used *muvevahonye* (worm's enemy) to treat livestock affected by a number of infections. Through it, they saved many of their livestock from illnesses, guaranteeing themselves of an abundant animal population.

In all the above cases, traditional medicine and medicine men are there to protect, spare, save and prolong life as well as unravel secrets whose ultimate intention is to safeguard life. The practitioners are presented as quite wise, intelligent, honourable and honoured in society (Gombe, 1998: 139). It is also through them that the Shona remained alive until the coming of the whites. Several village people interviewed testified that such people and their medicine still remain valuable even today and are heavily relied upon by both rural and urbanised folks who would have been failed by the so-called modern and sophisticated western medicine. The whites and even some Shona people have never paused to think what was in the traditional medicine that had kept the Shona people going from time immemorial. One notices that modern hospitals, clinics, the medicine and medical practitioners are just an alternative form and are in no way better than the traditional ones. It is this important detail that early Shona writers, knowingly or unknowingly suppressed and led to the heavy criticism of the health institutions of the past. It is clear that sane, serious, respected and concerned people of the society consult traditional medicine men.

Despite their good, Mutasa also shows that some traditional diviners were sometimes responsible for the suffering of people. Their word was powerful enough to save or condemn people to suffering or death. Owing to their authority, very few people if any, doubted their advice (Gelfand, 1973: 117). When Chirisamhuru degenerates into an egocentric king who rules with a heavy hand, he also has traditional diviners who speak in his favour, even giving him wrong advice. Many people die during the erection of the *Nhururamwedzi* (ladder to bring down the moon) out of the advice such respected men had given:

*N'anga dzamambo dzakanga dzamuudza kuti kana asingadi kuti hwaro hweShongwe hutsemuke makomba aya anotofanira kunyoroveswa neropa. Dzakati panodiwa ropa remagamba makuru enyika, manyusa nembonga. Kune mikweshwa mizhinji yeparume yakanga yatsakatika ropa rayo richiitiswa basa rokupfupira Shongwe iyi (1991: 70).*

The king's traditional diviners had told him that if he did not want the foundation of the envisioned ladder to crack, the trenches had to be moistened by blood. They said this should be blood from great fighters of the clan together with that from male and female attendants of traditional religion. Many important figures perished, their blood being used in the rituals for the ladder.

The author makes a distinction between genuine traditional diviners and fake or self-acclaimed ones. Whilst authentic people of religion spoke only the true word, regardless of it being loved or hated by the king, fake diviners only sought to please the king and obtain favours from him. The above is a case of diviners who had degenerated into personal possessions of the king and who therefore always spoke favourably of him and his unpopular projects of the *Ndarikure* (watchtower and capital city) and *Nhururamwedzi* (ladder to bring down the moon). This is almost akin to the Biblical distinction between true and false prophets, where false prophets only spoke in favour of the kings. These personal diviners blessed acts and ideas that were against the wish of the spiritual world. It is a fact that not every traditional diviner was authentic and that not every being of this kind always spoke the truth. The Shona were very much aware of the existence of such cases and that also partially explains why they treasured consulting more than a single diviner. Again, they were aware of diviners who spoke what they knew was happening owing to their proximity to the people who would have sought their services. As such, the Shona always preferred seeking the services of traditional diviners who resided in far away places. These people had no knowledge of their clients' backgrounds and so had limited chances of

using this to inform their advice. Hence, Mutasa shows that although traditional medicine men were an important sector of society, some needed to be approached with caution.

In Matsikiti's *Rakava Buno Risifemberi* (1995), traditional medicine men are painted negatively. After indicating that their word was listened to and obeyed, the writer goes on to show that they were never up to any good. After the birth of triplets, the Warikandwa household consults a diviner in a bid to know what the spiritual world's advice on such a mystery would be. Gurameno (He who cuts off teeth), a traditional diviner with a self-denigrating name, orders that the triplets born of Gorerenhamo and Maingeni be killed. He further claims that the couple had given birth to triplets because they were evil and so had to be killed too. He also gives very difficult instructions to those who would throw away the triplets into a pool: to close their eyes, not to look back, not to greet anyone along the way and then to wash their hands with medicine. To prove the healer wrong, only two infants who had died are thrown away but the *n'anga* never senses it. He even later claims that Gorerenhamo and his family have perished when in fact; they have safely escaped and are alive. The moral is quite clear: sane people and serious seekers of truth should never consult traditional medicine men. This is no surprise, coming from an ordained Reverend of the Wesley Methodist Church in Zimbabwe, a church that disparages and vehemently preaches against both the traditional diviners and those who seek their services. The writer even testified in an interview that he cannot speak highly of traditional diviners, a group of people who are cursed in the Bible (interview, 8 January 2002). To do so would be the same as going against the gospel he preaches.

The name the writer accords the diviner, Gurameno (He who cuts off teeth), also shows Matsikiti's attitude towards such people. The name suggests an unskilled, unfeeling and cruel medical practitioner who instead of carefully removing the teeth of his clients so as to reduce pain, chooses to carelessly cut them off, not only causing severe pain, but also leaving other pieces, which should have been extracted. The name condemns the traditional diviner as one who is bent on causing untold suffering to his clients. Yet, in the traditional context, he provided spiritual explanations to the causes of mishaps and was one of the very few people who could reason, talk and negotiate with the departed ancestors and traditional society could not do without him (Gombe, 1995: 119). The writer chooses to denude the diviner of the respect and

dignity that tradition accorded him. It is due to the diviner's advice that triplet children have to be killed, that Gorerenhamo and his family brave the long journey they walk on foot despite that his wife badly needed time to rest and recover as she had recently given birth. Worse, it was not out of choice that the couple had given birth to triplets and neither was it the desire of the children to be born triplets. The writer's *n'anga* is "a caricature of dark passions" (Chiwome and Gambahaya, 2000:93) and so the author is critical of such medical practitioners whose word creates torture for innocent people.

Not only does Matsikiti distort reality, but also contradicts himself. The Shona society hardly took a suspicious diviner seriously until they had determined the authenticity of what he said. The writer distorts the practice of consulting *n'angas*. As seen in the earlier section, the Shona knew very well that some traditional healers could not discern or tell the truth and so they usually never acted on advice from one traditional healer as presented by Matsikiti. They consulted more than one to establish the truth. Worse still, Matsikiti indicates that they consulted *n'anga yemumusha*, a family diviner. This reduces the practice to a mere childish game. The Shona are known to consult medicine men who resided in distant areas and who knew little if anything about their families and personalities. Those interviewed indicated that such places as Chipinge and Mozambique, *kuMaroro* (to Maroro) [a word that was used to refer to Mozambique, especially believed to be close to the Indian Ocean] were popular consulting areas among the Shona. Matsikiti denies the reader relevant information that proves him otherwise. He therefore falls into the same trap of colonial and Christian writers who distort reality and despise Shona traditional healers.

### **3.4 The custom of killing triplets**

In *Rakava Buno Risifemberi* (1995), Matsikiti portrays the mentioned custom of killing triplets, superficially. In a truly rebellious style to the custom, the writer shows that Gorerenhamo's family successfully goes against the decree of both the traditional healer and the spiritual world that such babies should be killed. Noting that the traditional healer has ordered that the only survivor among the triplets be killed, Gorerenhamo secretly chooses to disobey and then escapes with his family into foreign land. Through this, he saves both the child and the family at large.

Whilst in a foreign land, Pasipamire, the only survivor among the triplets then grows into a very hardworking, strong, resilient, dependable, prosperous and cultured young man. The plot is simple: Pasipamire, the only child to survive and escape the cruel practice thrives to become a very rich, respected and respectful person in society. The moral is again clear: Shona customs rob society of potentially great people.

The writer presents the custom without giving enough detail as to why the Shona practised it. With the kind of detail he presents, the Shona are seen as senseless, primitive, irrational and stupid followers of traditional religion. One is bound to 'thank' modernity because society now happily receives and cares for triplets. The way he presents the custom merely ends at blaming the traditional healers and Shona religion without proper justification. Although it is a reality that such children were killed and that such a custom deprived society of possible great people, what remains a mystery are the reasons why the Shona embarked on such a custom. The custom is rendered barbaric, inhuman and uncivilised. The writer presents the custom as if it was not born out of logical and plausible causes. The Shona are such a child-loving society who would have scarcely killed such a blessing of three babies for no clear reason. This love for children is even shown by contemporary couples or individuals who, when they fail to conceive, visit both modern and traditional doctors (Kabweza in Kabweza, Hatugari, Hamutyinei and Hove, 1979: 10) or even steal babies from hospitals so as to have 'children of their own'.

The writer tries to end the custom through rebellion and escape by characters, as in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* where those who had born twin children escaped to the Christian religion (1958), which accommodated them. Having rebelled against the practice, the saved child, Pasipamire later prospers. The weakness of his 'rebellion' and 'escape' plot is that, the Warikandwa family, from whom Gorerenhamo has run away never get to know that one of the triplets who should have died is still alive and prospering. As such, they will not stop the custom because to them, the traditional healer has said Gorerenhamo and his family have perished. Rebellion and escape are both not the best ways of ending a bad custom. Rather they are a pointer to irrationalism and defeat. The writer's idea to end a bad custom by rebelling against it does not truthfully reflect what happens in real life where obsolete cultural values and practices naturally find themselves falling out of favour with society. As Chiwome (1996: 74) observes,

customs are survival strategies. They are dropped when they become redundant. For as long as a custom serves a purpose, it will survive.

Again, Matsikiti uses an unrealistic character to present his otherwise valid point. Of all the people, a great liar and self-acclaimed diviner like Gurameno who is far from being a true representative of the religion and people in question can hardly be taken seriously. As a result, a number of questions remain unanswered: If the Shona had consulted more than one diviner, as was their practice, would they have got the same advice? What if they had consulted a genuine diviner? What if they had consulted a diviner from a distant place? Such questions that continue to rise are testimony that the writer did not do the expected and required intensive research that is hallmark of a committed writer. He misrepresents the custom by focusing on one side instead of looking at it wholly as he does with marriage customs like *kuzvarira*, daughter-pledging and *kutema ugariri*, mortgaging one's labour to have a wife.

### **3.5 Depiction of Shona marriage customs: *kuzvarira* (daughter-pledging) and *kutema ugariri* (mortgaging one's labour to get a wife)**

Unlike the custom of killing triplets, Matsikiti presents these two practices wholly. He presents the good and the bad in them and this enables readers to "pass their own judgements after knowing the whole truth" (Ngugi, 1982: 7). The kind of detail that the writer provides is sufficient enough to make readers draw valid conclusions on the admirable as well as deplorable aspects associated with the practices.

#### **3.5.1 *Kuzvarira*, daughter-pledging**

The Mbambara, a poor and hunger-ravaged family pledges its daughter, Yeukai to a very old, rich, extravagant, self-centred, sexually ungratified yet very skilled blacksmith and prosperous farmer, Bvunzawabaya. Through dialogue, interior monologue, flashback and contrast, the writer presents both the positive and negative aspects of this custom.

On the good, the Mbambara family fills many granaries with millet dished out by Bvunzawabaya. In addition, they have a goat and a fat ox slaughtered for them. Bvunzawabaya again arranges and conducts a highly attended beer-party, *nhimbe* for his in-laws at which he provides all the food – beer, sadza and meat. It is him who helps his in-laws till many fields including those that had lain idle for years. The same custom transforms the pathetic and pitied Mbambara family into a respected and envied one after they get bumper harvests from their fields and as they have many goats and cattle rented to them by Bvunzawabaya. It is through the custom that the whole family is saved from hunger and starvation. The custom was therefore a life-saving strategy, which also helped establish or even, cement very sound human relations (Kabweza, in Kabweza et al., 1979: 61), hence was looked at positively and had a respectable image among the Shona.

On the bad, the author shows that the custom forces young girls into loveless marriages with very old people even against their wish and before they mature. In her soliloquy and dialogue with her aunt, the troubled, victimised and remorseful Yeukai expresses the pain of being forced to marry a man who is not her choice. This way, the practice is not born out of true love (Gombe, 1998: 86). It violates the girl child's interests and rights and reduces her to an object of self-enrichment and self-pride, hence its ultimate demise. In addition, young, faithful and committed men like Pasipamire have their beloved snatched away from their jaws by the rich and asserting ones like Bvunzawabaya. In some cases, the disadvantaged suitor would have to wait even for another pregnancy for him to have his wife (ibid; Kabweza op cit., 1979: 59). The custom therefore condemns the unfortunate ones like Pasipamire to more painful experiences as they have their beloved wrestled away from them and pledged to the affluent members of the society under the guise of saving the family from trying times.

Unlike Chakaipa who condemns the custom without proper justification in *Pfumo Reropa* (1961), Matsikiti praises that which is admirable and condemns that which is worth the scorn. Again, unlike the custom of killing triplets, which lacks detail, here the writer exposes the reasons behind the custom. The reasons he gives for the practice are quite plausible and fall within the period he writes about. The rationale behind the custom is given and as such, its relevance is appreciated. Again, the side effects are thoroughly exposed. With this exposition,

the reasons behind its extinction today are thus accepted and understood. The writer shows that the custom was popular then because it served a specific purpose in society. It was in line with the needs, the thinking and lifestyle of the period in question. Yet it was bad too. With this detail, contemporary Shona readers not only get to know about their past's strengths and weaknesses, but they can also make informed decisions on which customs or practices from the past they would want to maintain, revive, modify or discard. Once a custom is made to speak for itself, it is not liable to misinterpretation.

### **3.5.2 *Kutema ugariri*, mortgaging one's labour to get a wife**

This is a Shona custom in which a young and poor man works for his in-laws for a considerable period before he is given his wife (Kabweza op cit., 1979: 62). The work he does is equated to the bride price he should have paid. An orphaned and poor Pasipamire who falls in love with Yeukai, VaMbambara's daughter is given many years to work before he is handed his wife. Once at his in-laws, Pasipamire builds and thatches a hut and granaries works tirelessly in the fields, slaughters beasts offered to his in-laws and runs other errands under the instruction of his in-law. He is then sent to Hwedza to obtain iron for both his in-law and Bvunzawabaya, an old but prosperous new in-law of VaMbambara. In embarking on all these activities, Pasipamire hopes that he is working for Yeukai, the girl he has fallen for. Ultimately, it turns out that he will not have her since she has already been pledged to Bvunzawabaya and so he has to wait and work longer since he is promised Pfumisai, Yeukai's younger sister instead. The writer objectively presents this custom, like the previous one.

On the good, it accords the poor like Pasipamire the chance to marry. In a society where marriage was a virtue (Gelfand, 1973: 167) and where husbandless-ness, wifelessness and childlessness were treated with contempt, the custom granted everyone a chance to marry and beget children. It catered for the disadvantaged ones so that they too could fulfil important goals in society. The Shona have an adage, *murombo munhu* (a poor person is equally human) [Gombe, 1998: 83], meant to cater for the shortcomings and wishes of this particular group of people. Society acknowledged that people are not equally gifted and that not everyone comes from a well-to-do background that would enable him to pay *lobola* for his wife. As such, the



custom gave such people a leeway. Presented this way, one is bound to appreciate the custom taking into account the context.

Any culture that is sensitive to the individual status and capabilities of its people is noble, virtuous and civilised. The Shona society of the past set goals and then provided the strategies with which to achieve those goals. The same can be said about polygamy, a custom that the three writers pay cursory glances at. Though grossly misrepresented by early writers, polygamy too served an important role in society. In a situation where everyone was expected to marry or to get married and where women outnumbered men, society accepted that a man could have more than one wife, but only if he could manage it. That is why only the rich could have such kind of marriages.

However, like polygamy, the custom of *kutema ugariri* also had serious shortcomings or pimples of ugliness in it. It justified exploitation and oppression of a different kind. The author shows that it is slavery disguised as a noble custom. The custom places the son-in-law at the mercy and disposal of his father-in-law, and the former is exposed to and expected to tolerate any kind of treatment and obey all instructions from the later (ibid: 83). Pasipamire does a lot of work; working tirelessly in the fields by himself and undertakes the risk of going to Hwedza to get iron. He does all this sheepishly. Also, although he commits himself to all the prescribed duties thinking he is labouring for Yeukai, his in-law already nurses other ideas, hoping to give him the younger daughter, Pfumisai. This means he does not only have to work a little longer, but wait a bit longer too. What is clear is that the custom condemns the very unfortunate it seeks to rescue. The author shows that there were no checks and balances since young men could have their fiancés taken by the rich and greedy ones. Consequently, a younger girl who might not be the ideal wife for the labouring in-law was earmarked for the in-law. Hence, the custom ended up producing marriages not born out of true love. It also tolerated mistrust and cunningness on the part of the daughters' parents as they could do whatever came into their minds.

However, the way the author presents this custom seems to stem from Biblical influence. What happens to Pasipamire is almost similar to what happens to Jacob who was working for Rachel only to be told that a younger sister could not be married before the elder one is married and so

he was made to work for seven more years for him to get Rachel after Laban had cheated him and given him Leah. This influence is explained by the fact that the writer himself is an ordained Reverend of the Wesley Methodist Church in Zimbabwe who therefore in most cases relates Biblical stories to life. Never the less, the idea of servitude still stands. Again, that VaMbambara decides to pledge Yeukai to the affluent Bvunzawabaya instead of the wretched Pasipamire also indicates that traditional society was also materialistic. What is clear is that if a custom is given the platform to showcase its aspects, it justifies its existence or demise. This is an example of a practice presented through the eyes of an insider who practices it.

### **3.6 Contrasting images of women**

Settlers invented and propagated myths about gender relations of the pre-colonial period. Shona indigenous culture was demonised as highly sexist and patriarchal (Furusa in Mguni, Furusa and Magosvongwe [eds], 2006: 5). It was presented as highly oppressive and abusive to women. Women's problems were and continue to be largely blamed on Shona men and patriarchy both of which are always shown to subordinate women's interests to men's and place women in the service of men. Mutasa and Matsikiti attempt a reconstruction of the position and image of women in pre-colonial Zimbabwe.

#### **3.6.1 Images of women in N.M. Mutasa's novels**

In *Nhume Yamambo* (1990) and *Misodzi, Dikita Neropa* (1991), Mutasa shows Shona traditional women on one hand, as a very important and indispensable group who occupied positions of great magnitude and significance in people's lives and on the other, as an exploited and used group. Harupindi, King Chirisamhuru's *nyachide*, or beloved wife, is portrayed as influential, intelligent, respected, obeyed, motherly and architectural and, together with other women, they are depicted as the brains behind Chirisamhuru's victory over Dyembeu and the subsequent unwavering rule. The *nyachide* even performs advisory roles to both men and women, especially at public gatherings. She is exemplary of the values of love, trust, loyalty and integrity of Shona motherhood. At one point where she contributed at an indaba meant to wage a war and dislodge Dyembeu, the writer says:

*Dare rakanakidzwa neshoko raHarupindi rikaritsigira kwazvo (p. 175).*

The court was impressed by Harupindi's contribution and unanimously supported it.

Contrary to popular belief that women were treated as minors in traditional society, they had chances to not only sit among important men of society, but also the platform and freedom to contribute ideas. Their ideas were respected, listened to and their advice heeded to (Rukuni, 2007: 54). During the subsequent war between Chirisamhuru and Dyembeu, it is women who come up with the idea to appear naked before Dyembeu's army as a way of weakening them (for it was popular belief that any fighter who takes sight of a naked woman will die in war). One notes that women did not sit back in their homes or hiding places during war, as was popular belief. Rather, they not only accompanied men, but also actively participated, distinguishing themselves too.

Women also held very important and crucial positions that guaranteed society of a prosperous life and of continuity. Some were *mbonga* (female religious attendants), whose lives were devoted to serving the *Mwari* (God of Shona traditional religion) cult. As Kabweza observes, it was always imperative for females to hold such a religious position (in Kabweza et al, 1979: 107). These figures were very much revered, admired and obeyed especially taking into account that the Shona were a very religious group. This means that such women were at the helm of society since they could even warn, rebuke, criticise or advise kings and men without facing resistance. These religious women were of great significance in Shona society because it is through them and their services that the people managed life. They worked at Mabweadziva, the central and most powerful religious place responsible for curing illnesses, guaranteeing peace, provision of good rains and bumper harvests. Hence, they worked for life.

As wives and mothers, Shona women were honoured for their responsibility of guaranteeing society of a future. A woman acquired standing within her husband's group as she grew in prestige and influence in accordance with the number of children and grandchildren she provided for her husband's group (Auret, 1990: 99). In such a Shona society that treasured numbers,

women were therefore an integral group. At King Chirisamhuru's *bira* (religious ceremony), whilst Tavada admires the energetic and rhythmic dances of the beautiful and entertaining young girls, he is quick to point out that the girls' bodily qualities were a testimony of the wish to bear and rear children thereby safeguarding society from extinction. Hence, in a society that celebrated marriage, families and procreation, women were a very indispensable group without which such values could become meaningless.

Again, as mothers, Shona women could own 'personal' property. They usually were given *mombe yeumai* (a cow given to one's mother-in-law), whose proceeds they exercised authority over. This was the case irrespective of the custom of marriage used. In *Nhume Yamambo* (1990), Ndomboya, Tavada's mother is also given cattle and servants by several clans seeking favours from her and her brother, Chirisamhuru.

Mutasa's expositions show that contrary to European-born myths, Shona women were not relegated to the status of 'outsiders' with no social and political authority, dignity or human rights. In their society, though performing responsibilities different from those of men, women were crucial political, economic, religious and social figures. The society is shown to have gender roles that are flexible. Women could delve into domains highly associated with men, such as war (as in *Nhume Yamambo*, 1990), but they would still be doing roles different from those of men. Conversely, men could also participate in areas normally linked with women, such as agriculture (as in Matsikiti's *Rakava Buno Risifemberi*, 1995), but performing the most arduous tasks like clearing and digging the land. Furusa notes that it is colonialism which bracketed the Zimbabwean woman into restricted roles of wife and mother whose performance space was the home, with her major staging area as the kitchen (in Mguni et al. [eds], 2006: 3). Worse still, to a colonial mentality, the responsibilities of women as wives and mothers reduce them to sex objects and a subservient position yet among the Shona, such roles elevate women to admirable, indispensable and highly regarded members of society.

Unlike the Euro-centric thinking, Shona women never had the status of a child. The idea that women never owned anything deemed 'personal' was again a colonial myth and invention. Among the Shona, the only person to own private property is the mother (ibid: 4). Whatever a

mother owns belongs to her and no member of the family including her biological children has a right to it. The only privilege that the family has is to share it with her while she is still alive (ibid). Unlike popular thinking today, in the past, whatever the father owned belonged to the family and even to the mother. Mutasa thus, provides a positive image of Shona women, which had been downplayed by many early writers.

The same writer also shows that although women were held in high esteem, there were instances when they were invariably dehumanised and used for the benefit of males. Although women distinguished themselves in the war against Dyembeu, at one level, by appearing naked before the enemy, they were in a way demeaning and denuding themselves of humanity and dignity. The worst thing that can happen to a woman among the Shona is to appear naked before a man who is not at all her husband. Again, they were labouring for Chirisamhuru to become king, showing them as a used and usable group. Even when he ultimately becomes king, Chirisamhuru has a group of young women who always sing his praises. At one traditional ceremony meant to thank the territorial spirits, the writer says:

*Kubva pasuwo remana raMambo uchidzira nomudziswa uye mugwagwa waisvika kudariro guru, paiva noruzhowa rwemhandara kumativi ose. Dzakanga dzabva pakubuda kwezuva dzichiimbira Mambo nziyo dzokurumbidza. Nziyo idzi dzaikurudzira vanhu kuti vatende Mambo pamhepo yavanofema, mvura yavanomwa naihwo upenyu hwavanahwo. Mhandara idzi dzaiva norunako pauso, pachimiro, pamakumbo napamanzwi. Dzakafumirira kutsvara uye kurigidura pasi namakumbo, safuri dzichinzviririka zvainzikwa navakamirira Mambo. Dikita raidirana richiyerera nokukukura guruva kuvasikana vaitaridza kusutsa nokuimbira Mambo (1991: 5).*

From the main exit from the King's cottage going down the road to the main arena, there was a huge line of young women on either side of the road. They had been singing songs of praise to the King since morning. These songs urged people to thank the King for the oxygen they breathed, the water they drank and even for life. These young women had very beautiful faces, rounded bodies, attractive legs and mellifluous voices. They had gotten up quite early to dance and beat the ground with their legs, rattles making noise that could be heard by those waiting for the arrival of the King. Sweat oozed out, carrying with it all the dust that was raised by the girls who danced for the King as if possessed.

The above is a serious case of exploitation of the female gender. Young women are made to form two thick lines, the lines being demarcations of the path that the king would use on his way to the

main arena. This would make the women the king's sight until he gets to the podium. In addition to being used as carriage markings, they are also made to sing songs of praises to the king, from quite early in the morning. This way, it is clear that they have been denied a decent resting time for the previous night and are also made to deify a human being. The songs centre on praising the king as the ultimate guarantor of life. In other words, the songs sideline the importance of ancestors as well as the spiritual world, including *Mwari* (God), the Creator himself. Yet, it is the spiritual world that guarantees both life and abundant rains. These praises do not emanate from the fact that "the king mediates and pleads with the spiritual world on behalf of the people" (Hodza, 1986: *ii*). Rather, the spiritual world's important position and roles have been usurped and all tribute is being paid to Chirisamhuru. The capital letter M, in *Mambo*, King used in reference to Chirisamhuru is meant to show that the king has now elevated himself to a godly position. Women now urge people to worship and accord him all praise. Women are thus depicted as a sex that can only follow orders, with no authority or freedom to desist. If they could determine what to do and what not to, they would have voiced against praising the king as if he were a god instead of praising the Creator himself.

Again, the young women had been chosen on the basis of their physical beauty, a sure testimony that women were reduced to sex objects. Among the Shona it is only the lustful who end at adoring the outward appearance of women. That a lot of sweat streamed out of their bodies shows them as a weaker sex who have to keep on doing what men have alienated them to do. Women are shown to have no say in society. They have to keep on impressing men despite the discomfort they experience. It shows unfeeling-ness on the part of society. Women are thus shown as a group that was exploited for the benefit and interests of men. Feminists pick up these unpalatable scenes that discredit tradition and patriarchy.

Such a presentation by Mutasa may have been influenced by what happens today at distinguished days when politicians attend public gatherings. At these occasions, women are usually made to stand in lines, singing songs of praises to even irresponsible leaders of the society. It could be that the writer is writing in retrospect, as if it is something carried over from tradition. Never the less, what is clear is that although they were accorded a place in society, women were sometimes

denied total freedom to express their wishes and feelings. Thus, the writer presents both the good and bad aspects that characterised the image of women in Shona society.

### 3.6.2 Matsikiti's portrayal of Shona women

In *Rakava Buno Risifemberi* (1995), Matsikiti presents a different picture of pre-colonial Shona women. His image of a Shona woman is that of a voiceless, ignorant, dependant, naïve individual, who is atrophied, disempowered and dehumanised by the dominant male culture. In many cases and situations, they suffer and have to endure male domination, without any prospects of successfully voicing their dissatisfaction or disinterest. Yeukai is pledged to an old, inconsiderate and egoist, Bvunzawabaya against her wish. She is depicted as an innocent victim of patriarchal society, whose values and dictates cannot be challenged or reversed. Although the aunt knows and has recommended that Yeukai agree to fall in love with Pasipamire, she too is powerless. She reverses her earlier recommendation and only urges her niece to abide by her father's command to marry Bvunzawabaya. In an advisory tone, the aunt tells Yeukai:

*Zvino iwe ukada kuramba uri pazvirongwa zvevanhukadzi uchisiya zvavarume hameno hako. Ziva kuti zvirongwa zvedu isu vanhukadzi hazvigone kumira zvoga pasina kutsigirwa nezvevanhurume. Hapana munhukadzi anoroodza mwana naizvozvo wotevera zvirongwa zvakababa vanova ndivo vanoroodza mwana (p.107).*

Now, if you stick to women's plans instead of those of men, you will live to regret. Our plans as women cannot stand without men's support. No woman negotiates for a daughter's marriage so listen to your father who is responsible for that.

From the aunt's advice, it is clear that men have their plans and women too have theirs. However, although, women plan, it is simply a mere waste of time and effort because no one ever listens or appreciates their ideas. The aunt advises that it is unfortunate for anyone to cling on to women's ideas and the sad result for those who treasure feminine ideas is to regret. She again advises that no idea from a woman can ever stand unless it has the support or blessing of the male members of society. It also comes out that women bear female children whose marriage they do not negotiate for. In a way, women are equated to a fork and knife, which bend from toil, feeding people but never taste the food. In a typical distortion and contempt of Shona culture and

women's position, *tete*, who seems to be the author's mouthpiece, continues to disparage the position and image of women in traditional society. She testifies that they had stupidly tried to resist the pledging of Yeukai to Bvunzawabaya, but thanks to VaMbambara, Yeukai's father, who had suppressed their ideas. If VaMbambara had not quashed women's plans, the whole family would have died from starvation. Looking at their foolishness as women, the aunt says:

*Apa panongoonesa poga kuti vanhurume vanoziwa kupinda isu vanhukadzi, chokwadi. Kubva nhasi ini handichazopikisani nezvirongwa zvemurume wako zvakare muroora (p.93).*

This only shows that men are more knowledgeable than we women. From today onwards, I will not go against the plans of your husband.

The aunt admits and tries to convince other womenfolk that no woman can ever be more intelligent or wiser than a man can. She also calls for her kindred never again to oppose men's ideas. In other words, it is a call for women to admire and tolerate male domination. This is more of an image of women under colonial 'customary' law than under tradition because under the former, women remained minors for the duration of their lives (Auret, 1990: 105). This way, Matsikiti embodies the western anthropologist's view of Shona culture. He re-invents a distorted picture of the culture and people in question. Even elderly women are presented as less intelligent, minors and downtrodden beings, whose duty is to seek men's approval on anything, listen to and obey men's plans without questions. In doing so, not only does the writer largely paint a negative image of Shona women, but distorts it too.

His portrayal of the aunt as a powerless, incapacitated and an ardent follower of men's ideas is far from being realistic; worse in matters concerning marriage, an institution where an aunt was known to be most vocal, domineering and asserting and where she could easily condemn men into silence. As Gombe (1995: 77) writes, everything concerning the sex education (of the girl child), love and marriage affairs and ensuing domestic problems were handled by the paternal aunts with the children's parents having very little say in such matters. The aunt, together with the girl's mother had the platform and freedom to make their own demands during the marriage of the girl child, and they even justified any of their requests. In Shona society, if an aunt had said 'No', marriage negotiations would not proceed. The writer fails to appreciate the truth that



Shona women had a lot of space where they could make their own decisions without seeking the advice of men. In a society where each gender did roles that were different from the other, it therefore was senseless for women to consult men each time they wanted to perform their duties. More so, some of these duties were done when women were quite distanced from men and to assume that they always sought the blessings of men in all their endeavours is really to distort reality. Again, the aunt admits that she is indeed female and cannot do anything in a society dominated and controlled by men. This too is a distortion of reality. In reality, the *tete*, aunt, was not only a woman, she was also a father, *bambomukadzi* or *bambomukunda* (female father), and hence, was male (ibid). She was a 'husband' to her *varoora*, in-laws and was also expected to perform all other social duties expected from husbands. Since every woman was an aunt to someone at some given stage, it means every woman was male. In concurrence, Furusa says that among the Shona:

All people on my mother's side, including the males are responsible for 'mothering' me. This means that my mother's sisters, brothers and all the male and female children of her brothers are my 'mothers'. Similarly, all my father's brothers and sisters are responsible for 'fathering' me (Mguni et al. [eds], 2006: 3).

It is clear that Matsikiti misses the valid point that Shona gender relations were flexible such that daughters and women could be husbands and consequently 'becoming' male whilst sons and men could be mothers thereby 'becoming' female. It was a society in which patriarchy meant both men and women dominating and inter-changing roles.

Again, the author portrays daughter- pledging, showing it as evidence of male domination over females. This is true to an extent, but it fails to take into account that the same girl child who seemed victimised also earned a lot of respect and reverence from all members of her original family. She was seen and regarded as a saviour because it was through her that the whole family was saved from hunger and starvation (Gombe, 1998: 85). This in a way made the same female being have power and control over virtually her family members, including the males. During family discussions in which she was a participant, her word was heeded, and sometimes deemed final. Hence, the writer only sees the bad in the custom, trivialising the good it also espoused. Worse, by focussing on a custom such as this one, the writer also unwittingly falls into the trap

of earlier writers who always chose to focus on what appeared bad and to depict Shona society as highly male-driven and controlled.

Yet there were also very clear cases and situations in which women took initiatives and detected the course of events and there was very little that men could do to stop that. One such case is the custom of *kuganha* (eloping of a young woman to a man of her choice). This was a custom in which a young woman who had great love for a man (but had failed to attract the man's attention) chose to elope to the young man, even when there was no courtship. The young woman was seldom turned away and in all cases, was deemed *mukadzi akabva kuvadzimu* (a wife given by the ancestors) who was not supposed to be ill treated or driven away. This is a practice that was purely the girl's own initiative (ibid: 86; Mkanganwi in Chiwome, Mguni and Furusa [eds], 2000: 156). This shows freedom on the part of the female gender. The fact that she was usually accepted shows a society that also considered the interests and views of the female being. It shows that women were also assertive, accommodated, listened to and obeyed. They were authoritative. Again, that she was associated with the ancestors shows that such a young woman earned herself both respect and reverence from the highly religious Shona society. In these instances, men also became powerless, voiceless and obedient. Hence, women had higher positions and better images than portrayed by Matsikiti.

The importance of the position held by Shona women is espoused in the maxim, "*Musha mukadzi*" (A home is a home because of a wife). This takes into account the social, economic and other roles that women are acknowledged and honoured for. The other Shona adage, "*Nherera inoguta musu wafa mai vayo*" (An orphan only enjoys satisfaction the day its mother dies) indicates that as soon as one does not have a living mother, then life degenerates into meaninglessness. The mother is shown as a very crucial figure in anyone's life. Capturing the significance of the female being, the mother in Shona society, Mkanganwi writes that:

You could taunt me in the most possible way and get away with it, but you could never refer to my mother: '*Mai vako!!* (Your mother ...!), or whatever else about her and be forgiven (in Chiwome and Gambahaya [eds], 1998: 10).

In other words, one jealously guarded the humanity, dignity and significance of their mother and was even prepared to die in defence of that. This shows the importance and deification that female beings enjoyed in traditional Shona society. Such is akin to the Igbo world-view where they have names such as *Nneka*, meaning 'Mother is supreme' (Achebe, 1958: 94). This captures the mother as the most important figure in one's life. Hence, the low status that Matsikiti accords Shona women is a continued championing of settler myths about the people's past, which is again, a distortion of history.

### **3.7 Images of beer drinking**

Another myth propagated by early writers like Zvarevashe (*Kurauone*, 1976) and Chakaipa (*Dzasukwa Mwana Asina Hembe*, 1967) is that beer drinking is a chief cause of the African people's social and economic problems and so should be avoided at all costs. Contrary to this popularised belief, Matsikiti (1995) and Zvarevashe (1998) now show that beer-drinking was part of Shona people's way of enhancing production and hence, of enhancing good life.

Beer drinking was quite popular among the Shona, especially at occasions like *nhimbe* (work parties) and *majakwara* (threshing parties). These were occasions when the people came together to help each other do strenuous work, ploughing, weeding, harvesting or threshing grain. The host provided beer, which was drunk at intervals by the working group. At a beer-party arranged and co-ordinated for VaMbambara by Bvunzawabaya, beer is quite instrumental in maximising production. Four large fields are tilled, more than had been anticipated and this was done under the influence of beer. Fresh from one such interval of beer drinking, people worked as if possessed:

*Nairowo doro ravainge vanwa rainge roitisana nharo namapadza nevhu kuti vaone kuti mukuru ndiani. Mapadza akataura nevhu kusvikira ivhu rakundwa (Rakava Buno Risifemberi p.150).*

Even the beer they had drunk enhanced the conflict between hoes and the soil in a bid to see who was mightier, until the soil admitted that it had been defeated.

Still bubbling with energy from the newly drunk beer, production is intensified. The beer rejuvenates the people's strength and challenges them into outstanding activities, engaging in some form of competition. That beer was drunk at intervals had its own rationale. Apart from it being an energiser, it also gave the people ample time to rest and then resume work with more enthusiasm, vigour and intensity. As Gombe (1998: 150) observes, such beer parties enabled people to accomplish a lot of work in a day, an amount of work, which would have taken the host more than a month if he were to do it by himself. Hence, in the eyes of the Shona, beer drinking was intertwined with production and prosperity. Beer was thus, viewed as a guarantor and sustainer of production and life.

Similarly, Zvarevashe shows that beer was an integral part in the installation of chiefs as well as rainmaking ceremonies, two important institutions in the Shona people's lives. At the installation of Nherera II, the writer says, "*Pakamwiwa mipeta yedora kuita jakachaka, machururuchumbwi* [1998: 109] (Lots and lots of beer were drunk). Beer was integral in most religious ceremonies because the spiritual world saw and regarded it as a unifying element (Nyevera in Shumba et al., 1983: 35). Whenever beer was brewed, it brought many people together, starting with the brewers and then the rest of family, clan or territorial members and it was good and satisfying to the spiritual world to see people coming together in their numbers to pay respect to them. It was also good for beer to be availed and drunk at the installation of chiefs. The chief was a representative of the spiritual world, a world that treasured the unifying element in beer, so beer brought all the descendants of the territory, to the delight of the ancestral world. Hence, to both the physical and the spiritual world, beer was unity. The writer again claims that at this installation ceremony, everything went on well; including beer drinking, because all things were under the guidance of ancestors and God. At rainmaking ceremonies, Chief Nherera pours beer onto the ground and people then sing, drinking beer, leading to the falling of rain. Beer is again important here because it facilitated communion and communication between the physical and metaphysical worlds (Gombe, 1998: 162). It ultimately made the spiritual world inform the living what steps needed to be taken for their plight to be addressed. Without beer, it was never expected of the spiritual world to respond to the people's request for rain. Hence, beer was an inducement of rain, and of good life.

Unlike in his earlier novels where he condemned beer drinking, Zvarevashe now positively presents it. This now stems from the new inclination taken by the Roman Catholic Church, which has since incorporated some of the Shona traditional practices in its worship, practices such as ancestral veneration and beer drinking (Interview with Evans Mandova, 2002).

Therefore, in traditional Shona, beer was never for self-destruction. It was functional. It served a purpose; enhancing bumper harvests. It was intertwined with employment and work, hence with productivity unlike today where it is associated with misery, unemployment and irresponsibility. It was the reason behind good life. It was therefore quite normal and noble to drink beer. There was no alcohol abuse, especially in a society that was responsible for the well being of its citizens. The young would drink *bumhe*, which was less alcoholic unlike today where the young drink alcoholic beer to their demise. Traditionally, it also brought people together and this was healthy for a society that thrived on unity. Today's Shona world is therefore threatened by hunger and starvation because people no longer brew beer for the purposes it served in the past.

### **3.8 Myth about laziness countered**

In *Nhume Yamambo* (1990), *Misodzi, Dikita Neropa* (1991) and *Rakava Buno Risifemberi* (1995), the Shona are depicted as a hardworking society whose philosophy is "There is strength and prosperity in numbers". It is a society that thrives on communal and team spirit on one hand and individual achievements on the other.

The Shona people's life has largely been an agrarian one. Their economy hinged more on tilling land, with subsidiary inflows from cattle and other mining and craft activities. In the domain of agriculture, Tavada says of the Rozvi kingdom:

*Mukati mamaguta, madzishe namasadunhu ndakadzidza kuti Guruuswa yairimwa. Ungava mutorwa kana muRozvi chinhu chaigonekwa nomumwe nomumwe kudarika zvose kurima (Nhume Yamambo p.78).*

Within the villages and chiefdoms, I learnt that a lot of agriculture was practised in Guruuswa. Be it a stranger or a Rozvi descendant, one thing that everyone was good at more than anything was agriculture.

It is clear that most people were distinguished farmers. This also presupposes great knowledge of farming methods, a sign that the people could not only grow crops that suited the climatic conditions, but also knew how best to nurture each crop to maturity. Such was an indigenous knowledge system that demonstrated management of microclimates and effective pest control (Kunnie, 2000: 36). It was a society that treasured hard work from its members. This was possible because of many factors. The people had sufficient arable land on which they could practise agriculture. Whenever the soil deteriorated in fertility, the people easily relocated elsewhere because there were no laws to forbid relocation of a place of residence (Auret, 1990: 102). Mutasa (1991) through the myth of *ndarikure* (watchtower and capital city) and *nhururamwedzi* (a tall ladder meant to bring down the moon) shows that among the Shona, industriousness has always been a virtue. The various clans and societal groups work tirelessly, uprooting mountains to erect a capital for the king and a ladder to bring down the moon. In all incidents, the people work almost all day and night, punctuating the laborious work with song and dance hence, making the arduous tasks enjoyable and manageable.

In *Rakava Buno Risifemberi* (1995), Matsikiti also gives several cases to justify the self-sustaining nature of the Shona society. The *dare*, court, is depicted as an entertainment and resting place for men, but more importantly, as a school where men traded ideas and skills and where much of the material culture of the society such as hoes, spears and skins were produced by outstanding members of the society. The Zengeni family in Hwedza, together with Bvunzawabaya's group that gathers for VaMbambara's beer-party are both portrayed as self-entertaining, competitive and highly productive groups. As for the latter, the author describes how the tilling of the land progressed:

*Vayawo vamwe vokuuya vasina mapadza, vainge vonzwa maoko okudawo kurima kuvavira. Ndivo vainge voravana mapadza aya navaya vainge voswatudza misana vasina kwavati vaenda. Asi vamwewo ndevairamba kukasika kuzorodzwa vachinyara kusvorwa navakadzi vaya vaiimbira kuti vangazoonekwa sokunge varume nhando. Zvino zvaizoti anenge angobata badza chete, aimborambira naro achimboimbirwa nokudomwa zita rake kana mutupo kune vaya vaizivikanwa. Varimi vainge voita makwikwi zvino okutandanisana mundima namapadza pakukanda mvinga. Izvi zvakakonzera kuti basa ringe rakareruka. Navaiimbawo vaya vakagoti naivowo vainge vokwikwidzana*

*pakushaura nziyo dzokurima nedzimwe, uye nokudeketera mazita evavaiziva. Haiwa kwakava kumakuwerere* (p. 145-6).

Those who had not brought hoes with them were now itching to show that they could cultivate. They were alternating hoes with those who wanted to rest. But others refused to be relieved, for fear of being looked down upon by the women who were singing for them. Hence, who-ever got hold of the hoe clung to it as the women sang his praises and totem, for those they knew. The workers were engaged in some competition, chasing one another with hoes. This made the job lighter. Even those who sang were competing amongst themselves singing agricultural songs and others, showering praises for those they knew. What a day!

The Shona are portrayed as a unified society, one that treasured helping each other do strenuous work. Everyone is shown as keen to demonstrate that they too could do exploits with the hoe. This desire shows that the people were self-motivated to work. In a situation where everyone itched to showcase their capabilities, it is no surprise that some refused to be relieved, a sign that the community was generally industrious. Those who distinguished themselves by excelling in work were held in high esteem. Society admired and sang praises for such people, challenging them into greater exploits and everyone strove to have these sung for them. These people gained respect from the rest of society. The use of totems was highly regarded among the Shona and it was believed that these totems praised the individual together with his ancestors who were believed to spur the individual into outstanding achievements.

More so, it is by excelling in farming activities that many men won hearts of females, boosting their chances of marriage. Females desired to get married to industrious members of the community. The presence of females at beer parties was therefore society's strategy to challenge male members into excelling in their activities. The same applies to the females. They also had to distinguish themselves through the singing and praising to attract men's attention. The songs coordinated the people into one rhythmic movement, as if one person was doing the job. Again, songs made people focus on the entertainment, the words and their amusement instead of focussing on the hard work at stake. As Chiwome (1996: 19) remarks, songs act like lullabies; they transform tedious activity into enjoyable work. Through songs, people did not feel the pain and difficult nature of the job they did. This proves settler views on African labour wrong. Whites could not believe that it was possible for people to sing at the same time doing work. To

them, singing took away some of the effort which could have been used in doing the actual task. That is why many European farmers always tried to silence groups of singing Africans working on their farms. Again, the given cases prove wrong popular colonial mythology that the Shona were lazy and so needed to be driven by the whip. They indeed were a self-motivated society that had thrived for long because of the prowess of its members.

Due to the importance attached to togetherness, oneness and industriousness, the Shona have generated strategies to cultivate this way of life among members. The proverb, “*Rume rimwe harikombi churu*” (One man cannot surround an anthill) challenges people to come together and make work easier. Even clan praises were born out of the need to challenge individual members to put maximum effort in whatever they did; effort for the good of society. Rycroft writes that the more one achieved, the more and the better praises he received (1988: 24). It is because of individual effort that King Chirisamhuru has apt names as *Chikodzamarombe* (He who fattens the poor), *Chisvinudzamapenzi* (He who deals with rogues), *Bvumavaranda* (He who tolerates servants), *Chigoveranyika* (He who distributes land), and *Durarenjere* (Storage of wisdom) among others (*Misodzi, Dikita Neropa*, 1991). It is clear that although society celebrates unity, it acknowledges and reveres individual performances and achievements especially if they are in line with societal norms and expectations. In line with this, amongst a large group that gathers at VaMbambara’s beer-party, individual achievements are celebrated. Pasipamire, Ganyura and others are individually praised for challenging the working group to a higher level of production (*Rakava Buno Risifemberi*, 1995).

What is clear is that although the Shona treasure communalism in most things that they do, they accommodate individual achievements and contributions. It is a society that gives everyone a platform to display their capabilities and talents for the good of all. Hence, the communalism does not obliterate or squeeze out individuality and the individual is free to do whatever he can for as long as it is for the good of society. Such a world-view is akin to that captured by a Ghanaian proverb:

The society is like a cluster of trees which, when seen from afar, appear huddled together, but which would be seen to stand individually when closely approached (Gykye, 1988: 12).



The proverb stresses the social reality of both the society and the individual; that it is by individual efforts that society thrives. Among the Nigerians, hard work was rewarded with titles for men (Ohadike in Achebe, 1996: xxvi) and women (Amadiume, 1992: 42).

To complement the hard work, the Shona also cultivated among each other, a creative spirit. Mutasa and Matsikiti both explain that the Shona were smelters of iron, blacksmiths, miners, weavers, skin-tidiers and great farmers. They depended more on self-production and then complemented their efforts through trading with other people. This shows that the Shona were not primitive, but had developed a society that was technologically advanced. Thus, it is an unfortunate remark to say the Shona were lazy people whom the settler had to drive using a whip.

### **3.9 Let the past teach the present: lessons to draw from the Shona past**

As Gykye (in Wiredu and Gykye, 1992: 252) puts it, if we are to objectively examine the ancient system of values, we will find some values and practices relevant to our modern circumstances. The relevance or irrelevance of ideas or institutions of the past to the present would be determined largely by their functionality: that is, whether or not they can play a meaningful or efficacious role in the present scheme of things and so be conducive to the attainment of goals and vision of the present (ibid). However, those ideas and institutions that fail to prove their worth should be regarded as worthless and should be jettisoned and replaced by new ones. Amongst such important traditional values and institutions for today include election of leaders, democracy, and importance of religion, communalism and individualism, the position of women, marriage customs and technological advancement. It is important to note that among the writers who write on the past, it is only Zvarevashe (*Dzinza RavaGovera VaChirumhanzu NaMutasa*, 1998) and Tsodzo (*Mudhuri Murefurefu*, 1993) who make an effort to clearly indicate the importance of the Shona past in dealing with today's challenges, other writers merely end at preaching cultural nationalism. However, even in the fiction of those novelists who end at casting light on the past, we can still discern lessons that can help life in contemporary society.

### 3.9.1 Election of a leader

Succession systems nowadays are unstable (Nkomo in Chivaura and Mararike [eds], 1998: 196). This is because there is sometimes chaos or violence in matters on succession. Systems are subject to political manoeuvres and dirty tricks (ibid), meaning people can exploit the system to their advantage. Tradition teaches the present that leaders are never imposed on a people. Society elects them following laid down procedures that are transparent. In the past, sometimes religion guaranteed the election of a leader with the will of the people at heart. In other cases, people with the right and proven moral standing in society were elected and then later vindicated by religion. Hence, in contemporary society, there is need for one to have a clear and clean history of responsibility for them to be elected as leaders. This comes in the wake of many leaders who have been imposed on constituencies as well as opportunists who cheat their way to positions they never deserve or are capable of holding. Zimbabweans need to be aware of the fact that it is them who have the mandate to choose their own leaders and not have them imposed by anyone, within or outside the country. It is again handy in contemporary society where when people elect leaders, eloquence is given precedence over the person's sense of duty. Parliament today houses people who are just vocal but with no proper sense of duty or direction. In some cases, parliamentarians have to re-pose questions because the respondents were not paying attention (Report on Parliamentary Debates, 7 November 2007: 937) and in other cases, they deny that standards of education are going down due to low morale among teachers and lack of basic commodities like cooking oil used for practical subjects when it is in fact very true (ibid: 949-959). Wrong criteria were used in electing them into leadership positions. This partially explains why Zimbabwe is experiencing a number of challenges today. Some of these leaders have pursued individual desires of self-gratification, abusing state funds. It is no surprise that some of these leaders like Chris Kuruneri (Makuni, 2007: 8), one time Minister of Finance and Kumbirai Kangai (Khumalo, 2003: 5), one time Minister of Agriculture have been dragged before the courts to answer charges, including the externalisation of foreign currency and the exportation of maize to Zambia, among others.

Leadership was again a social contract in which those who no longer upheld the will of the people were dethroned (Gykye in Wiredu and Gykye, 1992: 243), as conveyed through Mutasa's

*Nhume Yamambo* (1990) and *Misodzi, Dikita Neropa* (1991) together with *Zvarevashe's Dzinza RavaGovera VaChirumhanzu NaMutasa* (1998). Those who ignored the spiritual world in their reign had their terms of office cut short. These were people who had fallen short of the expected qualities of leadership. It is clear that in the past, accountability, commitment, skill and capability were the hallmark of genuine leadership (Nkomo in Chivaura and Mararike [eds], 1998: 196). It is therefore important for today's society to scrutinise the competence of their leadership against this background and determine whether their services are still worth their re-election. It is a painful sight that some irresponsible members continue to be elected or reshuffled into other positions within parliament and cabinet instead of learning from tradition. This in a way perpetuates or shifts problems from one ministry to another where the incumbent will have been seconded.

Again, democracy was central to leadership. Each person was given the platform to present his or her view and although there could be disagreements, they would "talk and talk until they reached a consensus" (ibid: 253). Consensus, along with reconciliation, appears to have been a political virtue vigorously pursued in traditional councils and assemblies and seems to have become an outstanding feature of the process of reaching decisions (ibid: 248). Although today's society has aspects of democracy such as the multi-party system, routine elections in which each eligible voter speaks his mind, the democracy needs to be extended to the house of assembly where political parties, the Zimbabwe African National Union, Patriotic Front (ZANU PF) and the Movement For Democratic Change (MDC) need not only maintain extreme positions in their debates, but reach a consensus for the good of the country. They need to learn that "Consensus logically presupposes *dissensus* (that is, dissent), the existence of opposed or different views, for it was the opposed views that were, or needed to be, reconciled" (ibid). Although they may disagree, there is need for them to consider the rationality of propositions and come up with one sound position.

Rukuni (2007: 60) notes with great concern that the consultative and consensus-building process in parliamentary debates is being put aside in favour of elections, yet merely rushing to vote (especially along party lines) does not always produce the best solution. Quite often, the majority can be wrong and that is why our ancestors thoroughly discussed issues, until a consensus was

reached (ibid). Hence, our contemporary leaders' deliberations and arguments in Parliament should therefore be guided by reason and not emotion. They should break out of party cliques to analyse problems with independent and objective minds and arrive at rational conclusions, which may be against their party's position or principles. This is because in the past, people were very free to relinquish their earlier positions if they were not seen to be for the good of society. Equally important is the fact that "*Ushwe madzoro hunoravanwa*" (Leadership alternates) as shown by both Mutasa (1990, 1991) and Zvarevashe (1998). This is another pointer to democracy. Leaders need to know that they need not cling to power even if they are serving their countries well as this might be reason for unnecessary discontentment. Although there appears to have been a life presidency in the past, this aspect needs to be relinquished so that those elected into power serve their people when they are still in their prime time and energetic.

Democracy also includes the way cases are tried. In the past, those who wronged others and society were justly tried and each given due punishment depending on the nature of one's crime. There was neither corruption nor bribery. Zvarevashe (*Dzinza RavaGovera VaChirumhanzu NaMutasa*, 1998: 116) complains that the situation is bad today because criminals are left escaping without punishment or they engage lawyers who get them out of justified punishment. He says:

*Vadzimu naMwari havadi zvinhu zvakadaro...Ibasa ravatongi, vatungamiriri venyika, vose vakabatana nevechechi kuisa mitemo inodzivirira kuora kwetsika nounhu, kwete kungove nehanya chete neupfumi hwenyika. Vatungamiriri vechokwadi vanofanira kuve nehanya nokuchengetedza tsika dzounhu sezvaitwa namadzishe. Uhwu ndihwo ungaru hunodiwa kuti vatungamiri vose venyika vave nahwo (p. 116).*

Ancestors and God abhor such things ... It is the duty of the judges, the country's leaders together with church leaders to put in place laws that guard against cultural decadence and inhumanity, not just worry about accruing wealth. Genuine leaders should be worried about safeguarding important cultural values as was done by the chiefs. This is the kind of wisdom that all leaders of the country should possess.

Religion has been trivialised in today's life. There is no mechanism to safeguard and promote good behaviour and character among citizens. Leaders are not worried about safeguarding morality. Instead, corruption and inhumanity are being nursed by the western concept of

democracy. This democracy emphasises the rights of an individual despite that those rights could be very well against the interests and good of society. As a result, the general attitude of today's citizens is that it is possible to injure the state without injuring oneself, hence, the high rates of bribery, corruption and carelessness about state property. Yet tradition maintained that any injury to the community as a whole directly injures the individual (Gykye in Wiredu and Gykye, 1992: 254). People need to feel responsible for the safekeeping of national gadgets and resources. This laxity on the part of leaders to mould an ethical society has had a negative impact on social, political and economic relations of members of the contemporary society. It is imperative for today's society to study aspects of traditional leadership and see which they can adapt, adopt or prune for use today.

### **3.9.2 Importance of religion**

Traditional religion has been seen and known to regulate the behaviour of both leaders and subjects. It guaranteed democracy as leaders strove to please the ancestral world for their terms of office to be long. Again, religious figures always voiced against any form of injustice or irresponsibility on the part of leaders, both societal and family. If leadership ignored religion, calamity befell society. In trying to cope with the calamities, Shona people consulted the ancestral world and there are no secrets among relations that the ancestral world did not unearth (Gelfand, 1973: 115). With the sidelining of traditional religion today, many people, both leaders and commoners indulge in many formerly offensive activities like hoarding of wealth, private ownership of land, exploitation and oppression of the less powerful and even killing others for the sake of obtaining wealth or clinging to power. As Rukuni (2007: 119) observes, most ruling political parties in Africa have lost the sacredness of people's lives and nature in their forms of ruling and governance. Unlike in the past, there is no traditional religion to curb political violence as people vie for leadership positions and sometimes a leader's term of office is not terminated despite their ineptitude. Human life is no longer as sacred as it was in the past, a petty thief would rather kill somebody just to get a little bit of money (ibid). The human-ness of people has been devalued.

If traditional religion and its functions are revitalised, these are acts that would be exposed and addressed by the spiritual world. Belief in witchcraft, *ngozi* (the avenging spirit) as well as other taboos and myths on issues like incest and rape has been known to curb lawlessness in the past. Among the Shona, *ngozi* is usually believed as a moral police officer who traces the wrongdoer and exposes him. He knows no corruption or bribery. Witchcraft and *ngozi* need to be acknowledged in society for they help explain and reduce a number of social, economic and political problems. They would help reduce massive killings that are a result of divergences in political orientation as well as the desire for economic emancipation. In a society where people are falling prey to personal greed, religion would help give people a human face. Traditional religion would therefore bring the sanity that is necessary for development.

Religion has also been known to necessitate good rains and bumper harvests. The people prayed for rain and the health of both crops and livestock. They received the anticipated feedback from the spiritual world as soon as they had observed all the expected rituals. Religion was life and to neglect it was a sure way of courting either trouble or death. Such is important in today's society, which has so many challenges, many of which remain mythical and mystical. There are many droughts, diseases, deaths and wayward behaviour by people, all unsatisfactorily explained by modern science. The HIV and AIDS scourge continues to paralyse society with minimal resistance from the victims. People have taken long to understand, appreciate and find ways of minimising the effects of this pandemic.

Traditional religion has always been explaining such puzzling cases and offering ways of dealing with them, including recommending the necessary medicine to diagnose the problem. Commenting on the link between religion and medicine, Gelfand et al. (1985: 3) say it is difficult to separate religion from medicine in the faith of the Shona, for they are closely linked. The *n'anga* (traditional diviner) is not only a minister of religion but also a diagnostician and healer who is able to contact the spiritual world and learn which of the ancestral spirits is responsible for an illness or death as well as the measure to be taken to remove the influence (ibid). Unfortunately, today, people have only been left with science to explain even unscientific issues. Although science has its strengths in dealing with contemporary challenges, it too has

weaknesses in explaining some of such challenges, an aspect which usually makes people turn to religion for the answers.

It is important for the Shona and other contemporary Zimbabweans to lead religious lives, and turn to religion for them to understand and surmount many of the challenges prevailing. Challenging modern society to revitalise their traditional religions, Jingo says that, “It is because our ancestors see us using the wrong prayers today that we suffer these droughts and hardships” (Perry, 1975: 35). Traditional religion therefore needs to be revitalised and accorded its proper place so as to help solve a host of today’s problems. There is great need for legislation, which acknowledges the authenticity of not only traditional religion, but also its ministers as sane people. As Rukuni states, as an African, it is important that one acknowledges and respects one’s ancestor-based religion (2007: 160), one of whose primary values is that one has to respect all other religions and not convert other people into one’s ancestor-based faith. For those Africans who choose to pursue traditional faith, tolerance is important on the part of those in a different faith altogether. People need to know that all the faiths try to connect to one God. There is need to embrace and promote spiritual and religious diversity and ensure that no organised religion or faith dominates any other, either legally or implicitly, particularly in spheres of culture, education and politics (ibid: 161). Hence, it is imperative that traditional religion be accorded its place and dignity. The formulation of the Traditional Healers’ Association of Zimbabwe whilst it is a positive step should be augmented by the acknowledgement of beliefs in witchcraft and avenging spirit, which though downplayed, are some of the reasons behind awkward behaviour by some contemporary Zimbabwean citizens. There is even need to contextualise Christianity to suit the African worldview for it to be a relevant religion in understanding and tackling of African people’s socio-economic and political challenges.

Traditional and religious leadership, in the form of chiefs needs to be resuscitated so that they perform some of their traditional roles so as to help solve a number of problems. Such roles include presiding over rainmaking ceremonies, *zunde ramambo* (king or chief’s communal agricultural project), *chisi* (a religious day on which any form of manual work in the field is forbidden) as well as the maintaining the sacredness of religious places. Rainmaking ceremonies would guarantee optimum rains for the success of agricultural production. The *zunde ramambo*

project also necessitates the communal production of grain that would then be used to feed visitors, orphans or even members of society in times of drought. The project would therefore help address the problem of street people, who include orphaned children, blind people as well as the old who are usually driven to the streets by destitution. There would be no need to continuously appeal to non-governmental organisations for food aid or other forms of help since society would have its ways of looking after the disadvantaged.

### **3.9.3 Position of women**

Novels on the past have largely shown that Shona women were not oppressed, exploited or downtrodden. As Auret observes, there was no role competition between men and women (1990: 98). Each part had roles and functions that were complementary to the other. Women did not see or regard themselves as less significant as compared to men. Neither did men see or regard themselves as superior to women. It is colonialism that sidelined women. With the advent of colonialism, settlers who, in their culture kept women in a subordinate position perceived male dominance as quite natural. Women, under colonialism, were regarded as being the centre of the home, and were not expected to work outside it (ibid). The colonial system absorbed African men in various work places, including as domestic servants like cooks. With the continued impoverishment of the soil, women, the bulk of whom were in the reserves became economically insecure while those who were in towns were looked down upon as prostitutes. Hence, power, good jobs, education and other privileges were tilted in the favour of males, mainly due to the legislation and dictates of the colonial system. Men and patriarchy are therefore not wholly to blame for women's problems today as this is tantamount to blaming the victims of the new economy. The pre-colonial Shona woman was a force to reckon with in the affairs of the nation, as a farmer, religious figure, herbalist, mother, among others.

Such history is important for both today's male and female beings. To the male, it becomes clear that it is not his right to keep the female, in a subservient position since she had enough space and significantly contributed to societal development in the past. This makes men more understanding and appreciative of the legislation meant to elevate the position and status of women. From history, it becomes clear that women are equally important in enhancing the



nation's development. To the female being, it also becomes clear that men and patriarchy are not the chief causes of their misfortunes. Rather, they are also victims of an alien system whose socialisation has made it appear as if tradition did not accord women the status they deserved. Hence, instead of adopting a confrontational approach, which is both emotional and retrogressive, they need to sympathise with their male counterparts and engage them meaningfully in addressing the plight and wish of the female being. The two sexes also need to appreciate that it is through their complementary and not confrontational roles that society is guaranteed of a brighter future. Women have also been behind the success of agricultural activities since history, and to deny them land under the land redistribution programme is only an act of injustice, myopia and insensitivity. Whether married, divorced, widowed or single, it is necessary to give women land so that they practise agriculture and contribute to the economic recovery of the country.

It also becomes clear that childbearing has always been a celebrated role of women, which raised their importance in a society that treasured procreation. As such, today's society, which now looks down upon childbearing as binding a woman to a man, needs to appreciate that such is a very important role, which is a matter of life or death to society. As Mguni writes, the condition of the African woman can only be fully appreciated within the context of African culture and so; their genuine liberation can also only take place in the same context (in Mguni et al. [eds], 2006: 42). In other words, western-driven legislation, harsh laws for men and extermination of patriarchy do not form the soundest and healthiest solutions to women's problems since they do not emanate from the African culture, which nurtures African women. This helps today's society to have a re-look at women's problems, the actual causes and possible genuine solutions instead of propagating superficial prescriptions as solutions.

#### **3.9.4 Technological advancement**

Shona society, whose technology was quite in line with the people's stage of development, has always had affordable gadgets for use by its members, ranging from cooking utensils, farming and hunting equipment as well as medicine. Mutasa (1990, 1991), Zvarevashe (1998) as well as Matsikiti (1995) have demonstrated that the Shona were not at all uncivilised and

underdeveloped, but had usable tools in their various activities. As Achebe (1975: 17) rightly observes, the kind of firewood that a people have is sufficient for the kind of cooking, which they do. Put differently, the achievements and practices that any society engages in are adequate for the kind of lifestyle that they live, and this was the case with traditional Shona society.

These traditional achievements were in no way inferior to the white man's and so, should not have been discarded. Modern and so-called sophisticated equipment that came with the whites remain largely elusive to today's common Shona person. Modern medicine, which happens to come from the same source as traditional medicine, surprisingly continues to be praised, held in high esteem and highly sought despite its unaffordability and scarcity. Madera says that *musimboti* herb, which was used by the Bantu for the treatment of various ailments, has recently proven to be an immune booster in HIV positive people, and it also treats arthritis, TB, skin irritations and drastic weight loss (*Sunday News*, June 2006: 1). Gono adds that *muringa* tree's leaves "contain seven times the vitamin C found in oranges, twice the protein in milk and four times the vitamin A found in carrots. The same tree's leaves also contain thrice the potassium in bananas and four times the calcium found in milk" (*Sunday News*, July 2006: 10). There is therefore urgent need for today's society to turn to traditional achievements as they are not just accessible, but remain affordable and therefore good alternatives. In many cases, the efficacy of the traditional achievements has been doubtless. More so, traditional practices are in most instances looked down upon as if they would not have developed like Western practices. Yet, just like Western practices developed, traditional practices would be developed had they not been interfered with.

These observations undoubtedly suggest the conviction that it is sensible and even imperative to revive those positive aspects of our past while allowing ourselves to keep pace with modern developments. What we should watch out for, according to Nkomo, is to avoid throwing away the bath water together with the baby (in Chivaura and Mararike [eds], 1998: 197). In other words, in discarding the past, we should watch out for the danger of throwing away the bad together with the good that also lies in it. Such expositions by contemporary Shona writers are important especially to today's generation that is always keen to grab, imitate and practice

wholly, everything; including bad and retrogressive things and policies that come from the west under the guise of development. As Furusa rightly observes:

Shona ancestors have advised us wisely that we must 'handle strange things only after we have protected ourselves'. [*Bata chabva kumwe watanga wazora mushonga.*] They have also taught us 'not to rely on borrowed tools to sustain our families.' *Chimwango chekukumbira hachina ndima* (in Chivaura and Mararike [eds], 1998: 83).

He advises Africans to approach foreign products and gadgets with caution. This is because many of these products have evolved out of different needs and so serve different purposes. In the same spirit, p'Bitek also advises Africans that they cannot copy and hope to create (1973: *xii*), but should use their mental capabilities to exploit and tap the resources on their continent. In concurrence, Ngugi warns bluntly that a child without parents to counsel him (*or a nation without the past from which to draw lessons*) has nothing to prevent him from mistaking foreign shit for a delicious national dish (1982: 59). The argument is that today's Africans in general and Zimbabweans in this case, should rely on their intellectual talent, creativity, potential and sweat for their development. The argument is quite plausible in view of the many views, policies and practices that Africans have grabbed and continue to which have never worked well for the people in question. Among them are colonial myths about African people's poverty and backwardness whose solutions have erroneously been publicised as colonialism, education, adoption of the Christian religion and other western-driven policies like Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP). Some policies meant to elevate women today have also negatively affected the family, an institution on which every society thrives. All these have worked negatively for Africans because they were not borne out of the lifestyle and aspirations of the people but have largely been impositions and borrowed phenomena. If they have worked well for Europe, it does not necessarily mean that they too can work well for Africa because Africa is not Europe. Again, to try and implement them without any modification is tantamount to accepting that Europe's path of development is the universal model along which all other developments should be moulded; which is a fallacy.

### 3.9.5 Superficial propagation of a custom

Although Shona traditional culture and customs have been found to be important in shaping and directing today's experiences and the vision for tomorrow, there is no need to grab and implement wholly all of these. Such an approach would be tantamount to rejecting today for yesterday, something not only tragic, but also impossible. It is therefore the task of today's intellectuals to help us "return to the source" to (Cabral 1973: 43), exhume, clarify and disseminate the undiscovered past we are largely unaware we possess which can be useful for today's generation. We therefore need to be able to 'correctly spell our proper name' and once we can do that, then there is no limit as to where we can go (Furusa in Chivaura and Mararike[eds], 1998: 82). The idea is for Africans to be sure of who they are and what their destiny should be. After this, they can then chart a way towards that destiny.

In *Mudhuri Murefurefu* (1993), Tsodzo presents the inheritance custom. He focuses on its socio-economic advantages. In the novel, he has attempted to show that:

...we can have better things to do than follow Europe ... (that) we today can do everything so long as we do not imitate Europe, so long as we are not obsessed by the desire to catch up with Europe (Fanon, 1963: 251 -2).

In a bid to show that the past is indispensable to today's Zimbabwe, he uses the custom of *kugara nhaka*, inheritance. Through techniques such as flashback, soliloquy, epistolary, cacophony and dialogue, he tells the story of Majoni, a polygamist who before he dies tells his younger brother, Michael alias, Kanhuru that he has to inherit his wives (*kugara nhaka*). Having gone overseas, Canada, the educated and therefore westernised and modernised Michael despite having impregnated Mai Sarah (one of the deceased's wives), distances himself from the so-called outdated and primitive custom in favour of a single wife of his choice, Petronella. In the process, he falls ill (is struck by dumbness) and is deserted by Petronella then reconciles with Mai Sarah after consulting a traditional healer.

The message is clear: despite the advent of change, Shona people must go back and stick to their traditional customs and practise them in their entirety. The writer suggests a farewell to Eurocentrism and advocates a return to Africa's own material and mental resources.

Tsodzo's portrayal of the custom is quite plausible. After many years of denigration, responsible writers come in to revitalise their culture. They select aspects of their culture, which they view as positive, and which they want preserved even by today's generation. His preaching of the gospel of cultural nationalism is good for the purposes of decolonisation, cultural regeneration and national development. People need to have a positive image of themselves first so that they confidently tackle issues of development. Again, no development is possible if it does not take into account the traditional culture of a people. The writer therefore bridges the gap between development and traditional culture that colonialism had created and that contemporary advocates for development unfortunately tend to ignore.

When Majoni dies, he leaves his wife with just one child. Mai Sarah is still young enough to bear more children. Being young, it means she still has biological roles to fulfil. Again, she still expects her biological desires to be satisfied. The custom therefore accords her and others of her kind a chance to have their sexual desires fulfilled together with their reproductive potentials to be made use of for the good of society. Hence, the custom guarantees society of a future through continued procreation of children. By having a physically present husband, the custom also accords Mai Sarah the dignity and respect that modern society continues to place on women with husbands and which husbandless women lack. The custom also safeguards morality and the health of, especially the woman. In today's society, it is common and easier for men, both married and single, to try their luck by proposing divorced or widowed women just to satisfy their sexual needs, something they rarely do for women whose husbands are present and loving. The custom thus guards against women being tossed around by various men, being used as sex objects. Unlike popular mythology that the inheritance custom exacerbates the spread of HIV and AIDS, its practice, if well monitored would invariably lead to a reduction in the transmission of the deadly virus. What could be crucial today is for the individuals concerned in the polygamous marriage of the inheritance type to have their HIV status confirmed. Once everyone is confirmed as HIV negative, and they remain loyal to each other as was in the past, then the

problem of many husbandless women whose desires remain unfulfilled as well as their flirting around with various men in search of emotional gratification are minimised, so is the transmission of the virus.

In modern society, such women widowed at young age usually flirt around with various men with the hope of satisfying their biological and emotional desires. Married and even single men usually have extra affairs with such emotionally restless and yet vulnerable women. The affairs are generally never meant to culminate into marriage. Since they do not have full rights to the men, such women are forced by circumstances to have yet other affairs that will keep them going in the event of the other man being bound by family responsibilities. Many people testified that affairs between both married and single men with widowed women are usually very short-lived (interviews, 01 August 2008; 15 August 2008). This comes in the wake of the single man finding a woman to marry or the married man's wife discovering the affair or even one of the parties relocating to a distant place of residence or work. In the event of these calamities, the woman is forced into another relationship, and so the cycle goes on. What is also clear is that, although polygamy has been condemned in principle, in practice, the custom still prevails, in the form of 'wife spacing'. Unlike traditional polygamy in which the wives knew, tolerated and identified with each other, staying at one place with society helping to monitor their movements, today men have modern versions of the custom where the wives do not know each other, neither do they tolerate, respect or stay with each other. Such practice is enough breeding place for the transmission of the HIV and AIDS pandemic. By identifying a woman with a given husband, tradition curbed the disastrous spread of sexually transmitted diseases, an aspect that modern society pays little respect to.

In addition, in contemporary society, inheritance would accord both the children and wife physical, social and economic security. The responsibilities of fatherhood are so crucial to an African family, without which the single female parent may end up stressed by a host of duties she would have to perform. The custom also helps bring up children along expected social values as the man exercises the responsibilities of fatherhood, using his authority to control and monitor children's movements. In today's hyperinflationary environment, it would sometimes be difficult for a single parent to raise children and sponsor their education. In some cases, street children

testify that they chose the street because they could not go to school since their mother could not afford their fees (Shamhu, 2007: M8) or could not look after them well. Hence, inheritance helps minimise the problem of street children than worsen it. Looked at this way, some aspects of custom still remain noble even in modernity. It becomes senseless to rush to legislate the abolition of the custom altogether instead of calling for its streamlining so that it is in tandem with current life.

The author also celebrates the importance of the traditional diviner in contemporary society. Implicitly, he calls for the resuscitation of traditional religion whose significance has been explored in earlier sections. He presents two traditional healers who attend to Michael's illness towards the end of the novel. The first one, Mbuya Sithole, is dismissed, as a fake diviner who asks for money yet has not done anything to alleviate the illness. The second one, Masaraure, in Hwedza is depicted as a true and honest diviner. He rejects payment and orders the delegation only to pay after they are satisfied by his medication. He manages to bring back Michael to normalcy. Through the two, the author shows that contemporary society has given birth to contrasting characters of diviners. On one extreme side are those who are materially greedy but fake diviners whose mission is to milk money from people without offering proper service. On the other hand, there are also genuine diviners who can attend to, unearth and diagnose mystical problems without making greedy requests as payment. The latter group's medicine is not only affordable and accessible, but efficacious too. Hence, the author shows that it is a misconception to dismiss traditional medicine and medicine men as insignificant in contemporary society. Rather, they are quite instrumental as they manage to address illnesses that modern science fails to cure. The author thus gives back the image and respect once accorded to the traditional healer, showing him both as a minister of traditional religion and as a healer. Through cultural nationalism, the author shows that the past is quite indispensable if contemporary society should progress.

However, cultural nationalism's major weakness is that, it is inward looking and does not tolerate progressive ideas from outside. Its introspection is aimed at self-praise and defence and not at a rational assessment of its cultural principles. Yet, development is a process of selecting,

rejecting and polishing up our ways of life. The question is whether Tsodzo sees what needs to be polished, wiped out or to be preserved.

Firstly, the custom he chooses, that of inheritance, is not compulsory today. It is at the periphery of society. It has aspects, which need to be spruced up for it to be palatable to today's citizens. Once it is taken wholesale, its future ceases to be bright. In fact, it has some deplorable aspects, which has led society call for legislation to exterminate it. For this custom to exist and continue to exist, there should be those who want to inherit and those who itch to be inherited. In reality, very few people stand by it. In the case of Tsodzo's novel, the wife, Mai Sarah falls for it whilst the man, Michael, is not enthusiastic about it. With such invariance, a custom cannot thrive. In other words, a custom only survives if society is excited about it.

Again, whilst in the past *nhaka* could mean the inheritor performing both sexual and social responsibilities, today there is need to approach it differently. A holistic practice of the custom is no longer possible. *Nhaka* implies polygamy, another custom that is a liability in contemporary society. Not only do most churches and independent groups like non-governmental organisations condemn it, but it also does not auger well with the capitalist mode of production prevalent in modernity. It would make more economic sense to support the existing families than try to have additional children from the new union since they also need to be supported. Again, it would be safer for inheritors to concentrate or limit their scope to social responsibilities to both the wife and children instead of biological ones, which impinge negatively on both their health and worsen their economic base. HIV and AIDS and several other venereal diseases have seriously affected today's world such that the fewer sexual partners one has the better. It takes commitment for people to visit New Start Centres (Voluntary HIV Testing Centres) to be tested, a rare virtue among many Zimbabweans at the moment. Today's Cultural Revolution should therefore be one where old artefacts are adapted and adopted to suit new realities. Since not all traditional practices are good and indispensable, there is great need to modify them so that they are in line with the new way of life today.

The characters employed by the author are not also without problems. Mai Sarah is portrayed as educated and employed on one hand and as a traditionalist and fervent admirer of the inheritance



custom on the other. Conversely, Michael is presented as educated, westernised and against traditional customs. When her level of education is taken into account, it is difficult to acknowledge that Mai Sarah is representative enough of her social class. She received education at a time when the coloniser did his best to “form a class of persons African in blood and colour but English in tastes, opinion, in morals and in intellect” (Moyana, 1988: 18). It was an education, which made every recipient despise his or her culture as something they had to be ashamed of rather than a source of pride. It developed into the oppressed, an admiration of the oppressor who was their role model for imitation (ibid: 19). It produced ‘black Europeans’. As such, Mai Sarah’s mentality, lifestyle and qualities should have been very much against traditional customs, which she should have despised as archaic. It was not easy for one to receive colonial education and still remain an unchanged African. If the same education changed Michael’s mentality, it would also have created a similar being in Mai Sarah. The writer presents Mai Sarah as a greatly troubled person after Michael discloses that he cannot have her as his wife. Being educated and having a good job that can easily make her look after herself and her children, Mai Sarah can hardly be saddened by being ‘rejected’ by Michael. She is a nurse.

Again, being a nurse by profession, Mai Sarah belongs to the class of those who are very much aware of the disastrous consequences of customs like inheritance and inter-alia polygamy in the way advocated for by the writer. Medical practitioners are the very people currently helping and conscientising people about the effects of HIV and AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases. Her profession exposes her to patients who suffer from the killer disease and this must have given her enough ammunition to reject, resist and denounce the custom.

Another character that poses problems is the traditional diviner who finally helps Michael get back to normal. Unlike Mbuya Sithole who siphons money from the Mangwiro family without offering any meaningful service, Masaraure only asks for payment once his clients are satisfied by his services. This was the norm in traditional society (Gombe, 1998: 145). In modern society, where people seek payment for even the silliest help they would have offered someone, it is not easy to assume that there still exist many people (for it to be typical) in society who still leave it up to the helped to determine what they would pay after they are satisfied with the services rendered. The very diviner despised by the author as fake, is more representative of diviners in a

new Zimbabwe where people do all sorts of things to earn a living. As Gombe observes, whether the client's health improves or not, diviners in modern times expect to have their payment done to the full (ibid: 145). The 'true' diviner as the writer would call him is no longer a typical character.

Tsodzo wrote *Mudhuri Murefurefu* at a time when he was permanent secretary in the Ministry of Education, Sport and Culture (interview with E. Chingombe, 29 March 2006). As such, he champions the elevation of indigenous culture. However, whilst the past is important in today's world, there is need for intellectuals to explore, redefine, trim and give modern translation and interpretation to those ideas and practices that appear unclear and woolly but which nevertheless are considered worthwhile for modern society.

### **3.10 Conclusion**

After enduring foreign dominance and influence for close to a century, most African nations have now embarked on processes of decolonisation and cultural regeneration both of which are intertwined with nation building and national development. As Moyana (1988: 22) observes, cultural revolution is first of all human rehabilitation and is intended to restore individuals to all the plenitude of their being, their humanity, self-confidence and creative potential all of which they had been robbed of under the many years of abeyance. Contemporary Shona writers, like any other citizens with responsibilities, have helped in the exercises of self-definition and self-cleansing by revisiting the past to show the kind of people that the Shona were, their achievements and failures. Of question however was whether their portrayal of the socio-economic issues of this past is objective and how different it is from that by early writers.

Opposed to the European mentality that early writers championed to negate the achievements of the Shona, current Shona novelists have managed to show that, like anyone else, the Shona had a culture no matter how simple. In fact, the simpler the better (Mkanganwi in Chiwome and Gambahaya [eds], 1998: 9). The writers have shown that the Shona had a personality, had achievements, aspirations and failures too. Most of the largely criticised aspects of the past such as traditional leadership, solutions to crises, significance of the people's religion, position of

women, marriage customs and images of beer-drinking have now been largely presented with a lot of detail; with both the humanistic and deplorable facets being brought to light. Largely, today's writers, whether traditional or Christian, demonstrate a vision quite different from that espoused by their predecessors. Margaret Laurence's comment in Achebe (1975: 12) aptly captures the approach by most current Shona writers of the African past:

No writer of any quality has viewed the old Africa in an idealised way, but they have tried to regain what is rightly theirs – a past composed of real and vulnerable people, their ancestors, not the figments of missionary and colonialist imaginations.

Whilst the above is to a greater extent true, among the same crop of new writers on Shona culture, it has also been noted that there are a few others who consciously or unconsciously at times fall into the traditional trap of presenting the disparaged images of this past. It is therefore clear and imperative that writers who choose to focus their works of art on the past need to do intensive and extensive research so that they present all customs objectively; with their utmost details so that they speak for themselves and reduce chances of misinterpretation.

Again, although some authors have not directly linked the Shona past with today's experiences, the Shona past has been seen to be very significant in informing, educating and shaping the vision and actions of the contemporary society. It therefore needs to be an authentic past from which contemporary generations can discern the values and practices, which appeal to the new way of life. More importantly, whilst we acknowledge the importance of the past, we need to accept that some of the values and institutions are no longer relevant and should be thrown away while others need adjustments so that they are in accordance with the new philosophy of life. Writers need to admit that we cannot re-live the past in its entirety. In this case, their duty is to help today's citizens re-identify themselves with their traditional culture and history without only catching the past's "outer-garments", "outworn contrivances", "cast-off of thought" or "shells and corpses" (Moyana, 1988: 120). They need to prune the cultural values and customs, giving them new meaning and then handing them over to new generations for consumption. Approached this way, our past can actually bring us the much-needed socio-economic and political salvation. Contemporary Shona writers have largely made positive use of history if compared with their predecessors. They have not only used it to counter negative sentiments that

had been propagated by euro-centric writers, but have also used it as a reservoir from which contemporary generations can draw inspiration and knowledge in dealing with a variety of current problems.

## Chapter IV

### Empowerment versus disempowerment in the new dispensation

#### 4.0 Introduction

The preceding chapter has discussed Shona novelists' perception of the socio-economic issues during the pre-colonial past and has shown the Shona people's philosophy of life then. In doing so, it has justified contemporary efforts to de-colonize and rehabilitate African people and their institutions. The current chapter focuses on other post-independence issues as depicted through Shona literature. It focuses on efforts and ways meant to empower blacks on one hand and on factors that have disempowered them on the other. In this case, empowerment is used to mean the act and ways of raising the social and economic participation and standing of people. On the other hand, disempowerment is the act of denying people access to the above and its resultant effect is the continued suffering and destitution among people. The first two sections of the chapter focus on the extent of empowerment independence brought to the people. The last two sections analyse societal ways of empowering people as portrayed by writers. These include education, land, legislation and knowledge about the HIV and AIDS. The discussion in the preceding chapter is quite handy, especially in assessing issues raised by writers analysed in the current chapter where authors sometimes blame patriarchy, traditional customs and individual characters for contemporary problems and lack of empowerment.

#### 4.1 Independence and black empowerment

This section discusses the writers' portrayal of the ability of independence to empower Africans. It focuses on Makari's *Magamba eChimurenga: Josiah Tungamirai* (2003), Choto's *Vavairo* (1990) and Chimhundu's *Chakwasha* (1991). Earlier fiction, like *Mutunhu Une Mago* (Nyawaranda, 1985) *Zvakanga Zvakaoma MuZimbabwe* (Hamutyinei, 1984), *Gona ReChimurenga* (Makata, 1982), *Makara Asionani* (Matsikiti, 1987), *Zvairwadza Vasara* (Musengezi, 1984) and *Tsvaru Akazvara Tivu* (Masukusa, 1994) end at narrating events of the struggle. The novels selected for this chapter go a step further to probe the worthiness of the gains of struggle to different classes and groups of people. Makari's *Magamba eChimurenga*

focuses on liberation fighters-cum politicians, Choto's *Vavariro* on both peasants and freedom fighters whilst Chimhundu's *Chakwasha* focuses on workers and the elite, the intellectuals. The section seeks to establish if the writers realistically present the amount of empowerment brought by independence to the people.

#### **4.1.1 Tungamirai's perception**

*Magamba eChimurenga: Josiah Tungamirai* (2003) is a biography of one of the most distinguished freedom fighters of Zimbabwe, Josiah Tungamirai. It is a story told by someone who was an actual fighter at the battlefield. Tungamirai examines the empowerment he gets from the struggle in relation to the sacrifices he had made. Unlike Hamuytinei (1984) in his autobiography who "fails to link his life ... to the socio-political history" (Chiwome, 1996: 38), Tungamirai successfully blends his personal challenges and aspirations to those of the rest of the colonised.

After going through gruesome events during their training in Zambia and Tanzania, enduring long journeys on foot, hunger, mosquito bites and other diseases, and ultimately bringing independence to the country, he testifies that the war and independence had individual benefits to him and others. During the liberation struggle, he rises through the ranks of Secretarial Security Officer, Provincial Security Officer, ZANLA Chief Political Commissar, Central Committee member and then Deputy National Political Commissar, a post he holds until up to independence (2003: 146). At independence, Tungamirai is elected the Vice Commander of the Zimbabwe National Army (ZNA) and ZANU (PF) Central Committee member (ibid). All these are very powerful positions that have both material and financial benefits. They are also positions intertwined with political muscle. In this regard, the war and independence brought him economic and political empowerment.

In 2003, he testifies having, and running a very productive farm. He says, "*Pari zvino ndiri muzvinapurazi anorima chibage, fodya, nokupfuwa mombe*" [p. 149] (Now I own a farm, where I grow maize, tobacco and rear cattle). Independence now sees some blacks having access to farms and helping in producing wealth, unlike the colonial period where only whites enjoyed

such privileges. Whites had expropriated African people's productive lands and had pushed them to barren areas where it had been very difficult to eke out a living. Earlier in the novel, the narrator bemoans the injustice:

*Vanhu vakatinhwa semombe ndokunounganidzwa mumagwenga muzere masoso, ruvavatsuro, jecha nezvitumbura...Vachena vacho vakasara vachitora nzvimbo dziya dzakaorera vachidziita mapurazi avo. Varungu ivavo vaigara vakaparadzana zvekuti kana vaida kushanyirana, zvechokwadi vaitofamba karwendo chaiko kuti vasvike pane rimwe purazi (p.25).*

People were driven like cattle and heaped in barren soils where only drought resistant vegetation could thrive... The whites expropriated the fertile lands turning them into their farms. These whites were very spaced such that if they intended to visit each other, truly they had to travel relatively long to get to the next farm.

Chung (2006: 44) laments that many black peasants had been crowded into granite-dominated lands, beautiful to look at but barren. Land was the economy. Its alienation meant that the production, prosperity, freedom, dignity and integrity that the people used to enjoy were no more. With land, the people used to build as they wished and moved around freely as they wished. Hence, land was freedom, and without it, freedom was gone. As for the Shona, "enough land was crucial for their survival" (Auret, 1990: 5). Independence brought land to some blacks, including the narrator. Tungamirai can therefore be placed in the group of those who got substantial land to help in national production. To him and others, this land therefore brought freedom, dignity, humanity, production and self-sufficiency. It brought socio-economic empowerment.

The other reward he gets is the chance to proceed with education. Despite the demands from his new positions, Tungamirai claims to have the zeal for education. He corresponds for a B.A Honours degree, at the same time learning to be a pilot and then undertakes a Master of Arts in War and strategic studies programme. It becomes clear that blacks now have the opportunity to proceed with their education, something that colonialism did not guarantee as shown through Chimhundu's *Chakwasha* (1991). Independence thus opened floodgates for education and socio-intellectual empowerment.

What the narrator gets at the end: good positions, a farm, and an endless financial base for education shows the emancipation brought about by independence. It satisfies what Auret observes, that economic development was of greatest importance to the people and central to this was access to land and to education (ibid: 10). Hence the author has been successful in showing that independence brought meaningful changes to some black people's lives, especially those in powerful positions. The novel thus successfully celebrates the positions, farm and education, which some blacks got with the advent of independence. It celebrates black people's socio-economic, political and intellectual empowerment. However, a biography falls short of explaining if others; in this case, those in lower positions were also politically and economically emancipated. A holistic portrayal would make society have a thorough introspection of its achievements and shortcomings and map a meaningful future for its citizens. Hence, whilst the novel is a success in that it shows that independence totally empowered people, its weakness is that it acknowledges total empowerment, which was not witnessed by all. This way, the writer is unlike Choto in *Vavariro* (1990) who gives the successes and failures of independence to empower various groups of people.

#### **4.1.2 Choto's portrayal**

Choto's *Vavariro* (1990) presented largely through the third person narrative, is a story of the experiences and efforts by both the freedom fighters and the masses during the struggle for independence and what they ultimately get out of it. The author, being a journalist and a professional writer demonstrates great research skills in coming up with both the positive and deplorable gains of the war of liberation, which he explores through the technique of names.

The story centres on VaChimoto and other parents together with freedom fighters and the *mujibha* and *chimbwido* (young men, boys and young women and girls who ran errands in the war) who whole-heartedly support and participate in the struggle for independence. Having presented the efforts, determination and aim of the various participants, the author goes on to examine the rewards of independence. He makes use of significant names, which include Torai (Take, a name of a *mujibha*), Rambanai (Divorce each other, the name of a beer hall in Harare)



and Garikai (Live well, the name of Tumirai's son). These names mainly depict the kind and extent of empowerment brought about by independence.

Torai means 'take' or 'take back'; an expression that blacks had finally taken back their country. Independence in this case brought some political emancipation. During the struggle, the people had been promised total empowerment. They had been told that everyone would have access to good and fertile land and good jobs among other things (1990: 91-93). Independence became a memorable event for both fighters and masses as it granted the new government a chance to reverse all the colonial injustices and implement all that people had been promised and had anticipated.

The writer exposes the extent to which blacks witnessed emancipation. On the good, some of the former freedom fighters are integrated into the Zimbabwe National Army and actually enjoy life thereafter. Among these are Jeri, Tsitsi and Tapera. Jeri becomes a Major in the army and rises through ranks. Ultimately, he buys a piece of land in Christone Bank and practices intensive market gardening (1990: 148), something he could never have done during the colonial period. The same applies to Tumirai who also becomes a Member of Parliament for Uzumba. VaChimoto witnesses a number of significant changes in Tumirai's life. He now puts on very expensive suits, owns two cars, one for himself and the other for his wife, owns a very huge and beautiful house in one of the low density areas with very attractive lawn, has two workers – a gardener and a housemaid (ibid, 156). His house is well furnished, with bathing tubs that have phones and fixed mirrors. Independence has significantly improved his way of life. Blacks now own property in low-density suburbs, areas previously deemed fit for whites only. Among members of Parliament are blacks, a testimony that the government pursued black empowerment.

Tumirai testifies that although the new government faces challenges, it has made some achievements by according blacks a chance to have free primary education and free medication for the lowly paid. In line with this, primary education enrolment rose from 819 128 in 1979 to nearly 2.8 million in 1990 (Zvobgo, 1994: 94). For the new government, education was regarded as the basic right for every Zimbabwean citizen, and therefore every child had the right to attend

school (Auret, 1990: 19). All racial barriers to educational facilities were thus removed (ibid: 29; Zvobgo, 1994: 94). Thus Choto acknowledges the socio-intellectual emancipation brought about by independence.

The new government also manages to resettle some of the land-hungry citizens. Tumirai urges VaChimoto to go to the resettlement areas and be allocated land on which to practice his envisioned intensive agriculture (1990: 158). Many are reportedly being allocated land for use. Land had been a bone of contention and without it independence would have been meaningless. Regaining it was imperative for economically empowering the impoverished Africans. Vindicating Choto's exposition, a Minister, Nkomo states that by 1986, the government had resettled 35 000 families on two million hectares of land and three years later in 1989 a total of 52 000 families or 416 000 people had been established on 2 416 312 hectares of land (*The Herald*, 4 August 1989: 3). The writer shows that independence brought meaningful changes to some people's lives.

Whilst the author celebrates black empowerment brought by independence, he too is critical of the extent of such empowerment. He makes use of significant names, 'Rambanai' (divorce or reject each other) and 'Garikai' (live wealthily) to bring out reality. The author exposes a number of things evident of some kind of separation. Whilst some former fighters are integrated into the Zimbabwe National Army, others like Kufa are excluded on health grounds (1990: 147). Ironically, with the same ailment that marks him out at independence, he had been able to fight and endure all the hardships of the war such as hunger, thirst, diseases, fatigue, and travelling long distances. With that ailment, he contributed to the coming of independence. One wonders how the ailment that had not jeopardized his fighting for independence can now disenable him to enjoy the gains thereof. Judging from the fact that there was little if any fighting expected after independence, it therefore is grossly unjust to bracket out some of the chief participants of the struggle. In this regard, independence did not empower all.

Apart from Kufa, VaChimoto meets and shares beer with a colleague whose place of residence is a shack at the bus terminus (1990: 153). Yet the likes of Jeri and Tumirai stay in very good houses in low-density suburbs. The contrast is clear. Independence has only empowered a few.

Worse still, it is only rewarding to those who have been lucky to occupy or to be offered high positions. This concurs with Achebe's perception that, we had all been in the rain until yesterday and a few of us but hardly ever the best have taken over the positions formerly held by the former rulers and have barricaded themselves in ... (1966: 42). Whilst colonialism saw every black being disadvantaged, independence now sees very few fortunate but not really deserving blacks occupying the positions left by some of the former rulers.

Tumirai and other Members of Parliament drive around in posh cars and stay in very splashy houses whilst the people they represent are in dire poverty. In contrast to their spacious houses, they lead people who live in squalid conditions and shanty areas. Again, when VaChimoto visits Tumirai, he learns that he cannot see him if he has not booked an appointment, unlike in the war where he used to visit and see him each time there was need or he felt like (1990: 153). The author shows that independence has created barriers amongst blacks. It has created a society of the haves and the have-nots. Noting the kind of life style Tumirai now leads, VaChimoto cannot help but say, "*Vana ava vakarwira chiripo zvechokwadi... Mupfana uyu ava muRungu pachake zvechokwadi*" [p. 156] (These youngsters got what they fought for indeed. This young man is now a real white person). VaChimoto admires and agrees that the likes of Tumirai got something from their efforts during the war. However he just falls short of saying "but others did not get anything out of it". In himself and others, in comparison to the likes of Tumirai, VaChimoto seems to see an unequal relationship of the Dog and Hunter, and of knife and fork who work hard till they are blunt and bent from toil but never taste the food (Ngara, 1990: 124). He feels used and sidelined. Hence, Garikai is a statement that portrays that some, and not all people experienced the emancipation brought by independence.

Land, the very basic of the majority's involvement in the struggle, is not returned to all the needy and rightful owners. The author shows this through VaChimoto and VaKanyuchi. Inspired by what had been promised during the war, they, together with their families move themselves into farms previously owned by whites like Dereki and share the accommodation thereof (1990: 149). To them, this is evidence of an independent people. They view this as the achievements of the struggle, "*Ndizvo tairwira izvi komuredhi*" [ibid]. (This is what we fought for comrade). As Kriger observes, many peasants had understood guerrilla promises of 'free living' to mean that

they could select whatever land they wanted, and farm free of any rules or regulations (1992: 228). Feeling empowered, VaKanyuchi comments:

*Ipwa dzepano dzinonaka kudarika dzekwatakabva. Chibage chepano chinokura kudarika kumazijecha kwatakatiza. Zviyo zvepano zvinoita doro rinonaka kupinda mazimvura atainwa kumajecha kwatanga tarasirwa naSimisi. Mukati bhurazeni uya mupenyu? (p. 149).*

The canes on this soil are sweeter than those of the reserves where we left. The maize crop on this soil is vibrant and healthier than that of where we ran away (the reserves). The grain from this soil produces very good tasting beer than the tasteless water-like beer we used to drink in the sandy and useless soils where Smith had pushed us. Could that fellow be still alive?

The contrast is clear; the reserves where the majority of the people live do not yield good crops. The cane does not taste good. The maize is frivolous and malnourished. The grain is poor and so the beer is not sweet. In those poor soils, the people remain disempowered. The opposite is true about the white-owned farms. As Chung (2006: 43) remarks, it was not at all difficult to see the difference between white commercial farm areas and the reserves. The white commercial farms comprised beautiful agricultural land with better soil and better rainfall than the reserves (ibid). In their euphoria, the new occupants on Dereki's farm are warned and ultimately forced off the farm for illegally occupying it (1990: 151). By being denied access to their rightful heritage, the author shows that independence has not emancipated all the expectant people. Some still remain economically incapacitated. Yet, the very areas where many white farms are situated today rightfully belong to blacks. The poor areas where the majority of people stay today are not their rightful places. These are artificial places of residence created for them by the white government. To the disadvantaged, independence is therefore a harvest of thorns (Chinodya, 1989: 272), meaning the anticipated plenty has not materialized (Moyana in Ngara [ed], 1996: 55). Hence, the name 'Rambanai' (separation or divorce each other) is a clear testimony of the uneven emancipation that has occurred among blacks.

Unlike Makari's *Magamba eChimurenga: Josiah Tungamirai* (2003) which only stresses total empowerment, Choto's *Vavariro* (1990) does not cover up mistakes of the new society, neither is it oblivious of what has been gained to date. Such an exposition also shows that independence

has just empowered some people whilst the others still remain disempowered. The exposition helps society evaluate its achievements and then work on aspects that need improvement.

#### **4.1.3 Chimhundu's depiction**

Chimhundu's *Chakwasha* (1991), largely a historical novel, uses the lives of intellectuals to bring out the extent of black empowerment. In his novel, he shows that the kind of emancipation that was achieved is more of an anti-thesis of what had been anticipated.

Like Choto, Chimhundu acknowledges that people were quite happy to achieve political independence. They celebrated everywhere: in homes, at townships, in pubs, hotels, halls and stadiums (1991: 153-5). Independence was supposed to right all the wrongs of a colonialist and capitalist society and empower the people in many respects. The writer shows that little did the people know that they had achieved an independence with a question mark (Ngugi, 1986: 7). To the people's surprise, among the new leadership of the independent country are the very white people whose governance they had sacrificed their lives to remove. These include Walls who leads the army, David Smith who is Minister of Industry and Trade whilst Denis Norman leads the Ministry of Agriculture (*Chakwasha*, 1991: 154). Like Choto, Chimhundu shows that whites were part of the new socio-political and economic order. Former rulers actually occupied quite many strategic posts in the new government: the police, prisons, public service, the air force and the judiciary (Mandaza, 1989: 39). In addition to them, incompetent and self-centred blacks like Moses have joined the new crop of leaders. The continued existence of white leadership shows that black people have not received total political emancipation. Former enemies still occupy positions that determine the fate of black people.

The author shows that the new black leadership does not push to empower the majority of blacks, but adopts the system of exploitation, virtually unchanged. Rather, they push themselves into houses and offices formerly occupied by colonialists and capitalists and have inherited the structures without any modification. Moses and Susan move into a house in Glen Lorne after getting a loan through the recommendation of party officials (1991: 158). They now lead a new lifestyle – a house in the low density, a car, and two workers. Such kinds of houses are similar to

the colonial houses fictionalised by Katiyo, in *A Son of the Soil*, thus, “the houses in Highlands stood in big yards with lawns, flowers and swimming pools at the front” (1976: 44). In addition to this, Susan and Moses now throw party after party. Such parties are thrown for party officials as a way of buying promotion at their respective workplaces. The author satirizes the get-rich-quickly syndrome that has characterized the middle class. They continue to exploit workers who are their fellow blacks. Susan is against the idea of granting their workers off days or even paying them for the hours they would have worked overtime:

*Ofu yechii? Ovhataimu yechii? Kana iko kumashefu makuru vanoipiwa here? Handiti kose kwatinoenda chero usiku chero wikendi tinowana makuku namahausigero achingoshanda? Wakambonzwa kuti vanoibufura iyo yeovhataimu yauri kutaura iyoyi kana iyo minimum wage vanoinhuhwidza vose vose? Zvino iwewo zvako ndiwe ani waa kutoda kuzviita nyanzvi yokuchengeta mitemo? Ndiwe unoidzika here mitemo yacho? (Chakwasha, 1991: 157).*

Off? What for? Overtime – what for? Even in senior party officials’ homes they are not granted these. Wherever we visit at night or weekends we find these workers at work. Do you ever hear that they talk of overtime? They are even far below the minimum wage. Who are you then to abide by the law as if you are the one who legislates the laws?

That workers are denied off days is a testimony that they are being overworked and denied the right to rest. Worse, they are not remunerated for any extra hour that they work. This is a clear testimony of a leadership that preys on the people whose well being they should strive to improve. The system has normalized the abnormal because, as Susan remarks, everyone is practising it. She also argues that, that is what the white man used to do and hence, there is nothing wrong with it. The new leadership judges itself by how close to emulating the former masters it has been. Their model of excellence was the Rhodesian model, and they sought to imitate and replicate it (Chung, 2006: 272). The closer to the white man their efforts are, the more successful they think they are. This way, Ngugi’s observation is vindicated, that, the leaders are devoid of inventiveness; they remember what they have seen or read in European textbooks and try to imitate that (1983: 97). Again, as Fanon (1963: 124) writes, with independence, the exploitation of workers will intensify and made legitimate. In fact, independence becomes an era in which the worst elements of the old are retained and some of the worst of the new are added on to them. Ironically, these were some of the grievances that

made people participate and stir the struggle for independence. The fact that workers do not voice about overtime and are paid far below the minimum wage shows that they are still disempowered in many respects.

In his novel, *Chimhundu* shows that some people get emancipated through unorthodox means. The powerful have degenerated into very immoral, corrupt, egocentric and irresponsible characters. Moses and Susan hold parties so that they are promoted. Ultimately, Susan is promoted to the position of undersecretary, after satisfying Mashumba's sexual desires (1991: 170). Even when he assumes the leadership of ZIMMACCO, Moses craves for and "lives through corruption as a goat lives on yam" (Achebe, 1983: 38). He fires Tracy and later Dorothy after they turn down his sexual demands. He then offers Nyarai Makura a secretarial job after being attracted by her physical beauty and not by her competence (1991: 183). She is immediately promised a flashy and luxurious lifestyle; of nice weekends in very expensive hotels. This tallies with Ngugi's observation that in contemporary society, women's thighs are regarded as tables on which modern job contracts are signed (1982: 19). Women get or stay in their jobs depending on how they satisfy their bosses' sexual desires. In another instance, Moses urges James his friend to leave a municipality job so that he can arrange for him a job in his company because he is at the helm. Through this, the author shows that like in Nigeria, Zimbabwe is fast becoming "a country where it would be difficult to point one important job held by the most competent person we have" (Achebe, 1983: 19). It appears recruitment and promotion borders on mediocrity and compromise.

The powerful ones economically emancipate themselves through shoddy deals, which include illegal importation of goods. Senior party officials like Mashumba bring from outside, Mercedes Benz cars, BMW cars and smuggle into the country televisions, videos and other commodities that they then sell clandestinely and use the proceeds from these to buy farms (1991: 174). Out of such activities, Moses Marufu is ultimately charged with multiple crimes and among them, opening of foreign accounts and externalisation of foreign currency, dealing with mandrax, embezzlement of funds from Non-Alignment Movement (NAM), bribing police as well as smuggling into the country goods that include cars, televisions and videos (ibid: 189-190). In addition, he receives commission from external agents of local companies. In line with this,

Babu (1981: 49) rightly points out that neo-colonialism is worse than formal colonialism in that in the later case we were confronted with only one vulture, now the vultures are many, foreign as well as local, old and new. In other words, exploitation and inhumanity in the post-independence era are worse than in the colonial period in that it now involves many perpetrators who in addition to the former masters now also include new black elites. In concurrence, Fanon also notes that today the vultures are too many and too voracious in proportion to the lean spoils of the national wealth (1963: 138), implying that there are too many people who are scrambling to grab the small cake. Worse, these people do not desire to get their piece, but struggle to get big chunks even at the expense of others.

The writer is also critical of the social empowerment that independence has brought to some women. They have been accorded the chance to prescribe their hitherto traditional roles to men. Susan instructs Moses her husband to cook and wash utensils. She again has the right and freedom to drink beer and smoke and to go out with any man she sees fit. She is assertive, uncaring and unfeeling. In her sense of freedom and empowerment, she flirts around with Mashumba who ultimately promotes her to the position of an undersecretary. Independence has also accorded women a chance to divorce their sometimes-responsible husbands and put the whole family at stake (1991: 172). They can now resist childbearing as evidenced by Susan who lectures and instructs her friends not to bear many children as if they are mice. Chimhundu seems to question whether this is the kind of freedom that Zimbabweans fought and sacrificed their lives for. Whereas liberation was aimed at improving the life style of the family, independence has jeopardized the family and worsened its condition. What liberation has brought was never part of the agenda of the struggle. In almost every respect, what has come out is a neo-colony, which is nominally independent but its economy is still in the hands of the imperialist bourgeoisie (Ngugi, 1983: 95). Nothing has, in substance, changed (*ibid*). The only change is that where before the imperialist bourgeoisie used to exploit through its settler or feudal representatives in the colonised territories, now it does so through a native bourgeoisie (*ibid*: 95-6).

Chimhundu does well to show that empowerment has largely been limited to leaders and a few fortunate. However, although he acts as the sensitive needle of society, the major weakness of



the novel is its over-emphasis on the view that the commoners have not witnessed any meaningful emancipation. Yet, in areas like education, health, agriculture and women empowerment among others, the government has made great achievements. Auret (1990: 152) summarises the developments that have occurred since independence. She writes that, since 1980 schools, clinics, houses, roads and dams have been built. Agricultural productivity has increased beyond all expectations; millions of adults and children are receiving education, formal and non-formal; the expanded health service has given the majority of Zimbabwe's children the chance to adulthood and the women who spearheaded the development in communal areas are gradually acquiring their rightful status in society. Sadly, these seem to have escaped the writer's eye. The novel bemoans the lack of meaningful empowerment for the majority. It is an anti-thesis to Makari's *Magamba eChimurenga: Josiah Tungamirai* (2003), which focuses on the great emancipation blacks enjoy. Whilst *Chakwasha* (1991) exposes reality by showing that independence did not empower many of the expectant blacks, it distorts the same reality by showing independence as a total flop. Choto's *Vavariro* (1990) seems to be a synthesis and the most successful as it shows both the achievements and failures of independence.

## **4.2 Poverty among unempowered people**

This section focuses on factors that writers view as responsible for the lack of empowerment of blacks as well as suggested ways for their empowerment. It analyses Hwendaenda's *Mubairo* (1993), Chitsike's *Minisita Munhuwo* (1999), and Nyandoro's *Ndozviudza Aniko?* (2006). It exposes whether the writers have moved away from the popular but mythical victim-blame motif espoused by earlier writers. Hwendaenda's *Mubairo* focuses on poverty among the rural folk whilst the other two novels deal with poverty among especially the urbanites. The section examines whether the given writers are able to identify the root causes of such poverty or economic disempowerment among contemporary Africans as well as the ways to alleviate it.

### **4.2.1 Lack of empowerment among rural Africans**

In *Mubairo* [Reward] (1993), Hwendaenda attempts to explain economic disempowerment among the majority of Zimbabwean rural dwellers. He focuses on the life of the Chiratidzo

family. The title of the novel is self-explanatory. It means reward or gain. Like in early novels such as *Pfumo Reropa* and *Garandichauya* (Chakaipa, 1961; 1963) and *China Manenji Hachifambisi* (Hamutyinei, 1981), Hwendaenda's characters fall into two distinct categories, the good and the bad. The characters are rewarded, for either good or bad. The reward is either socio-economic emancipation or disempowerment. Hence, the theme, just like in earlier novels, is "moralistic and didactic, in keeping with the traditional idea of teaching citizens" (Kahari, 1986: 123).

Amongst the hardworking and socio-economically rewarded are George and his wife Eunice, as well as Musiyiwa. George and his wife are industrious and self-reliant. After retreating to the rural areas, they start a vibrant commercial agricultural business, spending much of their time working on their garden as a family, getting up before the sun rises and retiring quite late (1993: 14). They also run a self-sustaining poultry project from which they sell both birds and eggs, accumulating a lot of surplus. In their endeavour to prosper, they do not loathe manual labour. They seem guided by the Shona people's philosophy "*Hama maoko*" (Hands are your relative), an adage meant to capture and celebrate the importance of work in helping, serving and looking after oneself. The author shows that it is precisely this premise whose conclusion is their prosperity. Out of the afore-mentioned attributes, George and his family are highly rewarded. Their agricultural produce proves to be of unsurpassable grade, allowing them to sell it at competitive prices for most of the time. The family easily buys a new car and with such a sound financial base, they easily replace their destroyed hosepipe. In embarking on these projects, they also create employment for other willing-to-work-hard people such as Musiyiwa.

The same is true of Musiyiwa (The deserted one), an orphan employed by George's family to help with farming activities. Being the only one left out of the tragic destruction of their family by fire, he is a nonentity until employed by George. He is industrious and honest. He spends most of his time working in the garden single-handedly and driving George's business when the latter had been admitted in hospital. He also cycles around the rural areas, selling a lot of agricultural products and at many occasions, selling them at competitive prices due to their quality, making a lot of money and profit for his employer (1993: 85). Like Samere in Chidzero's *Nvengamutsvairo* (1957), he sees nothing wrong in working for the rich and the

powerful of the time. To the writer, he is “a symbol of enlightenment and development” (Kahari, 1986: 34). Another moral becomes clear: to live like a king, one has to work like a slave, or, to emancipate oneself; one has to work very hard. The author views and presents hard work as the only source and key to success, affluence and good life. It seems that to him, black people’s economic empowerment solely lies in working hard. It is out of the given commitment that Musiyiwa is rewarded in a number of ways. He has his education financed by George (1993: 24) and is granted off days and weeks (ibid: 97) as a form of thank you. Impressed by his workaholic spirit, the family makes him obtain a driver’s license and accord him the chance to drive the family car, selling vegetables and other products. Above all, he is treated, not as a worker, but as a family member. George’s wife addresses him as “*Mukoma Musiyiwa*” (Brother Musiyiwa). The author thus shows the nobility of working hard and being honest, presenting these as sure ways of upgrading oneself in life. To him, there is dignity, humanity and life in hard work and honesty.

On the other extreme side are Makate and Kamukombe’s families who lead pathetic and miserable lives. Like Matigimu in Chidzero’s *Nzvengamutsvairo* (1957), the two are presented as lazy, untidy and anti-thesis of enlightenment and development. They are well known loafers who have self-denigrating names. Makate means brewery containers whilst Kamukombe implies the gourd used to drink beer. Both names aptly capture and depict the two as hopeless drunkards whose pre-occupation is beer drinking. Through the two, the author seems to view and present laziness and drunkenness as twin activities whose results are poverty and misery or economic disempowerment. In his prosperity, George tries in vain to persuade his younger brother, Kamukombe to help him work on the garden and also start a poultry project of his own. Kamukombe turns down the garden request arguing that it would seriously affect and militate against his drinking activities (1993: 14). As for the chicken project, all the twenty-five young birds that George had bought for him perish due to the beneficiary’s great love for beer and lack of concern (ibid: 32).

Through the contrast between George’s family and those of his elderly and younger brothers, the author challenges people to work hard, tilling the land, showing that such a venture has both immediate and long-term benefits. It raises people’s standards of living, economically, socially

and even in terms of health. Out of the love for work, George and his family create friendship with many people whilst the opposite is true for the lazy ones. Their agricultural activities enable them to make a lot of money and profit as they sell their produce at handsome prices. In addition, compared to Makate and Kamukombe's families, which are lazy, underfed and malnourished, George's family enjoys a healthy life. Hence, the novel is a positive challenge for Zimbabweans not to loathe hard work. It urges people, both rural and urban to be industrious. It is clear that in the end, every character gets a reward for the good or bad they have done.

However, although the incidents tally with the title of the novel, they do not satisfactorily relate to reality. The novel is sadly heavily based on the myth of poverty and affluence. The myth has it that hard work in whatever form and for whatever reason is the source of affluence or wealth (Chiwome and Gambahaya, 1998: 104). It is based on the Shona adage, *Rugare tange nhamo* (Wealth is preceded by poverty). This myth seeks to challenge Africans to work hard, however poorly paid they may be (ibid) and no matter what their reward would be. That to live like a king one has to work like a slave is only true when the produce of one's sweat is meant to benefit the worker himself. In contemporary Zimbabwe, hard work benefits a few who often do not work like slaves. These are rich because they own the means of production. In the colonial period, the myth of poverty and affluence was used to justify the use of the whip on one hand and the meagre wages paid to blacks on the other (ibid). Whites claimed blacks were poor because they were lazy; they did not want to work, and working in those days meant working for the white man whose mind was capitalist. In the same vein, it was popular belief that blacks were paid little because they did not want to work hard. To cap it, they again claimed that the people's poverty emanated from their great love for beer and sex on which they recklessly spent their money. No one attempted to link people's poverty to the land issues and to the pittance they were paid; wages that could hardly sustain a living. Hwendaenda too does not go beyond personal traits to look at the wider historical forces like the land issue, which many Shona people had not got until the land reform programme of 2000. Yet as Chiwome (1996: 31) rightly observes, truthful depiction of reality also includes the depiction of political reality. In reality, Zimbabwe of today comes out of the Zimbabwe of yesterday (Ramphal in *New African* 2007/2008: 4), whose land problems had not yet been addressed then. By leaving out this political reality,

Hwendaenda prefers to “moralise on the basis of superficial observations instead of analysing the truth beneath those observations” (Chiwome: *ibid*).

Today, business people use the same myth to criticise people and youths of today who are unemployed (Chiwome and Gambahaya, 1998: 105). Their view is that the unemployed and economically weak are a lazy group who do not want to work, and work (according to them) is working for the business people. In this case, the writer seems to echo the Kerr Commission’s belief that Africans “have a complete lack of pride in their work. They are horribly lazy” (Moyana, 1988: 49). Makate’s destitution is all blamed on his turning down George’s plea to have him work for him as well as his love for beer which resulted in the death of all the young chicks George had bought him to start a poultry project. On the other hand, Musiyiwa is shown to prosper in life because he has agreed to work for George and he is not an alcoholic. Hence, the myth urges people to work hard, with the hope that one day they would get empowered. It fails to acknowledge that hard work is not the only way to empowerment, especially in modern society. If hard work were the way to emancipation, then many black Africans would have been among the richest because it is they who labour and keep industries, factories, mines and plantations flourishing. Ironically, these people are among the poorest and most miserable people in society. The myth forgets that Africans have been working very hard since the slave trade but have never been faithfully empowered, and all it says is that they have not been working hard enough.

In contemporary society, the very rich usually exploit their workers, paying them little. In reality, contrary to what the author portrays, an employee like George rarely pays his workers enough for them to lead a very good life. Musiyiwa is made to drive the family car. This should not be interpreted as a benefit. Rather it is part of the work. What is important is not that he now drives the family car, but what he gets after driving the family car, which the author hardly dwells on. The writer seems to present Zimbabwean rural people outside the context of history. He seems not to see Makate and Kamukombe’s families as victims of both colonialism and neo-colonialism. Yet, the land question occupied the centre of most rural problems and has since remained there (Chiwome, 1996: 138). Hence, like Chakaipa’s (1963), Hwendaenda’s plot “depicts the state of the family and not the land issues related to it” (*ibid*). Among the rural folk,

unlike what the writer presents, laziness and beer drinking can never satisfactorily explain poverty. Poverty is caused more by the uncorrected colonial land policy than by laziness and beer drinking. As Rukuni rightly observes, the land question is central to the study of rural poverty in countries such as Zimbabwe (in Rukuni, Tawonezvi and Eicher [eds], 2006: 25). Despite the positive gains of independence, land policy was Zimbabwe's biggest failure; inequitable access to land reform remained a key problem by the end of the first decade (ibid: 54).

Makate and his group are people who no longer see any logic in working on over-used and unproductive land, which is ironically viewed as their ancestral land. If such people are accorded good and fertile lands, their industriousness quickly manifest itself as seen with the case of some Denda and Svosve villagers who when they relocated to a Munenga farm in September 1998 feverishly started clearing the land for agriculture (*Sunday Mail*, 15 September 1998). The plight of Makate and others can only be understood in the context of numerous farm occupations, which later took place in 2000 and beyond, spearheaded by a desperate and land-hungry rural citizenry. Such farm occupations not only testify that rural people were in great hunger for arable land, but that they again are very hard working for many of them immediately cleared large tracts of land for cropping. Hence refusal to work is not always a sign of laziness.

The author also seems to condemn beer drinking as responsible for black people's economic decline. The argument is that money spent on beer could have been used for other meaningful activities to raise the socio-economic status of the people and improve their lives. Although this sounds true, the writer does not explore why the people embark on useless drinking sprees. He is worried about alcohol abuse. It is sad to note that the characters (such as Kamukombe and Makate) have to behave in accordance their pre-deterministic names and not in line with the dictates of social reality. Such names are usually derived from externally observable behaviour and to that extent they are limited in psychological profundity (Chiwome, 1996: 133). Such names reduce characters to rigid portraits, without intellectual or emotional growth (ibid). Unlike in modern times, in traditional Shona society beer drinking was closely linked to, and with hard work and high production; and hence with economic emancipation. In Matsikiti's *Rakava Buno Risifemberi* (1995), people drink beer at work parties. It was functional beer, which necessitated

and increased production thereby economically empowering people. They knew their limits. On the contrary, in contemporary society, people drink themselves lame so as to forget their problems. Widespread alcoholism is a modern problem, just like drug abuse (Chiwome, 1996: 72). It is “a symptom of profound social problems which are often of an economic nature” (ibid). Unfortunately, Hwendaenda does not focus on this reality. Without arable land, people have nowhere else to use their energies. Hence, just like in folktales, although readers are advised not to follow the folly and stupidity of the characters portrayed, the story “unrealistically dramatises the penalty and consequences of evil” (Kahari, 1986: 123).

Overall, whilst the author sees rural poverty, he fails to satisfactorily explain its cause and hence its solution. He sees it as a simple family crisis, when in reality it is much more than that. It is a national crisis and not a mere domestic challenge. The family’s economic decline is a mere manifestation of broader national problems that centre on land hunger and *ipso facto* lack of occupation. He stigmatises his characters into the rich and humane on one hand and the lazy, poor and unscrupulous on the other. Like early Christian writers such as Zvarevashe and Chakaipa, he sees the good as worthy the happiness and emancipation while the wicked are worthy their suffering and disempowerment. Such polarization is sadly not linked to socio-historical forces behind black people’s economic deprivation; especially the unresolved land issues that later saw many move themselves into former white-owned farms.

#### **4.2.2 Lack of empowerment among urban Africans**

Chitsike (*Minisita Munhuwo*, 1999) and Nyandoro (*Ndozvudza Aniko?* 2006), attempt to explain poverty (hence economic disempowerment), among contemporary Africans in the city. Both examine its causes as well as ways of curbing it. Chitsike (1999) presents the causes of poverty being, unemployment, poor remuneration and lack of a sense of duty on the part of African leaders. Similarly, Nyandoro (2006) views these causes, and in addition, western education. To both writers, modern life in its totality is behind most problems today. Like Achebe’s *A Man of the People* (1966), *Minisita Munhuwo* is mainly a satirical first person narrative, which exposes what leaders are doing vis-à-vis the electorate’s expectations. The author shows that those in leadership positions have ignored their responsibilities, leaving the majority of people in abject

poverty. On the other hand, Nyandoro's story, which has a complex plot, is told from the point of view of the downtrodden, who include Fiona, Wisdom, Cryboy, Chaza and others, as they reflect upon their economic shortfalls and aspirations. Such a multiplicity of voices and points of view help show reality as lacking any unifying logic (Hawthorn, 2005: 63). The complex plot helps the author focus on the problems of the self and inner self, through such techniques as stream of consciousness, epistolary, flashback and interior monologue. Even the title itself "Ndozviudza Aniko?" (Whom shall I tell?) is suggestive of the solitude and isolation of human beings as they grapple to have their socio-economic status raised in the new and individualistic world. The two novels fit into the category of modernist literature, which highlights the absurdity of modern life.

The authors expose what causes poverty in the city. Through flash back, both writers show that urban characters are in fact people who have been forced off the rural areas by economic strife. Like the critical realist Tsodzo in *Pafunge* (1972), Nyandoro and Chitsike trace most of their characters' backgrounds in a bid to examine the circumstances behind their suffering. In this regard, Nyandoro presents western education as one of the reasons behind black disempowerment. In *Ndozviudza Aniko?* (2006), Wisdom's parents sell all the domestic animals they have in a bid to finance their child's education. To these parents, education is "the highest goal in life. It is envisioned to be the best way to combat economic and political hardships" (Chiwome, 1996: 114). The author shows that contrary to popular opinion and expectation, education was not a form of black empowerment, but of economic disempowerment. Despite that his parents lose many cattle, Wisdom's parents do not have any positive gains from their sacrifice because Wisdom does not do well in school. Again, education fails to meaningfully empower even those who are bright. Nzunza, a graduate and trained teacher leaves teaching arguing that it is not a highly paying job at all (2006: 24-5). One could therefore acquire as much education as was possible but remain at the periphery of society. It becomes plausible to believe that formal education was never meant for black empowerment. It was not an automatic guarantor of a good life. Hence, parents hardly recovered the resources they would have spent on their children's schooling.

Nyandoro and Chitsike explain why and how their characters surface in the city. This way, they differ from early writers like Chakaipa in *Garandichauya* (1963) and *Dzasukwa Mwana Asina*



*Hembe* (1967); and Hamutyinei in *China Manenji Hachifambisi* (1981), whose characters we encounter already in the city facing challenges, without sufficient background information on how and why they ended living there. In *Ndozvitudza Aniko?* (2006), both Wisdom and Fiona leave for the city of Harare, to look for employment (2006: 90; 2006: 122). The same applies to Silver Dollar:

...akabva kumusha ari musvuuganda dzvinyu risina gushe, achitarisira kuti achawana basa muHarare raizomuunzira rugare (2006: 138).

...she was very poor when she left the rural home, hoping to find a job that would bring her a good life in Harare.

Similarly, in *Minisita Munhuwo* (1999), Chitsike explains that Chenai goes to the city of Kwekwe to look for employment in order to curb poverty in the family (p. 8). She, like others is pushed into the city by circumstances. Life in the rural areas has become unbearable. The characters hope and view paying jobs in the city as the answer to their and the families' economic problems.

The two authors give crucial sociological detail as to why characters surface in the city. They are running away from poverty and disempowerment in the rural areas. Hence, unlike characters who are said to have "been attracted by the false glitter of city life" (Ngugi, 1983: 77) such as Muchaneta in *Garandichauya* (1963), Nyandoro and Chitsike show that such characters are "escaping from the hell of rural poverty and misery into the hades of urban poverty and misery..."(ibid). Through this, the two authors almost answer a pertinent question that Marita asks in Hove's *Bones*, "If the city is so frightening as you say ... why are so many people living there?" (1988: 24). Such detail is crucial as far as it also helps to show if those writers who solve problems by bringing their characters back into the rural areas would have been able to offer realistic solutions to African problems. Examples of writers who solve problems by making characters retreat into the reserves are Zvarevashe (*Museve Wade Nyama*, 1983) and Chakaipa (*Garandichauya*, 1963). Having retreated into the rural areas, the characters are said to have lived happily thereafter. What these early writers fail to acknowledge is that the reserves are in fact a creation of the same factors that have established big cities like Harare. Again, they fail to

acknowledge that the reserves are equally worse and that is why the characters escaped into the cities in the first place.

There are however cases where both Nyandoro and Chitsike leave out important detail. Wisdom and Silver Dollar come to town poor, strongly hoping to find employment. In *Minisita Munhuwo*, Chenai is forced to town by poverty. These presentations show as if the rural and the urban are two self-contained islands and a character from one to the other is actually walking across two unlinked entities (Ngugi, 1983: 78). Yet in reality, the two are a creation of each other. Whilst the authors satisfactorily show poverty or economic disempowerment as the chief reason behind the popular pattern of rural-urban migration, what is sadly left unsaid is how, when, why and by who this poverty was and is created. This is quite important as it has a strong bearing on whether it is justified to blame characters for what befalls them in the cities and also the kind of solutions to African problems that the writers propagate. The missing truth is that white settlers came and alienated black people's best lands. Without arable land, many African families were condemned to poverty. The money economy gave birth to wage employment and thus resulted in many flocking to the city in search of employment. The urban is thus a creation of the rural in as much as the rural is a creation of the urban (ibid). The peasants had to be alienated from the soil and be driven into towns as wage labourers (ibid). It is therefore clear that Africans who are in cities are firstly victims of poverty created in the rural areas. They are poor beings in search of a living. Their poverty has political roots in that it stems from the colonisation and alienation of their productive land.

The writers then link urban poverty to the unemployment that is rampant in most cities. In *Ndozviudza Aniko?* (2006: 53), a number of characters are not gainfully employed: Silver Dollar, Fiona, Wisdom, Tapson, Chimusoro, the begging woman and the clown in First Street. In another incident, along Simon Mazorodze drive, Revai notices groups of young people, some basking in the sun, others asleep and others standing near company premises. He is convinced that the people are desperately looking for employment. In *Minisita Munhuwo* (1999), unemployment is brought out through two instances. One is where Chenai struggles to get employment in the city of Kwekwe until she almost gives up. The other is the dialogue between the police guards where one says:

*Mazuvano hazviiti kuti munhu ashaye basa nokuti kuzoona rimwe unenge watsvukira sechin'ai. Vanhu mazuva ano vatambura nezvebasa izvi, zvikuru iwo mafomu 4 aya... Indasitiri ipi yavasingasviki kutsvaga basa risingamuki zvekare? (1999: 13).*

These days it is not welcome for anyone to lose his or her job because you will labour very hard to get another. Nowadays people, especially the Form Four graduates fail to secure jobs... Which industry have they not visited, looking for non-existing job opportunities?

People, especially the school leavers look for employment without success. It is clear that only the academic base has been improved at the expense of the industrial base. In doing so, the system has created unemployment through raising people's hopes through education then dashing the hopes upon the learners' completion of form four. Therefore, without employment, many blacks do not have any source of income, and hence of a living. In this regard, Africans are not to blame for their poverty, the system has not found for them places to demonstrate their potentials. Again, it is not that the people do not want to work. The writers show that these people roam from industry to industry, and even try to get jobs through unorthodox means like nepotism, but without success. The expositions refute popular mythology that blacks are poor because they do not want to work. All the characters are shown to have left the reserves with the desire to find employment.

The writers also link urban poverty to poor remuneration. Contrary to popular belief, the authors show that being educated or employed does not mean automatic economic emancipation. In *Ndozviudza Aniko?* (2006) the two police officers, Chaza and Nzunza's dialogue show that poverty among the employed is a result of poor remuneration. Workers are so poorly paid that they can hardly sustain their lives and families. Nzunza testifies that before he joined the police force, he was a very good and brilliant teacher who trained at Gweru Teachers' College before proceeding to the University of Zimbabwe to acquire a degree. He resigned arguing, "*Kamari kacho hakaiti...*" [p. 24] (The salary is so little and useless...). Teachers are cited as currently poorly paid. This is quite real and comes in the wake of many qualified teachers who have left the profession not only to join other professions like the police force, but also to become informal traders, illegal gold panners and foreign currency dealers. Even the police force and workers in the private sectors are presented as poorly paid also. Nzunza joins the police force not

because it is a better paying job, but because it has more opportunities of survival for the cunning ones. In another instance, Freedom tells Wisdom why he and Cryboy stole from their employer:

*Chakaita kuti tisvike pakuita mabasa akadai kutambiriswa mari shoma kwataitwa. Mari yacho yaive shomanane. Hameno kuti murungu wacho aifunga kuti tinorarama nei. Izvi ndizvo zvakazotituma kuti timugadzirise kuburikidza nekumubira (2006: 160).*

What drove us into such acts was the poor remuneration that we got. The pay was very little. I do not know how the employer expected us to survive. This is what made us fix him by stealing from him.

Freedom and Cryboy are poor, not because they are not employed, but because they are not meaningfully paid. The jobs have failed to economically empower them. Much the same can be said of Chitsike's presentation in *Minisita Munhuwo* (1999). Chenai could not attain secondary education. Her poor father died at his workplace and left no money for his three daughters' education. He owned no bank account. He was paid so little that he could hardly save any amount (1999: 8). At his workplace, no one was granted pension. He ended up drinking like a destitute. Poverty, poor working conditions and desperation made him seek solace in beer drinking. Chitsike brings out another instance of poverty through Moses, Chenai's boyfriend who works as a secretary of O.K Stores. Minister Mwaita laughs at Moses' occupation (1999: 95-6). He regards it as a shameful, ridiculous and very lowly paid job. The authors in this case link African poverty to poor remuneration in a hyper-inflationary environment. As Chiwome notes, "poor wages were a cardinal factor in causing poverty" (1996: 136). Just like in the colonial era, such wages are designed to keep the labourers in perpetual need of employment to ensure a constant supply of labour. They are also closely linked with the employer's great desire to make profits. Therefore, it is highly mythical to believe that Africans are poor because they are not employed or because they do not want to work, as presented by writers like Hwendaenda in *Mubairo* (1993). People can be in various jobs but still remain poor. Poor remuneration is what currently has largely driven previously employed people into neighbouring countries, especially between 1998 and 2009. The majority has flocked to South Africa, Botswana and Mozambique where the education systems and private sectors of those countries are better paying compared to the situation back home in Zimbabwe. Nyandoro and Chitsike's vision of

African poverty is therefore wider as compared to that by other contemporary writers like Hwendaenda.

In such despicable environments, the writers show that people use their whims to economically empower themselves. The poor, unemployed and underpaid end up being thieves, prostitutes and beggars in a bid to salvage some income. The authors depart from the popular victim-blame propagated by earlier writers. They provide relevant detail for readers to empathise with the characters. In *Ndozviudza Aniko?* (2006), Silver Dollar and, later, Fiona become prostitutes. As for Silver Dollar, Nyandoro says, “*Basa rakaramba kumuka, zvinova zvakamutuma kuita basa rekutengesa muviri wake*” [p. 138] (She could not get any employment, which led her into selling her body [prostitution]). It is only after her high hopes and efforts of getting gainful employment are dashed that she ultimately indulges in prostitution. As for Fiona, the writer again explains how she finally gives in to the immoral business. The writer explores the internal conflict she goes through:

*Fiona akazviona ave pamharadzano yenzira, paakanga oshaya kuti otera gwara ripi reupenyu. Zveupfambi akaona zviri zvinhu zvakaipa, zvine urwere, zvisina unhu, uye zvinoitika kuti areruke sebepa pane vamwe. Pamusoro pazvo, ainge akura achinzwa dzidziso yokuti zvakaipa. Upenyu hwemumigwagwa aihuziva kuti hwakaoma, hunovava segavakava. Mazino ahwo akaona ave pedyo nokumuruma zvakare, zvinova zvakamutyisa...Mwanasikana akashaya kuti otera divi ripi. Pakupedzisira akazongobvuma kuita zvaidiwa naSilver Dollar mushure mekuzviudza kuti “kusiri kufa ndekupi?” Chaainge otsvaga kuchengetwa (p. 145).*

Fiona saw herself between horns of a dilemma, where she was not sure which action to take. She despised prostitution, which she considered very bad, immoral, and as something which posed very high health risks and denuded one of their dignity. In addition, she had been brought up to know that it was bad and un-Christian. She knew how terrible street life was. She saw the gruesome teeth of street life wide open, ready to devour her and was very afraid. The girl child did not know what to do. Ultimately, she gave in to Silver Dollar’s request to sell her body after telling herself that either way, death was imminent. What she only desired was to have someone look after her.

The author makes strong observations about prostitution. It is not an easy adventure and that is why characters take time to indulge in it. Again, the characters are quite aware of its negative aspects and disastrous effects. As for Fiona, she has known it to be a bad and un-Christian

practice. Again, it exposes one to the dangers of contacting sexually transmitted diseases like syphilis, gonorrhoea, herpes, HIV and AIDS. It also denudes all the respect and dignity an individual previously commanded. Yet, despite all these hazards, Fiona makes the resolution that it is better to be a living prostitute than a hungry and starving decent person. Thus the city, as Kahari (1986: 108) observes, is the deathbed of Shona people's morals and decency. Its problems lead characters into inhuman behaviour. The exposition tallies well with the testimonies of two prostitutes interviewed by Barnes and Win on why people engage in the shameful activity (1992: 118):

One is that "it's because of suffering. That is how many began it" and that, "some of them didn't want to, but **One**: they had nowhere to live. **Two**: they came from a very poor family, she had nothing to eat, nothing to dress with.

What is clear is that no one really wants to be a prostitute. However harsh economic circumstances force them. Unlike other victimised women-cum-prostitutes in earlier Shona novels, Fiona, like Ngugi's Wanja in *Petals of Blood* (1977) and Wariinga in *Devil on the Cross* (1982), identifies the social forces that turn her into a prostitute. She consoles herself saying that prostitution was the ultimate option given the economic circumstances. Nyandoro, unlike earlier novelists, links prostitution with unemployment and the great desire to earn a living. He thus does not blame Fiona and Silver Dollar for becoming prostitutes. It is in fact, an ultimate option for economically stranded women. It is a desperate attempt to survive in a harsh socio-economic environment. The writer shows that in such an environment, it is very difficult for morals to stand the test of time. He portrays prostitutes as poor and relatively powerless women who cannot find other means of survival (Barnes and Win, 1992: 117). Like Tsodzo in *Pafunge* (1972), Nyandoro shows the "moral consequences of frustrating young people who aspire to live decently" (Chiwome, 1996: 120). To blame such women characters only exude one's insensitivity to their plight. It is to claim that individuals are stronger than their environment, when in fact; their environment shapes them.

In a bid to emancipate herself economically, Silver Dollar does all she can to attract male clients. She is awash with latest fashions, lipstick, several bangles, wigs, earrings, and modern perfumes and has to change clothes every day. Seeing that her services alone cannot sustain her needs, she

opens a brothel and hires other women, including Fiona. At the brothel, Fiona discovers one day that all the booking houses were full with male clients, and yet a very long queue of men waiting to be served was still visible from outside (ibid: 139). Hence, prostitution is a practice meant to sustain one's life in the same way a good paying job would. It is a job where workers also have to be contended with worker overtime so as to improve their incomes. Hence, writers who blame prostitutes in fact castigate victims who themselves are sweating to earn a living. Nyandoro moves away from the victim blame motif and accords the practice a more holistic look.

In *Ndozviudza Aniko?* (2006), some of the poor unemployed and underpaid become thieves while others indulge in corruption in order to raise their economic standing. Wisdom, Cryboy, Freedom and others connive to steal various things. At times they lure their victims away and steal in their absence, in other instances they deceive them and even get the victims' help as they swindle things away from them. The gang steals a variety of furniture, posh and new model cars using a variety of techniques, selling many of them to South Africa. The thieves have also become professionals in their own right. They agree on a code of conduct, which include, never divulging confidential information, such as names and places of residence of the members of the group (2006: 157-8). They think of what to steal, why to steal, when to steal and how to do it. This takes into account the need to be disguised so as never to be suspected, the need to be sweet tongued, sociable, seemingly helpful and concerned. The wrier shows that thieves first and foremost behave as very responsible citizens of society. They study and behave as expected in every situation. It is an exercise that poses a lot of homework for its participants. They also study their clients very carefully, monitoring their movements, something that does not only require time but resources too. Therefore, at times thieves are very patient, a rare aspect in modern business, and at other times they are swift while maintaining accuracy and caution. They again quickly finalize on how, when and where to dispose of their loot so that they are not suspected or caught. Hence, it is mythical to believe that thieves do not work. In fact, stealing is a profession where the participants have to be 'well-behaved,' work all round the clock and all year round unlike other professions where working hours are limited per day or where there are public holidays and off days to assure people of a rest. With this detail, it is clear that stealing is a form of self-empowerment in an environment where society has not accorded people opportunities for survival. People are driven into theft by the imperative necessity to live. The author does not

blame them. He sympathises with them, showing them as a pitiful group of people whom society has failed to take care of.

Nyandoro also shows that the poorly paid also engage in corrupt activities so as to boost their income. Police officers in the traffic section make a lot of money for themselves by accepting bribes from over-speeding motorists who will be trying to meet and beat the day's target income for their employers. Some officers take away meat from people, taking advantage of the government's decree to ban carrying meat from the rural areas into town. They lie that the meat is infected, burn a very small portion to deceive people and carry the rest to their homes for their families (2006: 28). Others take away vegetables, tomatoes, bananas and apples from female vendors to their families. No one considers that the embattled female vendors are selling these items at illegal places in order to look after their families. They are also desperately trying to make ends meet. The writer does not blame the police officers either. As Kurotwi observes:

...the presence of corruption in any society is an indicator that all is not well in that society. In Zimbabwe, it is deprivation which has led to poverty and in the process of being poor, people then try and make it by any means necessary (2003: 66).

Hence, the police too are desperate to make ends meet in a hyper-inflationary environment. The system no longer rewards well such qualities as being honest, transparent and responsible. The writer gives an anecdote of a police officer who was rewarded with \$350 and a cop of the month award after arresting two thieves. Incidentally, the officer had turned down a \$25 000 bribe from the thieves. If he had accepted the bribe, he could have earned a lot more than he was given as reward for his professional behaviour. Inhuman acts pay more than responsible behaviour. In such circumstances, it becomes very tempting for people to fall prey to corruption since the great need to salvage a living is more compelling than moral uprightness. In a society where life has become largely materialistic and expensive, it is senseless for people to be very responsible and get peanuts out of it whilst the cunning earn a fortune.

Both writers show that whilst some turn into thieves and prostitutes, others turn into beggars and others into clowning as sources of income. In *Ndozviudza Aniko?* (2006), while enduring her street life, Fiona notices two people; a woman begging and a man teasing people and getting paid



for his antics. The pathetic woman begs seated very close to a bank, with the strong anticipation that people would easily help her for they would have immediately withdrawn money from their accounts. The comedian also undertakes risky adventures. At times he walks along a piece of wire tied to two poles, at times kisses a huge flame of fire or, using his teeth, picks up a small but very heavy piece of rail. Fiona later accesses information on the history of both characters. The clowning man used to work for a clothes-manufacturing factory but due to the difficult economic environment, he, together with others was retrenched. Seeing that his family now suffered from extreme poverty, the man took to the streets where he now behaved like a clown (2006: 9). The blind woman had no any employment and so was trying to make ends meet. Fiona again narrates a humorous incident of a Chitungwiza man who had feigned blindness in order to beg. After the day's collection, the man could not resist the excitement of dancing to System Tazvida's music, with his eyes wide open.

Similarly, in *Minisita Munhuwo* (1999), Chitsike also shows that begging is fast becoming a common occupation in the cities:

*Mataundi ose omuno ari kuchema-chema nouwandu hwevapemhi shamwari. MuHarare muno nyanye, kunge vakadaidzirwa mari. Ipi zvayo sitiriri yaunofamba uchishaya kuona vapemhi ava? Vamwe vavo mapofu, vamwe zvirema, vamwewo vachinyepera kuva zvirema kana vati chete pindikiti mutaundi. Asi kana vari kumataundishipi, vanhu vatsvene chaivo vatori nemhuri. Pane mumwe anoti kune munhu wose waaona, ndipewo mari yebhazi nokuti yandinayo yaramba kukwana (p. 77).*

All the towns in this country are complaining about the increased number of beggars my dear. This is worse in Harare, as if they were invited to get money. Which street can you not find these people? Some of them are blind, others crippled, while others feign lameness when they are in town but when they are in the townships they are well-to-do family people. There is someone who always asks for top up to his bus fare from everyone he comes across.

Many people have resorted to begging as a source of income and economic emancipation. Begging is a pointer to a weak or failing economy. Clowning too shows the unavailability of employment opportunities for citizens. Both are signs of under-utilisation of a useful human resource base. Society has failed to cater for its people's creative potentials. Mwaita complains that some of the beggars are not good singers; they have hoarse voices (p. 77). The minister is sarcastic of the poor voice modulation of the singers, describing it as discord. Admittedly, some

of the people have poor voices because they naturally are not singers. They have certain potentials, which they have never been accorded a platform to demonstrate. Hence, they have been forced into a 'music profession', which originally was never their aspiration. What the minister criticises as bad singing is in fact, the aftermaths of having people do jobs that they never aspired to do.

To the minister's dismay, each time the beggars are arrested by the police, they surface again in no time. The author displays the naivety of contemporary society, which forces beggars off the streets hoping not to see them again. To the beggars, removing them from the streets is an act of disempowering them and that is why they quickly resurface. Society views beggars as trouble; confirming Falola's (2004: 598) observation that people think life after independence should be an exercise of relaxation. Society only sees beggars who throng the streets without seeing the force behind their begging. They strive to address the symptoms of a failing system instead of getting to the root cause. It is naïve for people to remove these street people and hope they will never surface again without creating jobs and other life-sustaining opportunities that will occupy them and keep them off the streets. Why the people quickly surface again is because the root cause of their begging or disempowerment has not been addressed. The people are running away from poverty and starvation, which will continue to haunt them even if the society uses the police force to evict them from the streets.

What makes the situation worse is that even the able-bodied and well-to-do people feign blindness and lameness and throng the streets, begging and in some cases, cheating people in order to get financial assistance. Yet, people do not leave rural areas for the towns to beg. Through characters like Fiona, Silver Dollar, Wisdom and Chenai, the authors show that everyone; blind, lame or those without any physical handicap gets into town with high prospects of a paying job that would enable him or her to earn a living. It is only after their expectations would have been thwarted that they resort to begging. In an interview with Grace Shamhu of the *Sunday Mail Metro*, Ambuya Mudzinganyama, a grandmother who lives by begging remarked, "I was left with no choice but to beg. I do not enjoy it but what other option is there?" (p. M 8). There are no other options for economic emancipation or survival for the people. That is why they resort to begging. Begging is also never an intention for the disabled or blind. For the able-

bodied, it is not only demeaning and immoral to pretend to be disabled, but also cunning. Yet, it is a sign of their resourcefulness. The writers do not blame beggars; they show begging as a resourceful way of trying to survive in a hostile environment. They link well “the evils of this world with poor accommodation and lack of permanent employment...” (Chiwome, 1996: 118).

Both writers again concur on the view that African people’s lack of economic empowerment, together with individual people’s survival strategies discussed above, are also caused by lack of accountability on the part of black leaders. In other words, African people’s poverty can be blamed on political figures. As Mutiso observes, in most post-independence novels, it is the politician who features most (1974: 6). What Achebe (1983: 10) observes about the Nigerian situation seems to be Nyandoro and Chitsike’s view, that the people are what they are only because their leaders are not what they should be. The problem with contemporary society is shown as the failure of leadership (ibid: 1). Leaders pay lip service to their duties. In *Minisita Munhuwo* (1999), Mwaita is presented as an egocentric, cunning, fame-loving and irresponsible minister who uses flowery language when addressing people at political rallies but who is very inefficient when it comes to service delivery. He is annoyed that people expect him to do several things for them, forgetting that he was elected to serve and not to be served. Even when they hold rallies, ministers do not address the bread and butter issues. Commenting on the nature of rallies that have become popular, Chenai laments:

*Ini handidi zvangu kuendako nokuti zvinhu zvakaipa zvawanda muno wena. Tarisa kuwanda kwaita pfambi, zvidhakwa nembavha asi hurumende hapana zvairi kuita kuti zvinhu izvi zviderere kwete (p. 36).*

I do not want to attend the rally because we have many unsolved issues. Look at the ever-increasing number of prostitutes, drunkards and thieves but the government is not doing anything to ameliorate the situation.

Chitsike, unlike earlier Shona writers, clearly shows that, the case of many people being out of employment, leading to many inhuman practices, is not out of choice or being uneducated and neither is it their problem. It is failure by government to formulate policies that would avail opportunities that can occupy people and keep them off the streets. In *Ndozviudza Aniko?* (2006), Nyandoro also points a finger at the legislators who fail to better the people’s lives:

*Nechekumaodzanyemba kweAfrica Unity Square, wadarika Nelson Mandela Avenue, ndipo pane imba yedare reparamende, munosangana vamiririri vematunhu akasiyana-siyana vachiita hurukuro pamusoro pematongerwo anofanira kuitwa nyika. Vamiririri ava vanenge vachitarisirwa zvakare kuzivisa vamwe pamusoro pematambudziko ari kunetsa vanhu munzvimbo dzavanomiririra kuti paonekwe nzira dzekuaderedza kana kuapedza. Vakuru ava vaisaonawo here kutambura kwaFiona nekwevamwe vake? Vamwe vake vanachenzira, vaininge vakangoti kunguru kurara kwevari parufu pedyo nenzvimbo iyi (p. 11)*

To the south of Africa Unity Square, after Nelson Mandela Avenue, is where the parliament building is, where legislators for various constituencies hold meetings and discussions on how the country should be run. These leaders will also be expected to alert each other on the problems or challenges bedevilling people in their respective constituencies so as to come up with ways to alleviate or deal with them totally. Did not these leaders see Fiona's misery, including that of her colleagues? Her colleagues, street children were sleeping in the open, without blankets, like people at a funeral.

It is clear from what the writers present that the duty of those elected into power should be to formulate policies that improve the well-being of the people, including enabling the private sector and other individuals to create employment for the public, guaranteeing meaningful and life-sustaining wages for workers. They also need to be concerned about decent accommodation and food for the people as well as ascertaining whether the country's economy and politics are conducive for people to realize their creative potentials. On the contrary, Africa is in an economic coma (Falola, 2004: 591), a testimony that these leaders are not doing what they are expected to do. The economic crisis is characterized by extremely low rates of economic growth. Most industries in Africa have either gone bankrupt or shut down or at a stand still, or operating below 50% capacity all causing acute unemployment (ibid). No factories are opened to accommodate school leavers. In their expositions, the authors link the cause and effect relationship quite well. They do not condemn thieves and prostitutes. Rather, they show how society itself creates bad people from very good and responsible citizens. They put the blame largely on the government, whose policies they feel should be responsible for creating employment for the people. They do not separate politics from economics. It is for this reason that Miriam; Mwaita's wife asks why ministers, her husband included, are handsomely paid if they are not alleviating the people's suffering (*Minisita Munhuwo*, 1999: 78).

The writers suggest ways of empowering blacks. Chitsike (*Minisita Munhuwo*, 1999) suggests arresting, imprisoning and sacking unaccountable leaders from their jobs as well as for the disadvantaged to start self-help projects like sewing. On the other hand, Nyandoro (*Ndozviudza Aniko?* 2006) urges the disadvantaged to save their meagre incomes and then use them to start income-generating projects. In *Minisita Munhuwo*, Minister Mwaita is arrested and dragged to the courts. The same is true of Chimhundu's *Chakwasha* (1991) where the corrupt leader, Moses is arrested and brought for sentencing. This seems in line with Gutu's observation, that unless the big fish are netted, Zimbabwe's problems will never end (*The Zimbabwean Independent*, 2007: 15). Such is also in agreement with Falola (2004: 596) who says that instead of sweeping the problem of bad governance under the carpet, it should be accepted as an African crisis; a cancerous growth, which needs to be completely removed for meaningful development to take place in Africa. Leadership crisis is shown as a challenge that needs to be looked into and tackled for the good of society.

By arresting unaccountable leaders, it is hoped that others would learn to desist from such bad deeds or that more responsible ones who can work for the people's emancipation will be elected. Although this appears true, it does not get to the root cause of black people's lack of socio-economic emancipation. By advocating for the imprisonment of bad leaders, Chitsike has gone back to the traditional victim-blame of punishing individuals in a bid to right their wrong behaviour. This way, the system is credited for curbing crime, which it has helped create with its poor way of socialising citizens. The Shona are presented as culprits and the system exonerated. Yet the writer had successfully shown that Mwaita's behaviour had deep roots in the circumstances he was brought under. The author has traced the character's background to unearth the circumstances responsible for the character malformation and wicked behaviour. When he had almost arrived at the root cause of the problem, he unfortunately advances a wrong solution to it. The way today's citizens are brought up is responsible for such ills as corruption and the abuse of positions. Chung (2006: 324) remarks that the ineptitude of the ruling elite can be blamed not only on their personal lack of integrity, but also the weak institutional systems through which they were socialized. As Maphosa observes, socially irresponsible organizations are contexts for developing a poor human factor (in Chivaura and Mararike [eds], 1998: 149).

In *Ndozviudza Aniko?* (2006) the writer urges the disadvantaged to shun inhuman acts of having income, but to save their little incomes and use them to start small enterprises. As he awaits his sentence, Wisdom blames himself for his fate and remarks, “...nyaya yokuda kupfuma chimbi chimbi iyi yazondiparira chokwadi. Ndosaka zvichinzi ‘Idya cheziya’ [p. 200] (The desire to get rich quickly has led me into trouble. That is why it is said, ‘One must eat what he has worked for’). As if to confirm Wisdom’s realization, the author gives the case of Chimusoro, a former street child who refused to be dragged into inhuman activities by Wisdom and his group. Chimusoro proudly claims:

*Ndiri kuita basa rekutora mifananidzo. Iye zvino ndave kutowanawo kamari kangu zvokuti handichagari mumigwagwa. Ndave kuroja kuEpworth. Ndakasevha kamari kandaiwana kubva mukupakisa nekugadha motokari uye mukushandira mumwe murungu mugadheni. Nekamari ikaka ndakatenga muchina wekutora mapikicha nemafirimu (2006: 202).*

I am now a photographer. Now I am getting a reasonable income and I no longer stay in the streets. I am lodging in Epworth. I saved the little money I got from showing people where to park their cars and from guarding those cars as well as from working as a gardener for a white person. With this little money, I bought the camera together with the films.

To the writer, it seems that individuals should desist from crime and work hard in order to do away with the problem of economic incapacitation. They should try to save the little income that they get. They should strive to work hard with their own hands even if they are paid little. One day the small savings will count and produce an admirable life for them. Chimusoro is shown as doing well in life. Chimusoro also clearly tells Wisdom that he (Wisdom) is personally to blame for his imprisonment. In *Minisita Munhuwo* (1999), the hopeless individuals like impregnated young girls are also urged to start small businesses like knitting or sewing so that they can finance their education. They are warned against becoming prostitutes described as very lazy people who wait to be ‘given’ money by their clients (Minister Mwaita’s advice 1999: 73). This is a case where “social victims are supposed to be their own shepherds” (Chiwome, 1996: 109).

Whilst waiting for his sentence, Wisdom regrets having been unable to lead a moral and Christian life. He tells himself that he should have been like Chimusoro, who resisted indulging

in inhuman acts. Like earlier fiction, *Ndozviudza Aniko?* in this regard advocates for “a change of hearts” for socio-economic prosperity and not “a change of the system” (Chiwome, 1996: 122). Mentioning God “makes individuals wholly guilty of the mistakes they make in life. The consequences of their actions are evaluated more in idealistic than sociological terms” (ibid: 108). Sermonizing hampers the rational and imaginative analysis of contemporary problems (ibid). There will not be any further exploration of the undoubted relationship between evil and history. Again, by celebrating Chimusoro’s sacrificial savings, the author unwittingly condones employers for the meagre wages they give their workers, forgetting his earlier exposition that poor wages force previously innocent people to indulge in acts of vagrancy as they try to supplement their not-so-steady incomes. Hence, it would be naïve for Wisdom to promise to live a moral life once out of prison, forgetting that he had failed to live such a life when he had not yet been imprisoned. What is clear is that although imprisonment may knock some sense into someone’s head, the situation in real life makes it impossible for one to live the life they envision while in jail. The case of Fiona is a clear example. Once out of remand, Fiona realises she cannot start the noble sewing business whose skills she had acquired while in remand and has to resort to prostitution first for her to be able to raise capital for the project, risking being arrested again. By urging people to run individual businesses, the writers downplay the other prerequisites like capital and the expertise. They place the cart before the horse. Today’s society merely admires businesses run by individuals, urge people to emulate them, without examining how the admired people got into the business or sustain them. By calling for self-run enterprises, the writers have preferred a neat and hopeful ending akin to that of a romance. Once a novel adopts such an ending, it becomes escapist (Chiwome, 1996: 34). It entertains at the expense of truthfulness (ibid). The solution therefore remains at the level of ideas.

*Ndozviudza Aniko?* (2006) and *Minisita Munhuwo* (1999) are examples of fiction that can best be summed up as novels that “temporarily sharpened the readers’ awareness to a problem but disengaged their minds at the end of the story” (Chiwome, 1996: 34). Readers therefore do not probe deeper into what genuine course of action characters should have taken in order to extricate themselves from the economic incapacitation portrayed by the writers. As such, the novels seem to support the current pathetic state of the very things they challenge.

### **4.3 Perceptions on emancipation of African women**

The third section looks at female empowerment. It discusses Makayi's *Makudo Ndomamwe* (2004), Mutasa's *Sekai Minda Tave Nayo* (2005), Moyo's *Ndabva Zera* (1992) and *Chemera Mudundundu* (2002); as well as Chitsike's *Magora Panyama* (1999). The section analyses the writers' vision of the root causes of women's disempowerment and the ways of raising their status. It also seeks to establish if male and female writers differ in their vision of women empowerment and why, thereby ascertaining if women writers are any better than men in articulating women's concerns or not. It also compares male writers' attitude towards female empowerment. Owing to the paucity of novels published by women writers, the section focuses on one novel, *Makudo Ndomamwe* (2004) by a female writer and supplements this with short stories from *Masimba* (2004), a collection by women writers. It juxtaposes this with novels by male novelists mentioned above. While Makayi's *Makudo Ndomamwe* (2004) and Mutasa's *Sekai: Minda Tave Nayo* (2005) largely focus on education vis-à-vis the girl child, with the later also including land, Moyo's *Ndabva Zera* and *Chemera Mudundundu* (1992, 2002), together with Chitsike's *Magora Panyama* (1999) centre on legislation and women.

#### **4.3.1 Education and female empowerment**

Makayi's *Makudo Ndomamwe* (2004) and Mutasa's *Sekai: Minda Tave Nayo* (2005) centre on the problems and disadvantages of one's life as a female being and how such problems can be solved in a bid to bring total empowerment to her. The writers identify men and patriarchy as the chief enemies of women and their quest to raise their status in life, at the same time showing education and unity among women as key solutions. The two novels tackle issues similar to those dealt with by women writers such as Emecheta (*The Joys of Motherhood*, 1979), Tsitsi Dangarembga (*Nervous Conditions*, 1988) and Himunyanga-Phiri (*The Legacy*, 1992) where the girl child is denied the right to acquire formal education. The writers thus fall into the category of what Arndt regard as African feminists. Arndt (2002: 78) says these regard most of all, education and solidarity among women as well as women's economic and social independence from men as important means towards their emancipation.



*Makudo Ndomamwe* (2004), told largely from a third person narrative style, centres on Revai, a teenager whose desire for education and emancipation is militated against by patriarchal society and only extricates her-self from such disempowerment with the help of fellow women. *Sekai: Minda Tave Nayo* (2005) centres mainly on Sekai, her relatives and schoolmates. Sekai also battles the gruesome grip of tradition, defies all odds to reach dizzy heights in school (she even goes overseas for her university education) and then uses her education to uplift not only the welfare of her family, but that of her community too. Through the epistolary technique, the characters share important information on men and the oppressive nature of patriarchy. They then discuss how education can ultimately bail women out of its oppressive grip. Through the novel, the author shows that “the desire to learn is so great that no distance or obstacle is too great to be overcome” (Auret, 1990: 17). In both novels like in other feminist novels, “higher education offers women new possibilities of earning a living, bringing them autonomy and independence from men” (Arndt, 2002: 78).

In the two novels, there are cases to show how insensitive to women’s emancipation patriarchy is. One instance is where patriarchy denies the girl child the chance to acquire formal education, limiting this privilege to the boy child only. In *Makudo Ndomamwe* (2004), the name Revai (gossip) is significant in that it is in reference to society that laughs at, and gossips about VaRunyararo who sends his daughter to a secondary school:

*...vakatanga kuseka vachiti VaRunyararo vaitongwa nemukadzi uyo ainge ovafurira kudzidzisa mwanasikana zvavaisaita ivo. Kwaitoti anenge asvika rugwaro rwechinomwe aitoti midzimu yainge yatomuona* (p. 6).

...people from the village laughed saying VaRunyararo was under petticoat government from his wife who was now influencing him to send the girl child to school something which they themselves did not do. Any girl child who had gone as far as Grade seven would really thank her ancestral spirits.

What comes out is that it was common practice for Shona patriarchal society not to accord the girl child the chance to acquire post-primary education. On the other hand, the boy child went not only beyond higher primary level, but also as far as his intelligence and the fees could allow. Society also perceives and disapproves VaRunyararo’s wife as a bad influence to her husband for making him allow Revai, the girl child to go to school. To them, she acts in violation of the

norm. In other words, it was unheard of for a woman to control and influence her husband. It was expected that “men should always control, rule their households and keep women in subservient positions” (May, 1983: 61). Men’s deeds, opinions and world-view were deemed final. Even when Revai opts to go back to school after her failed attempt to marry Gutsa, men are shown to disapprove of the idea (2004: 52). In men, the writer sees a people who have the same attitude and approach to women. Men label women negatively and close doors for women who want to emancipate themselves in life.

Mutasa brings out the same patriarchal attitude towards the education of women in the novel *Sekai: Minda Tave Nayo* (2005) where Sekai’s father is very hostile to the idea of Sekai going to school. He argues that instead of going to school, she has to take care of children and look after cattle as her brothers, Joram, Sakurayi, Patson, and Biya go to school. His uncompromising stance is later expressed in a letter Matirasa writes to her aunt:

*Kwanzi makatora mwana pano muchida kuti andoita mukadzi wamaticha. Vati ndiani murume anozoroora simbe isingagoni kubata badza. Chikoro ndechevakomana. Baba vati kana Sekai achida kupinda chikoro achapinzwa nemurume wake. Kupinza Sekai chikoro kurasa mari. Vati kana akashanda saticha kana nesi kana basa ripi zvaro haadzori mari yavo. Vati upfumi hwokurasa nokuti anozoriritira varume vake isu tave marombe (p. 13).*

He said you took the child away so that she becomes a wife of the teachers. He asked which man would marry a lazy woman who does not know how to farm? Education is for boys. Father has said if Sekai wants to be educated, her husband is the one who would send her to school. To educate her is to waste money. He said even if she works as a teacher, nurse or whatever, she would not return the money he would have spent on her. He said he would have wasted his wealth because after finishing her education she would be taking care of her husbands whilst we will be destitute.

The writer successfully brings out the myths held by the Shona concerning the girl child’s education. They thought to educate her was to pledge her to teachers (Mai Guchu quoted in Barnes and Win, 1992: 63). They saw teachers as suspicious beings who took advantage of the girl child. For the girl child, her arena was limited to agricultural tasks like farming, and domestic ones like child rearing, sweeping, cooking and scrubbing; tasks that they argued, did not warrant women to go to school (Mai Kanogoiwa in *ibid*: 64). The same reality and concerns

are raised in Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988) where Nyasha testifies that she only got the chance to learn after the death of her brother, Nhamo. When he was still alive, she was sidelined to domestic chores whilst he went to school. Again, in Himunyangaphiri's *The Legacy* (1992) the narrator finds herself out of school and is made to marry early so as to raise fees for her brothers who are considered fit and ideal for education. By denying the girl child education, "patriarchy seeks to keep her in an inferior position to men, a position where women were men's slaves" (*African Weekly* 1946 in Barnes and Win, 1992: 65). Whilst education allows men to be adventurous, keeping women to tasks limited to farming, child minding and cooking, patriarchy not only enslaves them, it also denies them the freedom and equality with men that women deserve. Women are excluded from the socio-economic elevation and development that are brought about with education. This way, both male and female writers are successful and at par in showing the incapacitation of women.

Without education, women experience many marital problems. In the novel *Makudo Ndomamwe* (2004), Makayi shows that they are easily divorced, humiliated and denied socio-economic assistance by their male counterparts, creating problems for them. Gutsa divorces Revai after impregnating her, arguing that he cannot marry someone who is unemployed (2004: 41). Later, Nyengerai impregnates her but refuses to marry her on account that she is already a mother. He even does not assist in looking after the child born out of their intimacy. Men want to marry educated and employed women in an environment where most men despise women's learning. They also deny responsibilities that children naturally expect from fathers. Women are blamed for being victims of their socio-economic set-up whilst men who are equally influenced by the same environment are condoned. Although Makayi and Mutasa focus on the problems of women, in this regard, Makayi's vision of female suffering is wider. Women writers are therefore better in articulating their problems when compared to their male counterparts. The reason is that they are the recipients of the torment inflicted on them (Interview with Makayi, 17 July 2008).

The writers proceed to show that women can be empowered through acquiring formal education. In *Sekai: Minda Tave Nayo* (2005), Kasirai indicates the indispensability of education by stating that even women's traditional roles like farming now call for educated people (p.3). In this case,

education enables women to efficiently and effectively carry out their tasks, something they could not do without it. In their justification of women's education, the authors show that the girl child is quite determined, hardworking and intelligent. In *Makudo Ndomamwe*, despite learning at a day secondary school, Revai passes all the eight subjects she had registered for and later obtains a nursing certificate (2004: 56). In her nursing programme, she is so intelligent as to silence student doctors from the University of Zimbabwe. She is eloquent and has great mastery of her stuff (ibid: 62). She succeeds in life, living an admirable life, driving her own car, looking after her family very well. Similarly, in *Sekai: Minda Tave Nayo*, Sekai is quite outstanding not only in behaviour, but also in performance. She holds several positions through her secondary education. In the debates about land and the economy that they hold, she proves to be well read, knowledgeable, confident and quite eloquent (2005: 18-20). She ultimately goes overseas to further her education and again passes very well. Even in her execution of duty in the Ministry of Lands and Agriculture, she explains many concepts on how farmers can improve production, including how land has to be distributed, used and maintained. She also helps village communities get rid of their negative perception of the girl child and her capabilities, leaving everyone geared to educate their girl children. Through her, both her immediate family and community witness positive development. She builds a very beautiful house for her parents and promises to build a bigger one for her aunt. Even in Himunyanga-Phiri's *The Legacy* (1992), the girl child is shown as very capable; she registers in Science Subjects and goes on to do a Degree in Engineering where she performs even better than her male counterparts. Thus education levels the playing field for men and women, enabling women to demonstrate their potentials, earn money and raise their socio-economic standing. In some cases, it removes women's economic dependence on men, something they could not have done without acquiring an education.

That education is indispensable to development is captured through the Shona adage "*Kusaziva kufa*" (Ignorance is the same as death). Such a position stems from the view that education provides people with manual or mechanical skills (Blaug in Simmons [ed], 1980: 146) and that it works to eliminate poverty (ibid). In modern Zimbabwe, educated women have assumed various positions as ministers, nurses, teachers, engineers, doctors, pharmacists and lecturers. These positions have also accorded some of these women a very good life style, of good accommodation, cars and good remuneration. It has empowered them socially, intellectually,

economically, materially and politically. On the other hand, the uneducated lead a pathetic life, as general workers, house cleaners and beggars. This vindicates Siyachitema's view that education means money and a good life and without it, one is a dead person (2005: 26). Similarly, Mandela (1999) remarks, "Education is the most powerful weapon you can use to conquer the world", (A quotation at the entrance to the University of South Africa). Educated women, apart from having a sound knowledge of their rights also stand great chances of getting well paying jobs thereby limiting their dependency on men who are not always trustworthy. With education, women have become professionals capable of looking after themselves (Kahari, 1997: 93). They do not need to go down on their knees seeking favours from their husbands or from their mothers-in-law (ibid). The uneducated are usually tossed around by irresponsible men since they have to place themselves under their men for them to be guaranteed of continued support. In addition, education is imperative for many especially in respect of the new technology that is being introduced in life, technology that is also used by women. Education is thus power.

In addition to education, the authors also see unity among women as important in uplifting their socio-economic standing. In *Makudo Ndomamwe* (2004), after enduring the pains of an unsuccessful marriage with Gutsa, Revai vows, "*Handichadzve kuona munhurume pedyo neni panyaya dzerudo* (p. 60)." (I no longer want to have anything to do with men in love matters). The solution here lies in avoiding men in one's life. It is believed that since men are the cause of trouble, the way out is having nothing to do with them at all (Interview with Makayi, 17 July 2008). This saves women from all the problems caused by their associations with men. This therefore gives them the platform and freedom to advance and enjoy life. Joined to this, the author suggests that women must join hands and fight to remove men's chauvinistic tendencies. Although her uncle tries to block Revai's comeback to school, her grandmother fights hard on her side. Her mother and aunt too offer her emotional and moral support (2004: 53). Again, when Nyengerai comes back from overseas with another fiancé, his new fiancé is not cross with Revai. She abandons Nyengerai and tasks him to organise his affairs (ibid: 85). When he tries to reconcile with Revai, Revai too turns down his request and he is left stranded and baffled, with no one to establish a family. Single motherhood is seen as the solution. Such is in line with radical feminists' stance that men are never allies in the struggle against oppression of women (Arndt, 2002: 86). This view is an echo of Nwapa's point in *Efuru* (1966), which encourages

women to terminate marriages once they are unable to find what they expected from them. It also happens in “Bedzafuma” in *Masimba* (2004: 37-42), where separation is viewed as the solution to women’s hardships and socio-economic disempowerment in marriage. Women writers thus condemn marriage as riddled by oppressive values. It is viewed as an institution, which militates against their emancipation. This is explained by the generation to which the Makayi belongs; she is amongst the youngest and hence modernised authors who move with the times. In an interview, she testified that it is retrogressive to bind oneself to a marriage that seems not to work. In the spirit of oneness, in *Sekai: Minda Tave Nayo* (2005), Sekai’s aunt takes a bold stance and sends her niece to her son so that she can acquire an education. She argues that it will never happen that all generations of women fail to acquire an education. Ultimately, everyone admires what Sekai has done to both the family and community and they feel challenged to send their girl children to school. Thus as a woman, Sekai’s successful story helps bring empowerment to her fellow kindred for whom society had not aspired to emancipate. However, Mutasa’s vision of women solidarity is different from that of women writers who often advocate for divorce and separation from men as solutions.

By joining hands, the women succeed in dealing a blow to men and their attitude towards women’s empowerment. They refuse being taken for a ride. At this level, the writers see the salvation of women as lying in their own hands. Unless they take it upon themselves jointly to resist male domination, they will always be under the grip of men. Freedom is worked for, and not just given (Ngugi, 1972: x). This also gets authenticity from history where women have joined hands to form their own organisations meant to fight for their space in life. Through these organisations, women have managed not only to have their voices heard and listened to, but also to have their emancipation come to reality. These organisations include Musasa Project, the Zimbabwe Women Writers Association, and Women in Action Group and Women in Politics Support Unit. Some of these agitate against all forms of violence experienced by women while others are concerned about increasing women’s quantitative and qualitative participation in policy and decision-making (Women in Politics Support Unit, 2003/4: 5). Some scholarships are only meant to finance the girl child’s education, such as the Women in Management of Business Organisation (WIMBO) scholarship, whilst some universities are specifically for the female being, for example Women’s University Africa, in Harare. All these are successful efforts by

women to uplift their socio-economic status. However, where as women writers even agitate for women to break away from their marriages, male writers do not go to this extreme. Women see it better to dissociate themselves from men because they argue that it is them who endure the hardships and ill treatment in marriages.

Whilst the writers are highly critical of patriarchal attitudes towards the education of the girl child, they fall into the trap of not giving the rationale behind such philosophy by traditional Shona society. They blame both men and patriarchy for sidelining women and for their socio-economic underdevelopment without seeking the underlying causes. It appears as if it was by design that Shona culture looked down upon women and sidelined them from participating in mainstream economics of the country. Yet writers like Mutasa in *Nhume Yamambo* (1990) have shown that Shona women were not second-class citizens. They wielded a lot of authority and power both inside and outside the home. Equally importantly, before the coming of the whites and western form of education, the girl child, just like the boy child was never denied an education. As testified by prominent scholars on Shona culture like Gelfand (*Growing up in Shona Society*, 1979; *African Crucible*, 1968) Bourdillon (*The Shona Peoples*, 1976; *Religion and Society*, 1990), Gombe (*Tsika DzaVaShona*, 1998; *The Shona Idiom*, 1995), Kabweza et al. (*Pasichigare*, 1979) among others, both sexes received the relevant and necessary education through, folktales, riddles, children's songs and games. In early childhood, they received this education together, as a single group. Later in life, each sex received a kind of education that was relevant for it. If patriarchy were against the education of the girl child, then traditional societies would have had cases of boys receiving socio-economic education with girls receiving none. Since the two groups of children were accorded an equal opportunity to learn and develop their capabilities, it becomes unfair to criticise men and patriarchy for the girl child's failure to get education with the advent of colonialism.

It is the coming of the whites and the western form of education that made the Shona unwillingly alienate the girl child from the new form of education. As Barnes and Win rightly observe, education was one of the things which colonial society denied African children, especially girls (1992: 61). Colonialism had no place for the girl child, and women in general. No jobs were meant for the African woman because most African women were supposed to stay in the

reserves (ibid: 7). The foreigners employed males to do what was prior to this, female jobs like cooking, sweeping, making beds (ibid: 84) and hence there were laws to forbid women from entering and staying in the cities (ibid: 140). Ogot, the Kenyan novelist makes a scathing attack on colonialism when she remarks that when the coloniser wanted helpers, he built schools for men away from women, creating a big rift between brother and sister, husband and wife, girl and lover, and a saying soon evolved, that a woman's place was in the home; in the kitchen (in Arndt, 2002: 96). Chakaipa in *Rudo Ibofu* (1966) captures such a scenario, where Zingizi was employed as a cook despite being male. Seeing that there was no place for women in the new society, African society was forced to revisit and adjust its position and perception about women's education that had, prior to this placed women at the same footing as men. Worse still Schmidt (1992: 141-2) remarks that the coloniser had made it more expensive for Africans to educate the girl than the boy child. Hence, whilst Makayi and Mutasa expose patriarchy denying girl children the platform to learn, they sadly do not look into the causes of such a stance. Yet, African culture was merely reacting to the dictates of the more powerful colonial system. Under colonialism, educating the boy child was just a survival strategy by the victims of a new system, and to blame patriarchy and men is to absolve colonialism of its ills. To blame tradition is to fail to contextualise the problem. It is to address the symptoms of an unjust system without getting to the root cause. Such would be a case of misdirected anger.

In *Makudo Ndomamwe*, Revai believes that all men are the same (2004: 66); they are against women's emancipation. As such, Makayi's novel fits into the category of radical feminists who argue that men (as a social group) inevitably and in principle discriminate against, oppress and mistreat women, and that they are by nature, hopelessly sexist and usually deeply immoral, with no one departing from this pattern (Arndt, 2002: 85). Whilst there are cases of men who are this bad, Revai's statement and stance seem grossly generalised and fail to get to the root cause of women's unfortunate status in life. If all men are the same, it means it is the socialisation process, which is to blame and has to be examined and rectified for the good of humanity. Failure to do so would see more men of a similar type coming out of the same socialisation plants. It is as if to say men come into this world as finished products and therefore as unchangeable (Kandawasvika-Chivandikwa in Mguni et al. [eds], 2006: 187). It would appear as if the traits are inherent or inborn in men. If this were so, then women would have lost their



struggles for liberation before they have even started waging them. It would be to accept that efforts to change men's behaviour and attitude would be a futile exercise (ibid: 187-8). Yet, a look at our yesterday helps to show that Shona men and patriarchy were not always hostile and insensitive to women's problems, potentials and emancipation. Rather, tradition has shown that women have been a much-respected sector of society who wielded great influence in both private and public spheres of life (Auret, 1990: 98). Hence Makayi's male characters are not typical characters under typical circumstances. The writer's stance is evidence of Africans who have imbibed the colonial myth that men and patriarchy have always worked to the disadvantage of women. Failure to identify the root cause makes people fight a wrong cause. As such, women spend much of their time, resources and efforts fighting men and abolishing the so-called patriarchal attitudes instead of joining hands with men to work for the re-socialisation of humanity.

Although the solution for women to join hands and fight men seems plausible, it is based on two assumptions; that women can do without men and that they have similar problems, backgrounds, wishes and aspirations such that they can easily come together and successfully fight men for their empowerment. This is not always the case. Unlike what Makayi presents, in reality, women cannot successfully do away with men. They can hardly ignore, suppress or overcome biological desires that need to be fulfilled. As testified by some women interviewed by Barnes and Win, "When you used to be married...life needs a man. Life needs a woman. So you find it's better to have somebody to kiss you" (1992: 133). It means either sex has emotions that badly need to be satisfied. Hence, although women may help one another, there is a limit as to the extent their help can go. Beyond this, men become indispensable beings. Even so, society does not have a place for single women whom Weinrich says risk losing their self-respect (1982: 35). Again, the novel celebrates single motherhood, showing it as a solution when in fact it symbolises the beginning of a new life with even worse challenges especially in the current harsh socio-economic environment. Hence, the writer places hope where in reality there seems to be no hope.

It is also hardly believable that women have similar problems and aspirations that can easily call for their unified efforts for their emancipation. They belong to different groups and sectors in society, which have very different backgrounds and interests. The unemployed and traditional

women treasure salvaging and safeguarding marriage more than anything, including having many children. Again, some churches celebrate polygamous marriages where women are urged to co-exist under one man without joining hands to unsettle him. To them, it is natural and expected of a man to have more than one wife. Other women are sex workers, not by choice. This group of women cannot join hands with others to fight men when men are these women's source of living. If prostitutes would be happy with men being divorced, it would be for the sole reason that the unattached men become easier to lure than those in steady and happy marriages. In real life, "a married woman would never like a whore" (Barnes and Win, 1992: 120). Other women are gainfully employed and so do not really look up to men for support in life. Still among the educated are those who badly need men for emotional satisfaction. It is therefore clear that in Africa, women cannot easily and successfully join hands against men. Whilst some are against men, others are for the same men. Worse, today, feminist ideals appeal to women of the intellectual and middle class, permitting the conclusion that feminism has no relevance for Africa and that it is "non-African" (Arndt, 2002: 33).

In addition, although the writers see education as key, they seem to fail to realise that in contemporary society, it only boosts an individual's chances of getting employment but does not guarantee one with a job. Carnoy notes that, producing an educated supply of labour will not solve unemployment unless, concomitantly, the demand of labour is increased (in Simmons [ed], 1980: 157). This is because there is no education system that produces graduates only enough to fill the job opportunities (Blaug in Simmons [ed], 1980: 147). In fact, an education raises the hopes of many people but may fulfil those of a few. This comes in the wake of many highly educated people in Zimbabwe, women included, who are failing to secure gainful employment. Hence, it is not definite to believe that education is the ultimate solution to women's problems.

To their credit, the writers do well to show what educated women can now do, which they could not without an education. Even so, there is great need for authors to go beyond men and patriarchy as the cause of women's problems, and to regard education as the ultimate solution to women's problems.

### 4.3.2 Land and women empowerment

In addition to education, Mutasa also presents land as integral in the empowerment of black women. His novel comes in the context of the impoverishment of Africans through colonial land laws. It is clear in Makari's presentation in *Magamba eChimurenga: Josiah Tungamirai* (2003), that land was economy and was therefore life. Land was dignity, integrity and production. Traditionally, it was women who tilled land and tendered most crops. Hence, land alienation meant women disempowerment. Although the struggle had been fought to regain lost land, Choto in *Vavariro* (1990) has shown that very few people got the land that they had fought for, thus women remained the most disadvantaged. It is this failure to have arable land, which is behind the poverty of rural people that Hwendaenda, grapples with in his novel *Mubairo* (1993); and which led to the land invasions of the year 2000. By focusing on the land redistribution exercise of the year 2000 and after, Mutasa does not only reflect reality, but also focuses on what can be considered as "Zimbabwe's unfinished business" (Hammar and Raftopoulos, in Raftopoulos, Hammar and Jensen [eds], 2003: 1-47). As Ramphal observes, it was about land in the beginning, it was about land during the struggle, and it has remained about land today (in *New African*, 2007/2008: 4). By advocating for land reform as a way to empower women, Mutasa's solution to women's problems is therefore wider and more appealing if compared to his contemporary writers.

Mutasa (2005) exploits the flashback, epistolary and debate techniques to address most of the issues he raises about empowerment through land. These techniques enable him to have a holistic look at the empowerment exercise. Through the flash back technique, the writer takes readers back to history to show how the people were disempowered as well as how land became a contentious issue in Zimbabwe. Through the debate technique, the writer brings out the successes and failures of the land-based empowerment programme. He therefore averts the danger of presenting one side of experiences thereby distorting reality. The epistolary and debate techniques are largely emotional, thus making them quite relevant in the handling of the land issue, which is quite an emotional issue.

As Ramphal rightly notes, “if you forget that Zimbabweans were disposed of their rightful lands, then you cannot answer rationally any of the pertinent questions about Zimbabwe” (in *New African*, 2007/08: 4). Sekai narrates to Mr. Johnson, the whole history of how well black people, women included, lived before the coming of the whites (2005: 41-52). Through the narration, the writer exposes how blacks became socially, economically and politically incapacitated as they lost their fertile lands. Through the dialogue between Sekai and Mr. Johnson, the author manages to place the current Zimbabwean experiences and crisis in context. People were simply getting back their rightful heritage, one, which they had been unjustifiably dispossessed of. They were reacting to the disempowerment they had suffered as a result of colonialism.

Through the debate technique, several side effects that have resulted from black empowerment are exposed. Some of those given the new lands did not have the machinery to drive most agricultural activities as compared to the former white occupants (ibid, 2005: 18). The land grab led to the shortage of foreign currency; high inflation and most of the beneficiaries under-utilise the land (ibid). Corruption also riddled the exercise as some were made to pay for the land (ibid: 54-6). In some cases, people living in foreign countries and in towns got the land at the expense of the land hungry peasantry (Mutasa, 2005: 66-69; Matondi and Munyuki-Hungwe, in Rukuni et al. 2006: 77). This authenticates Makadho’s observation that there was nepotism, favouritism and what donors ended up labelling ‘cronyism’ in settler selection. All these cases show that government efforts to emancipate people still left some incapacitated.

However, this cannot discredit the whole exercise, which has helped emancipate some previously disadvantaged blacks, women in particular. In order to empower the majority, under the new land reform programme, land was taken from those who had multiple farms, both blacks and whites (2005: 26). The idea was to guarantee everyone access to resources, making the economy a good one where the cake is shared equitably by all the citizens (Mathema, 2007: 1). The exercise empowered the educated like Sekai by availing to them employment opportunities as they worked in the Ministry of Agriculture, helping society have access to good soils and use better methods of farming. In addition, some of these educated people also run very productive farms, boosting their economic standing becoming self-reliant farmers. It also empowered the uneducated by availing to them good soils to practice agriculture. Among the uneducated who

got land are those who got a bumper harvest, with some growing pumpkins quite big as to equal a television in size. In this regard, black women's empowerment becomes more realistic and more encompassing since not everyone is bright enough to be empowered through education as postulated by female writers like Makayi. Overall, the exercise enabled women to own property (land) hence raised their socio-economic and even political standing. They were brought at par with their male counterparts.

It is thus clear that political power alone is meaningless unless the people of Zimbabwe have land (Editor, *Zambia Daily* in *New African*, 2007/2008: 12). Reversing the land redistribution will never solve the socio-economic and political disempowerment among Africans. In fact, landlessness has undoubtedly been proved to be the major reason behind abject African poverty by writers like Choto (*Vavairo*, 1990), Makari (*Magamba eChimurenga: Josiah Tungamirai*, 2003), Ngugi, (*Petals of Blood*, 1977; *I Will Marry When I Want*, 1986). There are other issues that need to be tied to the land issue which have to be addressed to make the struggle for economic emancipation realisable. For example, every individual, and in particular, women need to be accorded a chance to demonstrate their productive and creative potentials, something which traditional society exploited quite well, hence its self-sufficiency. To return land to the whites would be a justification of colonialism and, especially African women's poverty and socio-political incapacitation.

However, the novel's weaknesses are two-fold. Firstly, the kind of happiness and enthusiasm for land that Mutasa accords his educated characters does not reflect historical reality. Many of his educated characters have a great zeal for land to the extent that some opt to resign from their jobs, merely to go and work on their farms while others retreat from the glitter of city life to the new areas where there is hardly any infrastructure. Even recent graduates from secondary school are shown to be enthusiastic about getting land. Although land was important for Zimbabweans, in reality the educated hardly see their empowerment in land, but in the white-collar jobs they are studying for. This is because colonial and today's education itself, which they imbibed, trivializes manual labour, which it associates with uneducated-ness and rural poverty. Blaug rightly observes that education stimulates the flight from farming (in Simmons [ed], 1980: 148). Many therefore strive to escape from this repudiated position to white-collar jobs such as

teaching and nursing among others. In this regard, some of the characters cease to be typical characters. Hence, whilst tilling the land is presented as a salvation to this crop of people, in reality the group views agriculture as a low endeavour for them. Secondly, the novel ends at mere exposition of what has happened. The author could have given insights on what then can be done to improve the situation and ensure that the land reform exercise becomes a successful empowerment tool that it was meant to be. Moyo observes that a number of things need to be taken care of. Among them are land, agricultural and economic policy measures so as to increase productivity, investment and exports, as well as bring stability and confidence to the new land property rights; to bring land acquisition to conclusion; speed compensation through policy compliance and to maintain negotiations with the former coloniser (in *New African*, 2007/2008: 15). There is also need to take steps against multiple ownerships, the unproductive farmers and to develop the given areas.

However, overall, the author has successfully shown that land is undoubtedly an integral part in the empowerment of blacks, especially females. His solution to women's problems is therefore more encompassing, informative, appealing and realistic when compared to that by female novelists.

#### **4.3.3 Legislation and female empowerment – contrasting perceptions**

This section continues to discuss the Shona writers' vision of female empowerment. It discusses novels that focus on legislation. The section analyses whether the writers are able to identify the rightful causes to women's incapacitation, and the solutions they suggest. It discusses this in the context of the government's desire "to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women in order to ensure their active participation in all sectors of national development, and enhance the quality of life not only for women, but also for the communities at large" (Auret, 1990: 106). Moyo's *Ndabva Zera* (1992) and *Chemera Mudundundu* (2002) deplore women empowerment, showing it as the cause of women and African families' problems. On the other hand, Chitsike's *Magora Panyama* (1999) celebrates their emancipation arguing that it empowers women and frees them from the undesirable fetters of men and tradition. It presents patriarchy and men as behind women's suffering. Moyo's case vindicates Aidoo's observation that no writer, female or

male, is a feminist just by writing about women (in Arndt, 2002: 79). This is because although he writes about women, he writes against their emancipation, and hence against the feminist movement.

#### **4.3.3.1 Moyo's perception of female empowerment**

The writer's vision on female emancipation is conveyed through *Ndabva zera* (1992) and *Chemera Mudundundu* (2002). In *Ndabva Zera*, Frank and Dorcas live happily for close to twenty years before the wife starts clamouring for her rights. As soon as Dorcas starts to fight for equality between herself and her husband, chaos erupts. The family fabric is affected as their children also agitate for their freedom since they are over eighteen years. Ultimately, the children who had opted to lead individualistic lifestyles face problems and come back home whilst husband and wife divorce. The family has a gloomy end following Frank's arrest. In *Chemera Mudundundu*, after the death of her husband, Victora Kapako inherits all the property they had according to the new law. She then marries a man of her choice, severing the mother-children relationship and squanders this wealth whilst her children are in dire poverty. Again, the novel ends pessimistically, with her serious illness after being infected by the virus that causes AIDS.

The novels dwell on new laws meant to empower women. *Ndabva Zera* focuses on the Equal Rights and Legal Age of Majority Act laws whilst *Chemera Mudundundu* focuses on inheritance laws. Through contrast, Moyo shows that legislation is behind most female and African problems. Frank and Dorcas stay well with their family for many years. As soon as Dorcas fights for her rights, problems start not only for her, but also for the family. She struggles to abolish what she views as the oppressive nature of men and patriarchy. She strives to be free to come home at a time she deems fit, walk and befriend people of her choice regardless of whether they are male or female and dress the way she feels like, putting on pairs of trousers (1992: 31-6). She also cries for the liberty to open her own bank account, and to use her money without consulting her husband. She also wishes to have Frank do what were hitherto feminine roles like cooking, sweeping, washing and scrubbing whilst she reads the newspaper (ibid: 54-5). She thus fights for equality between men and women, for women to be recognised and respected as fully human. All these are aspects of the Legal Age of Majority Act of 1982 (Auret, 1990: 116; Batezat and

Mwalo, 1989: 51) which now gave her the same rights as Frank. She fights what many female writers view as the double burden of family and profession; that despite their accomplishments, women are too often reduced to their role as wife or mother and seen as subordinate to men (Arndt, 2002: 29). She is unlike Juanita Karunguru in Ogot's *The Graduate* (1980) who, despite being a competent and committed minister, does not neglect her duties as wife and mother; thus reconciling career and family. In a bid to achieve her goal, Dorcas dismisses both their garden boy and house cleaner so that Frank has no option but to give in to her demands. Chris and Monica whose life style resembles the ideal, spur her. This other couple lives an individualistic lifestyle, exchanging roles. Chris does not even know how much his wife earns at work; neither does he worry about whom she interacts with, even the time she comes home. Such is the kind of freedom that Dorcas also aspires.

Frank, who is purported to represent patriarchy and tradition, does not give in to the new demands. He argues that she has to keep her 'traditional' subservient role and position as a wife. He insists that he cannot be troubled by someone he bought with money, implying that *lobola* (bride wealth) gives him the license to control her in every respect. He feels he is even entitled to bar her from continuing with her employment because being her husband gives him the power to do so. He also instructs that he married her so that she can work for him and please him too. Dorcas sees him as anti-change, authoritative, unsympathetic, oppressive and inconsiderate. Hence patriarchy is presented as men ruling and controlling women. Women have no voice in both domestic and external affairs. They cannot do anything without the blessing and knowledge of their husbands.

Because of Dorcas' efforts to break out of so-called traditional boundaries of ideal womanhood and motherhood, she creates problems, not only for herself, but also for other individuals and the family at large. Out of her desire to emancipate herself, innocent people like Chenai the house cleaner, together with the garden boy lose their jobs while her children, especially David, lead sorrowful lives. Her husband also lives in eternal psychological torture as he wonders what has hit his family as well as what she is up to. Her husband and children spend times without eating food, with no one to cook for them. It confirms Mungoshi's observation that, a woman destroys a man (in Veit-Wild, 1993: 164). Ultimately, her husband seeks and finds solace from outside,



confiding in and living with another woman, Mary. This finally leads to their divorce and, in the ensuing court case; Frank loses the house, custody of some of his children, only earning a television set and three sofas. This is despite that he had worked hard to have these things in place. The Legal Age of Majority Act, the Customary Law and Primary Courts Act and the Matrimonial Causes Act make this possible. These pieces of legislation enable women to own property in their own right and become guardians of children. The same laws make it possible for women to be sued as individuals and to divorce their husbands (Batezat and Mwalo, 1989: 51; Auret, 1990: 116-7). The new laws give women certain powers they previously did not have. Moyo shows that the new laws create bad people from what were previously very responsible husbands. Ultimately, Dorcas walks out on Frank and marries Zacks only to be further oppressed. It seems the writer presents and views legislation as the chief cause of women's suffering and the demise of both the family and society.

Similarly, the Legal Age of majority Act is portrayed as creating problems for both its young proponents whom it seeks to empower, and the family. Kudzai and Tamuka, both Frank's children fight to have their rights recognised because they are over eighteen years, the legal age of majority. They claim that the Act empowers them to do whatever they want, with whoever they deem fit. Spurred by this development, Kudzai puts on pairs of trousers and flirts around with many men, some of them married. She gets married to Jaravaza, and has a flat bought for her without even the consent or knowledge of her parents. The Act allows her to own property and contract marriage without the need for parental or family consent among other things (Batezat and Mwalo, 1989: 51). She then has an unwanted pregnancy and Jaravaza chases her away. It is only after this that she goes back to her parents for help. The father denies any further responsibilities, complicating the situation.

Like the law of Equal Rights, the Legal Age of Majority Act is shown to be another source of unwanted and unforeseen problems for both women and the African family. It empowers children who still need the guidance and advice of their more responsible parents (Siyachitema, 2005: 18). The Act creates adults from children without equipping them with both the much-needed experience and knowledge of approaching life. Because it is not explained to people,

especially youngsters, that every right has a corresponding responsibility, it stimulates irresponsibility, unfeeling-ness, individualism and ultimately, chaos and untold suffering.

The author is rightfully concerned about family stability, *ipso facto* societal harmony. A healthy society stems from healthy and happy family unions (Gelfand, 1968: 36-9). This is understandable especially if it comes from Moyo, a cultural activist himself, and a writer of the early generations whose pre-occupations is cultural preservation (Veit-Wild, 1993: 79). These writers argue that despite the change, Africans should stick to their cultural values for it is only in these that society is guaranteed of a bright future. This is a call to resist western ways of empowering Africans; it is a call for cultural nationalism. Change of whatever kind, especially if it comes from the west, is seen as never for the good of African society. Such a stance is very important especially to today's Africa where the tendency is to embrace wholesale any change that comes from Europe. Moyo brings this out very well by showing that Chris and Monica had exchanged roles because they had seen this being practiced in America where they had gone to study. Whilst it works well in the west, it creates problems for Africans. The writer is against importation of ideas, values and practices and imposition of these on the African society. He argues that such values are never for the good of Africans because they are not only alien, but have also been given rise by very different if not opposing historical circumstances. For Africa to accept them under the banner of emancipation and development is not only to accept racial inferiority, but also to give in to the myth that development is following the footsteps of Europe. Yet Achebe (1975: 44) puts it succinctly that, "If I were God I would regard as the worst our acceptance – for whatever reason – of racial inferiority". This is also what Chinweizu et al. (1980: 1) and p'Bitek (1973: *vii*) call for, for Africa to lead her own lifestyle, which is, and should be quite different from that of the west, because Africa is not an appendage of Europe. Ngugi (1982: 12) also remarks that aping others cost the frog its buttocks. In the same spirit, the Shona also have an adage "*Chitevedzerwa chakaputsa ukama*" (Imitation destroyed relationships). All these imply that Africa should not just jump into that bandwagon of embracing alien things since not every change works to the good of Africans. This warning is true especially if it comes in the wake of many western grown and driven solutions to African problems that the people have feverishly embraced and implemented, much to the detriment of not only the indigenous people's culture but also the human factor.

This position is vindicated in both Moyo's *Ndabva Zera* (1992) and *Chemera Mudundundu* (2002) where the ending for characters who adopt western ways of life is disastrous. Dorcas runs away from 'an oppressive' Frank and falls into the hands of an equally oppressive Zacks. She destroys her own family. The writer shows that African women seeking emancipation run away from men to join men. Equally, in *Chemera Mudundundu* (2002), Victoria who inherits all her husband's property after his death as opposed to the traditional custom of inheritance, has her wealth squandered by Vasco Antonio the foreign man of her choice while her children live in dire poverty. This has been necessitated by the Matrimonial Causes Act which now empowers a woman to inherit and dispose of all her husband's wealth as she deems fit (Batezat and Mwalo, 1989: 51). She ultimately suffers seriously from AIDS. Here, Moyo authenticates the Shona way of inheritance, which by implication, he says was concerned about the welfare of both the wife and children (Gelfand, 1981: 20). Hence, the author seems to show that most African problems are a result of importing alien customs of empowerment, ideas and values that were never meant for Africans. He argues like Achebe (1975: 17) who says the firewood that a people have is sufficient for the kind of cooking, which they do, implying that every culture is good for the kind of lifestyle that the people live. Hence, each group of people should be free to keep and follow their own way of doing and interpreting things.

However, Moyo's call for cultural preservation, and *ipso facto*, women disempowerment is not without its problems. Cultural nationalism has its own weaknesses. From Moyo's presentation, it is clear that it is male-chauvinistic, inward looking and impervious to change, regardless of the rationality of such change. It argues for cultural purity, resisting change under the banner of avoiding cultural pollution, thus disregards that culture is dynamic. It does not subscribe to the obvious view and philosophy that no culture is perfect, and as such, negative and detrimental aspects in a culture should be jettisoned and give way to more life-fulfilling ones. It does not recognise the undoubted truth that other cultures have good and admirable aspects, which can work for the good of African societies. Hence, cultural nationalism is racial. It is an undoubted fact that African women have been disempowered and marginalized, oppressed and denied space, regardless of who the perpetrator has been. As such, there is need for them to experience emancipation so that they fully participate in the nation building and economic development that

Zimbabwe is engaged in. To resist such a move is tantamount to resisting women's participation and contribution in national development, and can be equated to what Babu (1981: 36) says, to "reason with the head on the ground and the feet in the air". It is to fail to be rational. Yet, traditionally, everyone contributed to the well being of the family and society, each according to his or her ability. Society acknowledged the creative potential and contribution everyone of its member could make despite the individual's physical, social, economic or sexual standing.

In addition, Moyo's presentation of African culture (which he says is good for Shona families) is itself distorted. What he presents as traditional culture is in fact customary law, that is, "traditional law as interpreted by European anthropologists, administrators and the European courts" (May, 1983: 67). It is a proven fact that the foreigners' version and interpretation of African culture has largely been erroneous. Unlike what Frank thinks and does to his wife, traditional men, in most cases, never incapacitated women. Most of the times, women worked away from men without necessarily taking instructions from them. In cases where they worked together with men, men also considered women's presence and sought their views and advice on certain issues. Contrary to the customary decree, in tradition, as Gelfand (1968: 42) remarks, no man could dispose of things without getting the consent of his wife. Again, to regard *lobola* as an act of buying a wife (as does Frank) is an incorrect interpretation of what has happened (Gelfand, 1981: 19). Neither was *lobola* a source of oppression for women. It was in fact a gesture of appreciation by the son-in-law to his in-laws for a job well done for raising a wife for him. Through it they realised the value and worth that the woman brought to their family (Himunyanga-Phiri, 1992: 56-7, Gelfand, 1981: 19). It was in fact, a source of pride and recognition for a woman. Anyone who did not have *lobola* paid for her never had the pride and conviction that she was raised properly. *Lobola* also made it very difficult to break a marriage (Gelfand, *ibid*). It is the coming of whites that resulted in women being controlled by their male counterparts. The whites also misinterpreted payment of *lobola* as buying women, thus regarding them as property. Regarding *lobola* as purchasing a wife is a western thinking that Lakunle also expresses in Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel* (1990: 8), where the westernised young man likens it to buying a heifer at a market stall. Whites also demeaned women by condemning all aspects where they used to demonstrate their power. These aspects include religion, traditional

medicine, midwifery, and agriculture among others. Hence, it is colonialism that disempowered women and not tradition.

What Dorcas strives to do is in fact to liberate herself from the fetters of colonial and customary law where women were dependent on their husbands for all social relations and interactions outside the home (Auret, 1990: 105). The colonial and customary law ensured that women “remained minors for the duration of their lives and they could not enter into any contracts without the consent of father and husband” (ibid). It was also a period where they could not inherit or own substantial property in their own right; neither did they have the guardianship of their children (ibid; May, 1983: 64). Again, under customary law, a woman could not leave home or seek work without her guardian’s permission; she could not marry without his consent whatever her age, or open a bank account (May, ibid: 64). In addition her wages were the property of her husband and she could not make major decisions about her children, if she is divorced or becomes a widow she could not become the legal guardian of her children (ibid). Hence whilst Dorcas thinks she is battling against Shona patriarchy, she is in fact fighting against colonial and customary laws. Hence, whilst Moyo urges blacks to stick to their traditional gender roles and positions, the roles and positions he ascribes to Shona men and women are in fact, distorted ones. He calls people to go back to a past whose values and practices he is not sure of. His Shona past is in fact how colonialists viewed and understood Shona culture. Moyo’s traditional character, Frank, is actually, one example of the many Shona men who have taken the idea of the minority status of women with enthusiasm (ibid) which he now wants upheld for his individual benefit. Legislation therefore becomes an attempt by modernity to liberate women from the problems it has created for them.

Equally worrisome, Moyo paints society’s future bleakly. In the novels, he shows that western ways of empowerment do not guarantee Africans a bright future. In *Ndabva Zera* (1992), the family disintegrates and Frank is arrested whilst in *Chemera Mudundundu* (2002), Victoria suffers terribly from AIDS. Although it is true that western ways have in a way affected African people’s lives and that it has inflicted havoc on families, it is not enough or justified to end at nihilism. Such is a modernist perspective, which strives to show life as not worth-living. Yet p’Bitek rightly observes that problems, crises, challenges are, have always been, and will

continue to be a necessary ingredient of life and it is precisely the tackling and solving of these problems that life is all about (1986: 25). If life is about solving problems, and if literature is about life, then literature should also be about the solving and tackling of problems that life is concerned about. Such ending to the Shona novel suggests that the solution lies in women accepting their subservient position. However, a promising future does not lie in the suppression of the interests of women but in complementarity between the two sexes. Hence, Moyo should have suggested better solutions to the crisis he deals with in his novels.

#### **4.3.3.2 Chitsike's presentation of female empowerment**

In *Magora Panyama* (1999), Chitsike celebrates new inheritance laws that empower and safeguard women from the merciless greed of their in-laws. After the death of Tauya, his relatives jostle to possess and inherit his belongings, totally ignoring his wife, Mary. Unknown to them, Tauya had written a will which specified who had to get what, leaving many of his belongings in the hands of his wife, much to the dismay of his greedy relatives. The novel's teaching and theme are simple: new laws emancipate and safeguard women against the tyranny and greed of men and patriarchy. This way, Chitsike falls into the category of feminist writers like Nwapa in *Efuru* (1966), Emecheta in *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979), Dangarembga in *Nervous Conditions* (1988) and Bâ in *So Long a Letter* (1989) confirming Arndt's remark that one does not need to be a female in order to be a feminist (2002: 79). Other male writers who agitate for the liberation and emancipation of women are Ngugi in most of his works, which include *Petals of Blood* (1977), *Devil on the Cross* (1982) and *I Will Marry When I Want* (1986), which he co-authored with Ngugi wa Mirii.

Through mostly dialogue between and among his characters, the writer shows the discrimination and disempowerment that women suffered and also what they could not do before the enactment of new laws. In the novel, under tradition, marriage is a family and not an individual contract thereby denying women freedom by gluing them to the hold, obligations and expectations of the extended family. Tradition is also presented regarding women as less intelligent and loafers (who only fed on their husbands' sweat) and as not fully human when compared to men (1999: 11; 17), a case also complained about by Himunyanga-Phiri in *The Legacy* (1992). Traditional

women are not expected to put on pairs of trousers; wear lipstick or make-up (1999: 10), a case in which the writer believes women are regarded as minors who have to be guided on what to do in various situations. Chitsike's perception of dressing is thus different from that espoused by Moyo in both *Ndabva Zera* (1992) and *Chemera Mudundundu* (2002) who presents it as anti-cultural and decadent for women to put on pairs of trousers and mini skirts. Tradition further worsens women's problems by pressurizing them to have children immediately after marriage (1999: 13). Its customs are shown as reducing women to childbearing machines. This practice is also a victim of attack from feminists like Emecheta in *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979) where the author shows it as behind Nnu Ego's troubles and her ultimate divorce. It is argued that such customs and their related ones encourage immorality as women are ultimately forced to be intimate with more than one man or a man being intimate with more than one woman in the event of failure to conceive. This custom is also an object of criticism by mostly contemporary female writers in the women's collection of short stories, *Masimba* (1996, 2004) and *Totanga Patsva* (2005).

Before the enactment of new laws, women are also presented as victims of the traditional inheritance (of property) custom. It is portrayed as an insensitive male chauvinistic practice. Tauya's father who is purported to represent tradition argues that a woman who refused to be inherited would be sent packing from the family, taking nothing away with her (1999: 17). She would be stripped of all the wealth they owned with her husband (ibid). The custom is also an object of attack by the female short story writer, Chaukura in *Masimba* (1996) where the story "Waiti zvichazodii?" (What would have been the end?) shows Shona culture as condoning the greed of surviving male relatives in the event of a husband's death (Kandawasvika-Chivandikwa in Mguni et al. [eds], 2006: 191).

The writer thus presents tradition as disempowering to women. In the novel, it is criticised for denying them freedom and independence. Tradition is shown celebrating women's economic bondage to men and justifies their loss of possessions at inheritance. It socially and economically incapacitates women. Tradition, together with patriarchy and men, are shown as oppressive, domineering, insensitive and egocentric. They dictate to women how they should behave, what they should put on and to cap it all, they do not consider women as fully human. Whereas Moyo

celebrates the 'traditional' way of life, Chitsike is very much against it, showing divergent views of male writers on female empowerment. Again, it shows that writers of the same generation do not necessarily share the same vision on aspects they write on. Although he belongs to writers of the old generation, Chitsike's vision and presentation of feminine issues is more informed by modernity than tradition.

Like Himunyangaphiri in *The Legacy* (1992), Chitsike celebrates today's legislation, which he sees and presents as elevating and safeguarding both women and children from the cruelty of greed relatives. Marriage is now a contract between individuals and not groups of people (1999: 10), empowering women against extended family expectations. People now marry for love and companionship. It is hoped that once society no longer treasures procreation in marriage, women enjoy freedom and happiness. Childless marriages become less burdensome to them. Under the new law, women now also wield economic power; they are no longer stripped of their wealth at the death of their husbands as seen through Mary who remains in control, and benefits from her business with her deceased husband. New legislation rescues remaining families from the wrath of greed and mindless people influenced and guided by the so-called tradition. Like in Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988) in Chitsike's novel, Shona culture is criticised for pre-supposing discrete destinies for women and men, with women's inferiority destiny being stated and reinforced. The author seems grateful to European culture, which also helps Tambudzai in Dangarembga's novel by offering avenues of escape to trapped women. Therefore, while African culture is presented as damaging and constraining, westernisation and its individualistic lifestyle is offered as healing and liberating. Modernity is thus shown as sympathetic and empathetic to the female being. Here Chitsike shares the same vision with not only contemporary writers, but female authors too.

The author's exposition is handy to an extent. It acknowledges the undoubted truth that women have been oppressed, incapacitated and sidelined in many respects in life. They have been relegated to second-class citizens. As a result, their right to demonstrate their potentials and to own property in life has been denied them. They have been unable to contribute to development, both individual and national. The novel urges them to "wake up to the realities of their oppression and take up arms to fight for emancipation" (Mguni in Mguni et al. [eds], 2006: 44).



Any nation that does not acknowledge women's contribution will never witness meaningful development. Again, women have unfairly lost property for whose being they would also have contributed immensely. The novel rightly celebrates the role that legislation has played in emancipating Zimbabwean women. Since 1980, the Zimbabwean government has used laws to level the playing field between men and women, raising the status and recognition of women. There are such legal instruments like the Customary Law and Primary Courts Act (6: 1982), The Legal Age of Majority Act (15: 1982), The Labour Relations Act (16: 1985). There is also the Matrimonial Causes Act (33: 1985) and the Equal Rights Act all of which worked to remove all customary, socio-economic and legal constraints that inhibited women's full participation in the development of the country (Batezat and Mwalo, 1989: 50). In this case, Chitsike fits into the category of writers described as liberal or transformative feminists, those who view legislation as imperative in raising the status of women (Arndt, 2002: 84). It should be noted that such a way is quite appealing for it is premised on logic and peaceful settlement. This way, writers avoid the detrimental confrontational approach to women's problems adopted by radical feminists whose solution lies in women fighting men (ibid). Yet no society can ever develop or have a future if men and women are perennial enemies.

However, although it is true that women have been disempowered and disadvantaged, the author identifies a wrong cause to this problem and as such his solution to empower women has some weaknesses. He roundly blames men and traditional customs as the chief causes of women's beleaguered status in life. Contrary to the view that Shona tradition regards women as less intelligent, the likes of Mutasa in *Nhume Yamambo* (1990) have shown that such was never tradition's attitude towards women. Rather, women held very influential positions out of which they independently presided over issues without consulting men. Again, in some cases, they even sat among men, contributed ideas of great significance, which were men embraced for action. This way, women demonstrated their intellectual profundity.

Again, although the novel portrays it as 'tradition' that women do not work; they just feed on men's efforts and sweat, a closer analysis shows that tradition never had such an attitude towards women. Traditional society urged women to work hard and even acknowledged their immense contributions to the success of their families. They were admired for their agricultural activities,

pottery, weaving, collection of medicinal plants and other domestic chores, including the raising of children (Auret 1990: 98-9, Chinyemba et al. in Rukuni et al. [eds], 2006: 637). Among the Shona, no man would ever want to marry a lazy woman, normally referred to as *Murwarazhizha* (one who falls ill in summer) or *Garanehakata* (the shamefully lazy who is always consulting diviners). As Aschwanden rightly points out, a man looking for a wife was advised to make sure his beloved has horny hands, soft hands are a warning that the girl is lazy, and the same goes for a man (1982: 47), implying that hardworking women were every man's priority in marriage. Society's valuing of women and their indispensable role in the families is captured through the adage "*Musha mukadzi*" (A home is such because of a woman). The saying succinctly captures the socio-economic contributions that women are known for in traditional societies. Chitsike in this case, seems to imbibe and portray the colonial myth about the position of women in traditional society. He fails to see that colonialism turned women into docile beings who now depended on men for survival. The colonial system relegated women to the reserves such that for the greater part of the colonial period, no woman was working (Barnes and Win, 1992: 80; 81); hence women were viewed as seemingly lazy. The writer thus identifies a wrong cause for women's incapacitation and ends up distorting reality.

Contrary to the view that women were overridden by men, tradition indicates that as religious figures, aunts, sisters and grandmothers, women wielded both respect and control over men. No African, whether male or female would dare challenge a religious figure, the majority of which were women. As aunts, women were powerful in not only bringing up the girl child in the expected norms, but also in her marriage negotiations, where they were powerful enough to silence men. Again, as sisters, the *lobola* (bride wealth) that was paid for a woman was in turn used to pay for her brother's marriage. This way, women indirectly enabled the continuity of her natal group. This role earned the woman a position of respect and prestige in her natal family group, especially in the concerned brother's family where her respect and prestige was commensurate with being "the source of life" for her family group (Auret, 1990: 98-9; May, 1983: 23 - 24). This role again gave her authority over matters concerning her brother and his family, including the status of father to her brother's children. She again acted as intermediary between her brother and his children and her brother always consulted her in all matters of importance pertaining to the children (ibid). She also had rights to protect her brother's wife in

the event of maltreatment, divorce or widowhood (ibid). Since many women contributed in this respect, it means traditionally, they were a very powerful group, which ruled households and men, hence disproving Chitsike's portrayal of them. In fact, Chitsike's portrayal of women is akin to that of Matsikiti (in *Rakava Buno Risifemberi*, 1996), which was also dismissed as a distortion of the image and position of the female being in Shona traditional society.

The inheritance custom is also unjustifiably criticised for disempowering women. As portrayed in Chitsike's novel, the custom dispossesses a woman of the gadgets and wealth she is entitled to, thus incapacitating her. In a case of distortion of the custom, Toni, Tauya's young brother tells how they will fix Mary during the inheritance ceremony:

*ZvaMary mukadzi waTauya nyararai zvenyu. Hatidi kuti ambosara nechii zvacho nokuti mukadzi uyu aitidaira chaizvo Tauya achiri mupenyu. Kana kumugara nhaka chaiko handidi. Ndinoda kuti atange patsva tamutorera zvose imba, chitoro, mari, motokari nemidziyo yemba (1999: 56).*

As of Mary Tauya's wife, do not worry. We do not want her to remain with anything because she was very proud when Tauya was still alive. I do not even want to inherit her. I want her to start from scratch after we would have taken everything, the house, store, money, car and property.

Such an argument would appear as if the Shona inheritance was a custom meant to fix or discipline or inflict pain on women for any construed misdemeanour; a custom meant to fight grudges and one meant to incapacitate them. Yet, traditionally, it was a custom meant to economically, emotionally, biologically, and socially cater for the widow's well being. It empowered her. If the widow was still young, the custom gave the platform for her biological emotions to be fulfilled. The custom also availed to her a husband to help her with the economic activities in a family. Again, contrary to the author's presentation, inheritance was not at all a compulsory custom for every widowed woman; it was optional. It would appear as if women were powerless victims of a cruel custom when in reality their wishes were not only listened to, but respected too. If a woman did not want to be inherited, the custom never forced her; she was free to remain unattached. There were many cases of women who opted out of the custom by deciding that they would only want to look after their children without attaching themselves to any man (Gelfand, 1977: 44). A woman was even allowed to choose her son or aunt as the

*chisarapavana* (one who takes charge of the children's welfare after the death of a husband). The coming of modernity and its emphasis on materialism however adulterated this noble custom. People now saw the custom as a way of enriching themselves. Hence, it is modernity that has exploited the custom and in the process, disempowered women. Himunyanga-Phiri in *The Legacy* amply captures the difference between what used to obtain in the custom traditionally, as compared to today when she says that in the past her in-laws looked after a widow and her children. Her future was guaranteed. Unfortunately, today nobody cares about the widow and the children. Everyone is interested only in money and property that the deceased left behind (1992: 57). Instead of blaming the root cause, modernity, the writer chooses to place blame on the custom, which in itself is a victim of the new social order.

To argue that everything was to be taken away at inheritance (as Toni promises will do in *Magora Panyama*) implied that the woman had not contributed anything and that traditionally she did not, and was not allowed owning any property. Yet, traditionally, women owned property. In fact, a woman was the only person to individually own property (Furusa in Mguni et al.[eds], 2006: 4). During her lifetime, a woman had complete control of such property (May, 1983: 65). She was given *mombe yeumai* (cow for the mother), and she remained the sole owner of it and its offspring (Weinrich, 1982: 42). Under no circumstances may a member of her family use this cow or its offspring, and should this have been done, the cow must be replaced as soon as possible (ibid). At the inheritance of her husband's wealth, Gelfand (1977: 44) correctly notes that, "The widow is asked if she has any cattle of her own. If so they are left for her and the rest given to the eldest son". She could also own other property known as *maoko* property, which came from her personal effort as a midwife, potter, and basket weaver and to which she had absolute authority to dispose (Aschwanden, 1982: 187-204; May, 1983: 65). That is why Chirisamhuru's wife owns a lot of wealth in Mutasa's *Nhume Yamambo* (1990). Hence, traditional customs and ways of life ensured the socio-economic emancipation of women. In fact, it was under customary law that a woman was regarded as a minor who did not own anything, even a National Identity Card! Under the period of customary law, Mai Ndlela testifies:

A woman was not even allowed to take a *chitupa* (National Identity Card). A *chitupa* was taken by a man, if he was grown up... girls – no! We were not allowed a *chitupa*" (in Barnes and Win, 1992: 138)

Women were thus not allowed to own anything, even the smallest of all things. The popular saying of the times was, “A woman is a donkey, she doesn’t have a *chitupa*” (ibid). In addition, the colonial system only allowed men to register for housing and women who came to the city had virtually nowhere to live except to give in to men for them to find shelter (ibid: 127). This marks a situation where the colonial government tactically disempowered and sidelined not only the girl child but also women in general. Hence, contrary to the writer’s exposition, it was never part of Shona culture that a woman owned nothing. It is during the colonial period that women started to own nothing. Having lived among the Shona and having grasped a sound understanding of their customs, Gelfand comes to an important conclusion that “it is unfair to say that the African treats his womenfolk badly and shows little consideration for them ... this is not true” (1968: 42).

Western-linked legislation is viewed and celebrated as an important rescue package for the beleaguered African woman. However, such a recommendation comes at a time when many foreign-invented solutions to African problems have failed to bring the desired and necessary positive changes to the people’s lives. This is because these solutions arise from different if not antagonistic life experiences. Worse, to adopt these ideas as advocated by Chitsike is tantamount to admitting that all societies should develop along the footsteps of European countries; with the west leading and Africa following. As Rukuni rightly observes, borrowing ideas from other parts of the world has not succeeded mainly because intelligent borrowing of ideas has to be rooted in self-respect (in Rukuni et al. [eds], 2006: 18). In Chitsike’s case, the borrowing is based on the premise of Africa as a junior brother to the west; it is based on Africa’s acceptance of racial and cultural inferiority. In agreement, Mguni writes that while African women do have some legitimate concerns regarding African men, these concerns must be addressed within the context of African culture rather than an alien framework (in Mguni et al. [eds], 2006: 43). Hence, there is need to have solutions that appeal to African culture in whose context African women should be liberated.

In all cases, the writer advances the colonialist thinking that traditional customs are oppressive, disempowering and anti-developmental and that they should be jettisoned for the good of

humanity. Colonialists advanced such myths because they did not want to be held responsible for the problems bedeviling African people and their families. Hence, the author espouses the victim-blame characteristic of many Shona novels. Failure to identify the root cause of women problems leads him to advocate for westernisation as a solution when in fact, it is the cause. Whilst westernisation tries to solve the problem of western greed (noticed at inheritance) it has inculcated in people, it sadly does not address the biological, social and emotional feelings of the women in concern. Hence, like Moyo, Chitsike misconstrues colonial and customary law as genuine Shona traditional culture, in which case he also makes a grave mistake. Again, in Chitsike, one notices that some male writers raise the same concerns and aspirations of women, as do female writers, hence confirming similarity of vision between some male and female writers.

#### **4.4 Disempowerment and empowerment against the HIV and AIDS pandemic**

This section discusses the representations of HIV and AIDS pandemic and suggested ways of empowering people against it. Focus is on Mukwazhi's *Zvibaye Woga* (1996) and female writers' short story collection, *Totanga Patsva* (2005). HIV and AIDS are serious disabling factors in national development. Society is robbed of the robust and able-bodied personnel. As sensitive points of society, writers too have joined the group of teachers on this burning issue, disseminating information on how society can shrug off the challenge of this pandemic. The section discusses male and female writers' ability to satisfactorily identify the factors that disempower people against the HIV pandemic together with the suggested ways of empowering society against it.

##### **4.4.1 Factors that disempower people against HIV and AIDS**

Shona writers view different reasons for the spread of the HIV virus. Whilst male writers regard circumstances as disempowering to people, many female writers see individual weaknesses in people or Shona traditional customs as incapacitating to people's struggles against the pandemic. In *Zvibaye Woga* (1996), unemployment is shown as weakening people's resistance. In a

soliloquy, the main character, Cephas testifies that, despite the HIV and AIDS crisis, prostitution is still rampant:

*Izvi pfambi dzinozviziva asizve ndiwo munda wadzo wadzinowana upfu nokudaro neavo vasina mhosva navowo vave kutsvairwa nacho chirwere cheshuramatongo (1996: 13).*

Prostitutes know this very well but this is their way of earning a living and hence even innocent people are perishing through the HIV and AIDS pandemic.

The writer links the HIV and AIDS pandemic to prostitution and immorality that also come because of innocent citizens trying to earn a living in an environment where they have failed to find employment. He feels there is great need to create employment opportunities for people as a way of reducing prostitution, which is largely behind the spread of the HIV virus. This way, the writer absolves individuals of any blame. He presents circumstances as weakening people's resistance against the spread of the HIV virus.

Cephas also discovers at his new school that even the headmaster is in love with female students. As the writer's eye and mouthpiece, he does not blame him for what many would largely label as a very punishable offence:

*Asi chete anenge ane meso meso, kuda imhosva yokuti munhu anogara oga mudzimai ari Harare kwaanosevenzera... asiwo dzimwe nguva haisi mhosva yake nokuti pane vana vakanaka kunyange mutaundishipi macho hazvibviri (1996: 25).*

He seems to be immoral; maybe it is not his fault because he stays alone whilst his wife is in Harare where she works. ...Maybe it is not his fault because there are very beautiful girls, both at school and the townships.

Here, the author blames modern life where men are forced to stay away from their wives by circumstances. Out of the need to fend for the families in the trying economy, husbands and wives find themselves separated from each other creating crises to which they fall prey. As one cross-boarder woman remarked, "Staying together is a luxury enjoyed by those who have a secure job and salary at the end of the day" (in an interview with *Moto* Editor, 1997: 5). Thus,

despite being brought up in a moral way, husbands who work away from their wives find themselves denied of the emotional gratification they are entitled to (interview with HIV and AIDS Counsellor Makurumidze, Friday, 26 September 2008). Coupled with this, the situation is such that there are other female beings, quite beautiful, who can act as immediate substitutes. This comes out when Cephas works in Kadoma whilst his beloved wife, Florina works in Gokwe. He testifies that at first he visited her every weekend, then thereafter, it was intermittently until at last he hardly visited her (1996: 71-72). Ultimately, he started flirting around with other available women, impregnating some of them in the process. The narrator shows that no matter how responsible and chaste individuals may strive to be, economic situations always tie them down. Cephas is firstly separated from his wife by the need to work for the family, and then he is unable to regularly visit his wife owing to the harsh economic environment. This is despite his love and commitment to its well-being. Owing to the great need to address his emotional needs, he finds alternative women close-by. Hence, it is unfair to blame him for not only failing to look after his family, but also for indulging in extra affairs whose ultimate effect is the spreading of the HIV virus.

The same is true of his other affair with Miriro, who works as a Temporary Teacher at Romorehoto in Buhera whilst Cephas is in Gokwe. Owing to the great distance that separates the two, they are unable to visit each other regularly, resulting in Miriro falling in love, and engaging with another man whilst Cephas also falls in love with Florina who works in Gokwe. In agreement, Jackson states that “many men and some women, are forced to travel because of their work, and many married couples are apart for the bulk of their lives. This provides ample opportunity and need for other sexual partners” (Jackson, 1992: 61; UNICEF et al., 2001: 13). When Cephas ultimately visits Miriro and discovers the new reality, he does not only terminate his affair with her, but her other affair with her new lover also ends. Miriro relocates to Harare but fails to get another job and she struggles to pay her rentals and to buy food. Out of frustration and anxiety, she turns into full time prostitution and ultimately gets infected by the HIV virus. This confirms Moses and Plummer’s observation, that scarce opportunities for employment for women means that they must sell sex as a means for their livelihood (in *AIDS Forum*, 1995: 2). Hence, urban residence, low socio-economic status, mobile and transient partnership, forced segregation of sexes and alienation all point to the social and economic circumstances that



underlie risky behaviour (ibid). These factors avail platforms for behaviour that results in the transmission of the HIV virus. The author thus shows that people and African families are victims of the new economic set-up.

The author successfully shows that although prostitution and immorality are the chief causes of the spread of the virus, neither men nor women are necessarily to blame. Both are disempowered by circumstances. They will simply be trying to live in accordance with the dictates of the new way of life. This contradicts Chiota's thinking that men are the ones who cause prostitution because they are the ones who leave their wives at home, when they come to work in towns (in Barnes and Win, 1992: 132). Rather, men are powerless victims of the new socio-economic order. Similarly, in *Minisita Munhuwo* (1999), Chistike shows that immorality is chiefly responsible for the transmission of the virus. However, he shows that this immorality is a result of both, pull and push factors. Minister Mwaita, out of poor socialisation, is so irresponsible that he is pushed by both money and power into acts of immorality. As Palmer (1972: 73) notes, power corrupts. At the same time, the girls Mwaita sleeps around with are the unemployed who will be pulled by his money. They would be trying to earn some money with which to sustain life. Ultimately, the HIV virus infects the characters. As Tonhodzai rightly observes, where poverty is, AIDS is likely to be there too (in *The Herald*, July 2006: 10). This way, Chitsike blames neither of the characters. He shows that it is futile to blame individuals when they are all creations of society. He shows that society fails to socialise its citizens into the expected ways of conduct and also fails to avail opportunities for them to demonstrate their potentials and earn a living. Hence, male writers do not blame individual characters for the spread of the HIV virus.

Such a perception and presentation is quite different from that espoused by many female writers. In the women's anthology *Totanga Patsva* (2005), men, individual weaknesses and traditional practices are blamed as disempowering people against the spread of the deadly virus. Among stories that blame men are "Ndofirei senge ndini ndakajuruja?" [Pp 1-3] (Why should I suffer as if I am the one who looked for it?) by Gumbodete and "Munhu munhu" [Pp 4-8] (A human being is human) by Ndlovu.

“Ndofireyi senge ndini ndakajuruja?” [Pp 1-3] (Why should I die as if I am the one who looked for it?), blames the spread of the HIV virus on men who are presented indulging in extra sexual liaisons without even taking any protective measures. Men are presented as sexually greedy people who do not stick to single partners. Hence, having multiple partners is shown as a good breeding ground for the transmission of the virus, because “the more sexual partners, the greater the chance that one or more has HIV” (Jackson, 2002: 117). By demanding unprotected sex, men are shown as unsympathetic, uncaring, assertive and cruel beings whose sole desire is to satisfy their selfish but wicked ends. The prevailing power relationships in African societies make it difficult for women to say no to unprotected sex (Moses and Plummer, op cit: 2). Women are therefore shown as victims of men’s selfish chauvinistic tendencies. In this case, men’s individual weaknesses are presented as weakening women’s efforts against the spread of the HIV virus.

That men are causes for the transmission of the virus is expected if it comes from female writers who are understandably representing members of their gender (Interview with Virginia Phiri of Zimbabwe Women Writers, Friday, 01 August 2008). It also stems from the fact that men are the dominant partners in most social interactions and the main initiators of sexual activity (Jackson, 2002: 88). In addition, many men hold the philosophy that “A real man is not satisfied by one woman” (Jackson, 1992: 65). Although all this is true, the reasons for men’s indulgence in such extra-marital affairs are not alluded to. Recognizing the role that men play in the spread of HIV should not justify their being blamed. Men are trapped in social expectations of gender roles and behaviour as females (ibid, 89). In interviews, most men argued that they are usually pushed into extra-intimate relationships due to being separated from their wives by great distances. Some cited lack of sexual gratification in their marriages. Yet, others stated failure to have children in their marriages as the push factor. For some it is also a requisite by their religious sectors to have more than one wife, while few conceded to the view that they are enticed by wealthy women. In all these cases, it becomes important to ascertain the push factors behind men’s atrocious behaviour. In many cases, it is a result of poor socialisation. Failure to satisfy the other partner’s sexual desire stems from poor socialisation that modern society accords its people. Again, the desire to have children stems from societal expectation on married people, which usually results in restlessness on the part of the childless couple. Society looks down upon

childless marriages and this makes both the man and the woman victims of expectation. In addition, numerically, women outnumber men, yet everyone unmarried is still looked down upon. Despite their numerical advantage, most of these women need men to satisfy their sexual needs. As such, it becomes unavoidable for men to be enticed by those who seek emotional gratification (Makurumidze, interview, 26 September 2008). To cap it all, Zimbabwean society has no tolerance for lesbianism, forcing many women to look for and have men. This almost makes it practically impossible for all men to be in single partner relationships suppose they had wanted. Therefore, contrary to what female writers present, society is largely to blame for such dangerous liaisons since people try to live in accordance with the dictates of society.

Individual characters' promiscuous behaviour is also regarded as detrimental to the war against the HIV scourge. Some stories blame such behaviour, and seeking a life of sexual and materialistic pleasure as the main setbacks in the fight against the transmission of the HIV virus. These are "Kuna sahwira Chipo" [p 9] (To my dear friend Chipo) by E. Makasi, "Chakandidya" [Pp 19-20] (What ate me) by D. Sithole and "Chaita musoro uteme" [Pp 21-29] (What has caused the headache) by R. Magosvongwe. The others are "Pfira mate pasi" [Pp 33-34] (Spit on the ground) by S. Mufukari, "Zvakatanga nekupindwa nechando" [Pp 40-44] (It all started with a cold) by C. Chikwereveshe, "Dzinoruma" [53-57] (They bite) by E Chiramba and "Tikaramba takadaro tinokunda" [Pp 58-65] (If we keep on like that we will succeed) by P. Kaseke. As Moses and Plummer note, men and women with rapid changes in sexual partners acquire and transmit the infection and sustain the pandemic (in *AIDS Forum*, 1995: 2). In all these stories, individual weaknesses are shown as responsible for the transmission of the virus. Some characters are shown failing to control their sexual desires while others are presented keen to live a life of pleasure and materialism.

These short stories however succeed in showing the behaviour that exacerbates the transmission of the virus without satisfactorily examining the root causes of such behaviour. As Moses and Plummer (op cit: 2) note, the behaviours, which cause the transmission of HIV, also have causes; which are social, economic and biological as well. They are a result of poverty, social inequity, employment practices and development policies rather than chosen by an individual (ibid). Prostitution is an attempt to solve the problem of poverty (Jackson, 1992: 61; Rurevo and

Bourdillon, 2003: 52). A more successful short story is “Ndichiyeuka vabereki vangu” [Pp 10-13] (In remembrance of my parents) by Muganhiwa where the causes of promiscuity are shown as the people’s desire to eke a living on one hand and to satisfy sexual desire on the other. Seeking a life of perceived happiness and materialism together with having multiple sexual partners undoubtedly heighten the transmission but are themselves not the causes. The reasons why the characters opt to lead a materialistic lifestyle are not explored. Yet it is an undoubted fact that modern life has largely become materialistic without being matched by the necessary morality or spiritualism to curb asocial behaviour. The writers do not dwell upon the fact that these characters are victims of reality. The reasons for men and women engaging in or having multiple partners is not explored. Yet promiscuity is a result of push and pull factors. Moralising, condemning prostitutes and repression all ignore the root causes of prostitution and have little effect on reducing it (ibid). What is needed is to move beyond emotional and moralistic consideration exuded by most of the female writers.

Again, the fact that some of the characters testify that they were warned (“Chakandidya”, “Pfiramate pasi” and “Hazviitwe zviya vasikana”) but ignored all advice shows that there is something left unsaid by the writers. A closer analysis shows that their behaviour is shaped more by economic and social necessity than individual choices. Despite the nobility of other people’s advice, socially and economically stranded people always find themselves indulging in anti-social activities. Hence, despite the pleas by the authors and individual characters for people to desist from and resist immoral behaviour, if the causes of such actions are themselves not satisfactorily attended to, it becomes naïve to believe that people will refrain from them. It is an attempt to address the symptoms of a more complex system. Writers who fail to get to the root causes of problems often end up blaming characters whose behaviour is just an outward manifestation of an internally decadent social system.

In some instances, female writers criticise Shona traditional customs for disempowering women in their struggle against the pandemic. Customs such as payment of *lobola*, inheritance and the *chiramu* (banter) relationship are castigated. In “Ndofirei senge ndini ndakajuruja” (Pp 1-3), the practice of paying *lobola* is condemned for bonding and binding women to men’s demands. This is in line with Gokova’s view that a man who marries a woman and pays *lobola* develops the

feeling that he owns not only the woman but also her reproductive organs which must be available as and when he demands their use (in *Journal of Social Change and Development*, Number 40, 1996: 10). It means married women have very little sexual resistance to offer to their husbands. In “Mukore uno here?” [Pp 14-18] (In this era?), Keresia Chateuka is bitter about people who cling to the not only backward but also dangerous custom of *kugara nhaka* (wife inheritance). The same custom is also an object of attack by Valeria Chaukura in another short story collection, (*Masimba* 2004) where it is shown as the ultimate cause of Mai Maidei’s immoral behaviour. The writers openly castigate the practice, presenting it as not only risky to the two who would have become intimate, but also to the male’s other innocent wife. They view the custom as obsolete and as serving no purpose at all except to cripple society. This is a case where it is believed that those infected by the HIV virus should not indulge in sex as this might heighten the spread of the virus (Editor, *Exchange*, 2006: 3). Although such observations are valid, the continued existence of the custom shows that there is something noble in it that modern society fails to acknowledge. It is another case whereby society blames tradition for being anti-developmental. Inheritance is believed to exacerbate the spread of the HIV virus and so it is believed if the custom is abolished the spreading of the virus would be limited. Superficially, this appears true.

However, the nobility of African customs even in contemporary society is downplayed. Traditionally, the inheritance custom guaranteed emotional, biological and socio-economic gratification to either the deceased’s wife or husband. Through this custom, society acknowledged that death could sometimes rob one of their partners in the nascent or prime stages of marriage. Being a young man or woman, the person still had human feelings that badly needed attention from a member of the opposite sex. The individual also desired to be helped economically, including having some domestic and social chores done for them. This custom thus bound either a man or a woman to a new partner for the rest of their lives and such man or woman had rights to the body of the other. Unfortunately, HIV and AIDS have ravaged modern life and so, society warns against inheritance, showing it as one of the wicked customs that result in transmission of the virus. Although this sounds true, it simply shows that society tries to address superficially a more complex situation. At one level, society is no longer worried about widowed young men and women. They cannot be inherited, and cannot easily have their

biological desires and their economic challenges attended to. The young man or woman is cursed twice. Apart from enduring the pain of losing a beloved and hence being denied emotional gratification, he or she is also stigmatised and branded as a hazard to society. Even though he or she may have great desires or feelings, cursed as he or she is, the feelings do not deserve anyone's attention. Again, being single exposes the widow to worse economic challenges should she have children to look after. This might ultimately lead her to prostitution. It is true that society can never win the war at this level and it is the reason why in "Mukore uno here?", Chengetai and his brother's wife become intimate, "*Chenge aimunetsa achiti mukoma vakarwara kwenguva refu saka uri kupona nei?* [p. 17]. (Chenge was troubling her saying his brother had been ill for long and so how was she managing sexually?).

As shown through the above case, it is by nature that people need a member of the opposite sex for emotional gratification. Yeukai gives in to the call for sexual intimacy by Chenge despite the fact that she is a member of the Home Based Care, an organisation that teaches people on the spread, symptoms and care to be accorded to the victims of AIDS. Despite that she is well aware of the dangers of such intimacy, she does not resist, much to the surprise of other family members. This simply shows the naivety of trying to do away with human feelings, which are just natural. No one can completely control or suppress human feelings through legislation. Instead, we live in a society in which the law carries little moral status (Rurevo and Bourdillon, 2003: 56).

Legislation against inheritance helps free women or men from being intimate with members of their husbands or wives' families, but does not stamp out their sexual desires. This gives the individuals the 'freedom' to associate with multiple partners in search of gratification. In fact, conversely, abolishing inheritance exposes society and individuals to greater risks of the spreading of HIV, as people will be at liberty to associate with whomever they wish. It actually makes the partner-less individual more marketable and easily accessible to all and sundry. Instead of condemning the custom as one of the chief culprits in the spread of HIV, it can actually be adapted to become a source of control of the virus. This is so since its abolishment makes the widowed prone to infection or re-infection since they will seek gratification from a variety of clients (Makurumidze, interview, 26 September 2008). It is therefore mythical for

modernity to hope to solve such problems by condemning such cultural practices, which could help curb disaster by binding individuals to definite partners. In fact, the so-called risky cultural practices like inheritance arise out of important traditions, which are often very caring (Jackson, 2002: 135). What is important today is not to abolish the custom, but to modify it so that it suits contemporary times. There could be just need for people to have their blood tested so that should they be found positive, they practice methods that limit the transmission of the virus. Again, in cases where women do not wish to be inherited, it would just be prudent to guarantee them legal and human rights support and make sure they have continued economic security (Jackson, 2002: 137-8). The attempt by modernity to try and limit the transmission of the virus from mother to child shows that society is failing to totally do away with intimacy between infected people. Hence women writers, unlike their male counterparts seem unable to identify the underlying factors that incapacitate society and individuals against the HIV virus.

#### **4.4.2 Ways of empowering people against the HIV and AIDS pandemic**

With the exception of “Dzinoruma”, “Tikaramba takadaro tinokunda”, “Taemurwa”, “Goremucheche” and “Mhindo” all the short stories end pessimistically as the authors present characters in hopeless situations. It appears the authors see no hope for those infected by the HIV virus. In “Kuna sahwira Chipa”, “Chakandidya” and “Neniwo, ndinokudawo futi!” the narrators, who are themselves dead characters (in the graveyard) write to the living regretting what they did. In “Hazviitwe zviya vasikana” and “Zvakatanga nekupindwa nechando”, the infected characters pathetically wait for their death, viewing it as inevitable and unavoidable. Such is also an ending adopted by Chitsike in his *Minisita Munhuwo* (1999) where Mwaita painfully waits for his death upon hearing that he is HIV positive. This stems from the conclusion that the wages of sin is death; a philosophy also popularized by Matavire in his song “AIDS” (Tonhodzai in *The Herald* 2006: 10). Such a defeatist vision, although it serves to warn society about the dangers of infection does not help give it the hope it badly deserves and needs. This way, the authors stigmatize the characters’ HIV status. They disempower people against the virus by showing it as invincible. Yet it is no use to sit and mope (Moyana in Ngara [ed], 1996: 55). As Hove observes, writers should “be able to say to the depressed: the sun will rise again even if it seems the night is long” (Unpublished p.2). In agreement, Ngugi remarks that a writer is and should be a

pathfinder (1987: 85), meaning he must help society find ways out of existing problems and challenges. Since life is a struggle, one must gather courage and push on in whatever way possible. In reality, “HIV is not the end of life” (Mazodze, in *Sunday News*, 2006: 7). Although it will be scary to learn that one is HIV positive, but it is not a death sentence (Dr. Chimedza, in *The Sunday Mail*, 2006: 10). That being HIV positive is synonymous with dying was a popular myth of the early 90s. Although it reflected popular opinion and reality then, it is a weakness on the part of the writer whose duty is to help society find solutions to crises. The writers should have striven to show that being HIV positive is not really an end, but the beginning of a new life, which has its own challenges and expectations. They should have given people the hope that maybe doctors may find a cure, or that they can still live longer. In fact, today one can actually live positively with HIV. The given short stories thus go against the title of the book ‘Totanga patsva’ (We start afresh), whose pre-occupation is to show that being infected by the virus is not at all an end, but a beginning of a new life with its own challenges and expectations.

On the contrary, stories like “Dzinoruma” [Pp 53-57] (They bite), “Tikaramba takadaro tinokunda” [Pp 58-65] (If we keep on like that we will succeed), “Taemurwa” [Pp 30-32] (We have been admired), “Goremucheche” [Pp 48-50] (Ever young) and “Mhindo, mhindo, mhindo” [Pp 80-94] (Darkness, darkness, darkness) together with Mukwazhi’s *Zvibaye Woga* (1996) strive to show that though the pandemic is causing many deaths, there is still hope for the future.

In “Ndichiyeka vabereki vangu” [Pp 10-13] (In remembrance of my parents, Muganiwa) and “Mhindo, mhindo, mhindo” [Pp 80-94] (Darkness, darkness, darkness, Hwede), the writers see the future as lying in the union between men and women. In “Ndichiyeka vabereki vangu”, the narrator, Sarudzai says she chose to be a doctor so as to help society with knowledge and medicine to fight the HIV virus. In doing so, she does not lose sight of her male partner and the role he can and should play, “*Murume wangu ahandibatsirawo sezvo atova chiremba*” [p. 13]. (My husband will help me since he is already a practicing doctor). In “Mhindo, mhindo, mhindo” both men and women accept the reality that AIDS is real and so they agree to join hands to fight the darkness, a symbol of the gloom brought by the pandemic. Unlike other female writers who see men as enemies who need to be fought and defeated, if not exterminated, the two writers see men as important allies in waging a successful war against the pandemic. As Jackson observes,



men need to be actively involved in the fight against the pandemic (2002: 91). Men therefore cease to be causes of women's problems; they become part of the solution. A careful analysis shows that not only do we find good men in society, but that we indeed also find good in men. Such is a crucial step towards empowering society against HIV and AIDS. As these writers show, fighting men is not a solution at all. Instead, the whole society, men and women together need to be educated so that they are fully aware of the causes, symptoms and ways of dealing with the HIV virus. Although Hwede advocates for unified efforts between men and women, she is silent of what form those collaborative efforts should take. Muganhiwa urges these joint ventures to focus on research into traditional medicine as a way of minimising the effects of the pandemic. This is quite handy especially owing to the accessibility and affordability of this medicine if compared to western form of medication. In agreement, Nyazema remarks that there is a lot we can learn from traditional medicine and it is time we started to talk about it publicly (in UNICEF et al., 2001: 8). Whilst this is plausible, it seeks to help the infected only. What then remains a mystery is what society should do to prevent any further infections. As a matter of fact, prevention has always been better than cure.

In *Zvibaye Woga* (1996), Mukwazhi's main character highlights a number of things that people can do to surmount the HIV challenge. Firstly, it is important for them to have their blood tested so that they know their HIV status (p. 129). In agreement, Tonhodzai remarks that if AIDS is real, then people must also be real and go and get tested (in *The Herald*, July 2006: 10). In his dialogue with a doctor, Cephas also comes to the realisation that the HIV positive people are just as human as any other and that these people need the support of their relatives. They need to be well looked after, and to get the necessary foods. They can also use antiretroviral drugs to limit the effects of the infection. This way, these people still have the hope to live longer. It emerges that being faithful to a partner is the best way to deal the pandemic a blow. As such, Cephas reconciles with his wife and condemns multiple affairs. He offers to build a rural home and makes sure his wife goes there to help his mother work on the fields whilst he remains in Kwekwe.

Mukwazhi raises many issues meant to empower people against the pandemic. Firstly, his call for people to have their HIV status confirmed is quite in line with modern thinking as this helps

people to know how they should live. Once tested, they also receive the necessary counseling depending on their HIV status. This is because, “the more you know about your situation, the more you can do about it” (Jackson, 2002: 179). It also helps society see the kind of assistance to offer the infected. Faithfulness to a partner is also quite handy in curbing the spread of the virus (Jackson, 2002: 105), especially taking into account that the virus is mainly spread through sexual intercourse with infected people. In fact, it is essential that people have, not only fewer partners, but safer partners to reduce the risk (Jackson, 1992: 58). This becomes the best preventative measure. The author also explains that it is not enough to condemn polygynous marriage of the traditional type but shows that having multiple partners even under the banner of modernity, whether in or outside marriage is quite risky. This way, he shows the futility of condemning polygamous marriage as bad yet modernity has several instances of people who have artificial polygamous marriages. It is therefore prudent that Cephas reconciles with his wife so that he does not engage in multiple affairs, as had been the case. Mukwazhi does well to show that to win the war against HIV and AIDS, the preventive programme must make use of many approaches known to be effective, rather than just implementing one or a few select actions in isolation (Chimedza in *The Sunday Mail*, December 2006: 10). The multiple actions can minimise the spread of the pandemic. This empowers society against the pandemic and gives it some glimmer of hope.

Although the above seem plausible, there is a limit as to their authenticity as solutions to the HIV and AIDS pandemic. Although being faithful to a partner is deemed the best way to limit the spread of the pandemic, such a proposal fails to address the reason why people fail to be faithful. One main reason is separation of husband and wife owing to the nature of employment in modern society. This separation is worsened by the harsh socio-economic environment, which contemporary Zimbabweans find themselves in which makes frequent visits between couples very expensive and unsustainable. As such, the challenges of forced separation which the author had successfully shown to be reason behind infidelity, remains unresolved. To call for fidelity is to appeal for individual reformation in an environment that is more powerful than the individuals (Sikipa, in *SANASO*, 1997: 4). The HIV and AIDS Coordinator admitted that they face great challenges in trying to persuade distanced couples to abstain from sex (until they meet their spouse) because many of them complained that they could not go for two days without sexual

gratification. As Jackson rightly observes, although avoiding sexual activity would help curb the pandemic, it is unrealistic to expect the majority of young, healthy, sexually mature males and females to live for long without any sexual release (2002: 120). This is a clear indication that separation in a costly environment will make it difficult to curb transmission of the virus (Makurumidze, interview, 26 September 2008). The other reason for the cause of the transmission is the desperate desire by the unemployed to earn a living. People find themselves condemned to immorality for them to survive. Hence, until the unemployed find jobs that reward well, the problem of prostitution will not end. Thus, solving the underlying causes of the transmission will do much more than the best educational and counselling programmes (Moses and Plummer, *op cit*: 2). Therefore, a better understanding of these underlying causes is needed; they must be recognised and addressed at national, regional and global levels (*ibid*). Again, that Cephas reconciles with his wife and promises to build a rural home where the wife would stay; helping his mother with domestic chores is not a lasting solution. This is not a satisfactory way of curbing multiple partners. Such a solution fails to get to the root cause of the problem. It calls for another husband-wife separation, which makes the problem cyclic. Such literature fits into a kind of literature, which Osundare regards as one that “builds bridges where there are no rivers, and the type which feeds starving people with dreams of absent harvests” (in Chiwome, 1996:34). It is totally unrealistic to advocate that everyone remain faithful to one partner in situations where partners never live together for more than a week at a time (Jackson, 1992: 91). Complete abstinence, or avoiding any sexual activity is obviously a safe option although it is not a realistic, practical solution for most married people, nor indeed, for most adults whether married or single (*ibid*). Instead, the demand for commercial sex may be reduced if husbands are not separated from their wives, if migrant labour is reduced, if sex within marriage is more fulfilling and if women have better access to education and employment and stronger inheritance rights so that they are not forced into prostitution to survive (*ibid*: 103).

Thus, it emerges that generally, male and female writers’ vision of the HIV and AIDS pandemic is quite different. Unlike many female writers who tend to castigate men, individual characters and traditional customs, male writers have demonstrated a better understanding of the factors that disempower society against the spread of the HIV virus. Again, some writers, both male and female disempower people by presenting no life beyond infection by the HIV virus. This way,

they do not satisfactorily undertake their responsibilities as writers who must help society surmount the challenges it encounters. For those writers who suggest solutions, there is still need to offer practicable, wide-range and meaningful solutions. The tendency currently is to suggest solutions that act as painkillers, which temporarily silence people's pain. The solutions ought to centre much on how to prevent further infections and also how to limit viral effect in infected people.

#### **4.5 Conclusion**

The chapter examined the socio-economic disempowerment of Africans despite the advent of independence, as well as the various ways adopted and recommended for their emancipation. It focused on the writers' portrayal of ability of the struggle to empower people, disempowerment among rural and urban Africans, female empowerment as well as the disempowerment and empowerment against the HIV and AIDS pandemic. It has emerged that whilst some writers celebrate independence as having brought total empowerment, others bemoan its lack of meaningful empowerment to ordinary people. These two types of writers however do injustice to history. They fail to portray the extent of empowerment brought by independence in its entirety. Other writers, like Choto, attempt a balanced exposition, showing how each group or class of people has benefited from the emancipation brought about by independence. Such an approach enables society to have a thorough introspection on its strengths and weaknesses and map a way forward.

The chapter also focused on economic disempowerment of both rural and urban Zimbabweans. Some writers continue to blame economic strife among rural people on laziness and beer drinking. Individual characters are urged to work hard in order to emancipate themselves. Although such a recommendation is noble, it has been noted that the authors do not examine such disempowerment in its proper context. They focus more on observable personal traits at the expense of historical forces, which shape individual behaviour, such as land policies and the new socio-economic environment. Other writers focus on the suffering among the urban dwellers. These writers give important sociological detail that enables readers to understand their characters in context. However, although the characters' poverty and problems are traced to the rural areas, the authors fall short of identifying how, why and by whom such economic

disempowerment was caused. Although the authors do well to present prostitution, stealing and begging as desperate ways of economic emancipation by the marginalized as a result of unemployment, poor remuneration and bad governance, the solutions they suggest do not satisfactorily help raise the people's socio-economic standing. The writers have fallen into the traditional trap of appealing to individual characters to uphold moral values and start self-help projects, forgetting the bad setting.

The other concern of the chapter was writers' perceptions of female empowerment. It emerged that some male and female writers have similar visions with regards the causes and solutions to women's incapacitation. Overall, the researcher noted that female writers give a wider exposition of their problems when compared to their male counterparts, presumably because they are the recipients of the problems. As solutions, some authors view education and unity among women as key in liberating women from the grip of patriarchy. Although the suggested solutions are noble, it has been noted that they only work out well when other factors like existence of employment opportunities and the relevance of men in women's lives are taken into account. In these works, educated women have been seen to contribute immensely to their personal and societal development. Mutasa (2005) has however demonstrated a wider awareness of how the female being can be emancipated, showing the importance of, not only education, but also land. Legislation as a way of raising the status of women has received contrasting perceptions from especially male writers. Some writers, like Moyo are very much against it, showing it as responsible for the various problems bedevilling African people and their families. They advocate for a return to the traditional male-female relationship, which they say, was quite ideal. On the other hand, others, like Chitsike, as in other many female-written novels, delight in legislation, showing it as instrumental in raising the socio-economic standing of women in society. However, both groups have been shown to have a misconception of traditional culture. They misconstrue customary and colonial law as traditional Shona culture, weakening their plots. They also identify wrong causes to women's disempowerment, thereby advancing weak solutions too.

Finally, the chapter analysed writers' portrayal of the disempowerment and empowerment against the HIV and AIDS pandemic. Male writers have been shown to have a greater conceptualisation of the factors that disempower society against the virus. They move away from

the victim-blame characteristic of many Shona novelists. On the other hand, female writers have largely fallen into the trap of blaming men, individual characters and Shona customs for the problems caused by modernity. Some writers disengage society by presenting no hope for the infected. This has been noted as a failure to uphold the duties expected of them. Other writers suggest ways of addressing the crisis, ways that have been seen to fail to satisfactorily solve it. Muganhiwa's solution, which calls on both men and women to join hands and make extensive research in traditional medicine, is plausible. It is meant to assist the infected. More so, such medicine is accessible, affordable and efficacious. In the analysed fiction, there still however remains a gap on what society can do to prevent or safeguard people against new infections.

Although contemporary writers have been able to articulate the issues that have affected the country, some still fall into the trap of blaming characters for the situations they find themselves in, without linking their behaviour to wider socio-historical factors. Others have managed to absolve characters of the blame, only to advance weak solutions by advocating for the victims to change their personal traits instead of pressing for the change of the system.

## Chapter V

### Conclusion, findings and recommendations

#### 5.1 Conclusion and findings

This chapter concludes the research whose focus was Shona fiction's treatment of socio-economic issues, with reference to literature published as from 1990. It thus presents the findings of the study. The chapter also gives recommendations on what the researcher thinks is useful in Shona literary writing and analysis.

The research has considered literature and life to be very close allies. As such, writers have been seen to have the responsibility to help society take note of, reflect upon and surmount challenges people encounter in life. The writers' role includes looking back into history, unearthing elements quite important for the contemporary society, exposing current issues and help suggesting ways of solving today's problems. It is in this regard that Hove describes their role as that of publicists, newspaper columnists, public speakers; town-criers who stand for those whose voice would never be heard (Unpublished: 4). Due to the interrelatedness of literature and life, the research also underlined the need for literature to be studied in the context of historical experiences that shape both writers' awareness and the events conveyed therein. Every fiction is informed by observable events and experiences. It is against this background that such events as the colonisation of Africa, the denigration of all aspects of the people's culture and the subsequent adoption of European values and sensibilities by Africans (Kurotwi, 2004: 20, Rodney, 1972: 103 – 161) became crucial. These, together with the ambivalent role of the Literature Bureau become imperative in understanding the way early novelists portray both the Shona past and colonial experiences. In such a background, in both real life and literature, every aspect of traditional culture was condemned as the outward and visible manifestations of the pagan inner person (Bhebe, 1979: 111). In addition, some Shona novels also need to be studied in the context of alienation of the indigenous people's arable land, colonial labour laws and their impact on African people's lives, including the position of African women. Novels such as Chakaipa's *Dzasukwa Mwana-asina-hembe* (1967), Mungoshi's *Ndiko Kupindana Kwamazuva*

(1975) and Zvarevashe's *Museve Wade Nyama* (1983) can be understood in this context. This becomes handy in understanding if characters are to blame for the circumstances they find themselves in, as well as the kinds of solutions that writers propagate. The coming of independence, its failure to address colonial imbalances and the propagation of new laws to elevate, especially African women are all crucial in understanding if contemporary writers have been able to undertake the tasks expected of writers.

The research observed that since its inception in 1956, the Shona novel has been highlighting the topical and current issues of its times, albeit with varying degrees of competence. It emerged that though events of the colonial period were so pertinent as to give rise to serious and committed fiction, this was not so due to the reasons above. Only literature that was moralistic, didactic and devoid of politics saw the light of the day. Bepswa, one of the prominent writers laments that the Bureau organised workshops where writers were told what to write and what not to write (in Veit-Wild, 1993: 86). This gave rise to the realistic but moralistic novel, which entertained readers and distracted them from the causes of the social illnesses with which they were confronted in their own lives (Veit-Wild, *ibid*). The novels give no meaningful solutions to the problems they raise. This is quite evident in works such as Chakaipa's *Garandichauya* (1963), *Dzasukwa Mwana-asina-hembe* (1967) and Mungoshi's *Ndiko Kupindana Kwamazuva* (1975). The city was the culprit and not the settler who had established the city. Individual characters are blamed for their problems and fate. Only a few novels like Tsodzo's *Pafunge* (1972) probed the true essence of the African being, but again, fell short when it came to suggesting ideal solutions. The writers who focused on the African past emphasised the denigration and distortion of African people's cultural practices and values. Hence, early novelists could not satisfactorily undertake the roles expected of them by society. Even in the late 1980s (after independence), fiction still celebrated the defeat of the former coloniser, without drawing people's attention to more serious challenges of the new nation and era. As such, earlier Shona fiction's depiction of the selected issues was largely unsatisfactory.

Processes like decolonisation, cultural regeneration and nation building have necessitated a new kind of fiction, which focuses on the pre-colonial past. It emerged that most of current Shona novelists are aware of the distortions of this Shona past; hence, they strive to reconstruct it.



Writers such as Mutasa (*Nhume Yamambo*, 1990; *Misodzi, Dikita Neropa*, 1991) and Zvarevashe (*Dzinza RavaGovera VaChirumhanzu NaMutasa*, 1998) have shown that contrary to imperial myths propagated by early writers, the Shona were as humane as anyone else. They had a very responsible leadership, which was also a representative of the spiritual world. Despite its negative aspects, the institution of traditional leadership was largely peaceful, orderly and therefore admirable. The responsibility of these leaders entailed establishing and maintaining peace, hence the Shona were a very peaceful and peace-loving people who established and maintained peace through an assortment of ways. Violence and war were never their quickest way of solving crises. In cases where they were used, it only became an option after all other peaceful ones had failed. Even so, the war or violence was never meant to harm or annihilate the enemy, but to co-opt him. It also emerged that the people had a very powerful, vibrant and authentic religion, which permeated and gave meaning to all facets of the people's lives (Gelfand, 1977: 6). This religion was presided over by religious figures whose help and advice to society was indispensable. However, other writers, as evidenced by Matsikiti (*Rakava Buno Risifemberi*, 1995) have continued with the colonial attitude of castigating religious figures whom they portray as unreliable and dangerous informants. This group of writers presents Shona religious leaders as "charlatans and quacks" (Kahari, 1997: 75). The writers fail to bring out the reality that in religious figures' ugliness, there was also beauty.

The novelists have also countered imperial myths about the indigenous people's industriousness, marriage customs and the position of women. The Shona have been proved to be a very industrious people who were known agriculturalists and iron smelters and great hunters and traders. Such industriousness is brought out in Mutasa (*Nhume Yamambo*, 1990; *Misodzi, Dikita Neropa*, 1991) and Matsikiti (*Rakava Buno Risifemberi*, 1995). The people mainly worked as groups, challenging and inspiring each other, fulfilling the philosophy that there is strength in numbers. Such hard work made the society self-reliant. Beer drinking was also seen to be integral in boosting production, contrary to modern thinking that it jeopardises it. Hence, Kurotwi comments:

It is very clear that before the white man came, we were super geniuses. The evidence is abundant. We enjoyed unparalleled wealth, equity, unity and peace (2003: 47).

Shona marriage customs, mainly *kuzvarira* (daughter-pledging) and *kutema ugariri* (mortgaging one's labour to get a wife), are holistically presented, disproving colonial views that such customs were never for the good of society. It is on the position of Shona women that the novelists differ. Whereas writers like Mutasa (1990, 1991) bring out both the positive and negative attitude of traditional society over the status of women, Matsikiti continues with the colonial version of the image of Shona women, whom he presents as a powerless, subservient, unintelligent, victimised and an oppressed group. Contrary to this, it emerged, even in Mutasa's portrayal that despite their ill treatment in some cases, women were respected for a number of responsibilities they carried out as religious figures, mothers and aunts. Again, it emerged that Shona patriarchy was not one where men dominated women, but one where men and women exchanged roles, with men becoming women in some instances and women becoming men in others. Matsikiti further distorts the Shona practice of killing of triplets. He condemns the practice without getting to the root causes of why the child-loving society could engage in such an act. Lack of detail makes the custom and others prone to misinterpretation. Hence, whilst the majority of novelists re-create a genuine African past, a few still fall into the trap of presenting only the bad aspects, ignoring the good that also characterised the same institutions, values and practices.

The research also observed that the Shona past is important to contemporary Zimbabweans. It helps them regain their dignity, humanity and self-confidence badly needed in nation building. As Kurotwi observes:

We are not white, we shouldn't aspire to be white... all we need is to re-establish our pride, and accept our language, religion, governance, customs and everything that we can pick up as the essence of us (2003: 78).

Contemporary writers thus focus on the African past as a form of re-education of the contemporary citizens, embarking on what Mararike regards as the "Kurutsisa hypothesis (Induced vomiting hypothesis)" in which blacks are now undoing the brainwashing that many Africans were subjected to (in Chivaura and Mararike [eds], 1998: 93). It is from this past that they can unearth important values and practices that would help them face contemporary problems. The Shona past can inform modern society on important issues like democracy, good

governance, peace and peaceful settlement of disputes and the importance of religion and the position and image of women. Again, it becomes imperative to accord traditional medicine and its practitioners the status and importance they deserve, as this helps society fight the dreaded HIV and AIDS pandemic. From the same past, they can see those deplorable aspects, which need to be condemned or modified for the good of society. The inheritance custom that Tsodzo (*Mudhuri Murefurefu*, 1993) portrays can be adapted to suit contemporary society riddled by many orphans and street children, whose being the contemporary world seems unable to cope with. It is also handy especially in an era where society fails to satisfy the biological and economic expectations of widowed young people. It also emerged that, though some of the traditional practices are crucial, there is great need for writers to do extensive research on them to bring out both the good and bad aspects so that society can make informed adoptions and adaptations of the customs.

The research's other concern was the empowerment vis-à-vis the disempowerment in the new dispensation, where focus was on the gains of independence, poverty among many Zimbabweans, empowerment of especially women and the HIV and AIDS scourge. On fiction on the empowerment brought about by independence, the researcher noted that contemporary writers, unlike earlier ones, now go beyond the mere defeat of the former enemy to probe if the gains of the struggle were worth the sacrifice that was made. Three groups of writers have emerged. One group, which includes Makari (*Magamba eChimurenga: Josiah Tungamirai*, 2003) depict total empowerment only. It appears that to such writers, independence was a certain victory. That people got land, good positions and a sound economic base to continue acquiring education though true, sadly applies to a few. The other extreme position is that held by writers such as Chimhundu (*Chakwasha*, 1991) who present that there was no meaningful empowerment at all to the majority. They show that the opportunists are the only ones who are enjoying the national cake, with the majority still economically incapacitated. Independence has given rise to corruption, immorality, nepotism and the adoption of foreign values. In all aspects, independence is not presented as a victory, but a handover (Turok, 1987: 8) of power to blacks. It is shown as a battle won in war which was lost overall (*ibid*). Although this is to a greater extent true, the weakness with such fiction is its failure to acknowledge that independence also had admirable gains even to the majority of Zimbabweans, especially during the first decade. Hence, the first

two groups of writers feed the nation with misinformation. Their expositions do not help society have a complete and informed self-analysis to measure its strengths and weaknesses.

The third group, represented by Choto (*Vavariro*, 1990) does well to focus on both the good and bad aspects of empowerment brought about by independence. Such good aspects as free primary education and health services for the poor witnessed in the 1980s are captured. This move by the government opened doors to many Zimbabweans who had been denied education and proper medication under white rule. That explains the high literacy rate that Zimbabwe boasts of today. Again, that the government resettled some of the land-hungry peasants is an undoubted reality, which should not escape the eye of a committed writer. By bringing out the benefits enjoyed by a number of common people, Choto shows that independence was not a total flop. This group of writers again shows that there were however negative achievements of the struggle, such as the failure to return land to all the needy and the pursuit of self-emancipation by the leaders. This group of writers, unlike the first two, has peeped beneath the emperor's clothes and exclaimed that though seemingly dressed, the emperor is indeed naked (Hove Unpublished: 5). Hence, the group receives independence with mixed feelings. Such a balanced exposition helps society learn from its strengths and weaknesses.

The study also focused on economic disempowerment among rural and urban Africans today. One of those who focus on such is Hwendaenda (*Mubairo*, 1993). It was noted that though he does well to expose the economic disempowerment, he does not link his characters' behaviour to wider socio-historic factors like the unfinished land issue that later necessitated the land invasions of the year 2000 and beyond. He fails to show "the social and political causes" (Veit-Wild, 1993: 85) of the poverty he portrays. Instead, like early writers, he blames characters and not the system, which has victimised them. Poverty in rural areas can never be satisfactorily explained by laziness and beer drinking because the people there are naturally farmers. Worse, this happens in rural areas, places where beer was known to increase production. The writer portrays only the observable characteristics of a failing system and not its underlying structures. As such, he advances a weak solution.

The group that focuses on poverty among urbanites includes Nyandoro (*Ndozviudza Aniko?* 2006) and Chitsike (*Minisita Munhuwo*, 1999). These authors provide important sociological detail to make readers understand the history and yesterday of the characters. It emerges that urban characters are in fact, rural people running away from the challenges in the rural areas only to fall into even worse challenges of city life. Although the authors do well to expose this, they however fail to get to the root cause of rural poverty; which is the coming of the whites and the alienation of African land. The writers again do well to expose the causes of continued destitution in cities, which include unemployment, poor remuneration and lack of sense of duty on the part of leaders. These unfortunate people ultimately devise ways of economically empowering themselves, which include stealing, prostitution, clowning and begging. The writers show that characters are decent and humane people who are turned into indecency and vagrancy by a devastating socio-economic order. This way, the authors depart from the victim-blame quite characteristic of early writers. However, in solving their problems, the writers fall into the same trap of advocating for individuals to change in behaviour instead of the system to be transformed into a better and humane one. Characters are either imprisoned or advised to start self-help projects. Sadly, the writers do not delve into how their victimised characters can acquire skills or get capital to start the noble ventures. Hence, the solutions remain at the level of ideas, leaving the problems they raise unresolved.

The research's other concern was the empowerment of the female African. Several authors, male and female, agree that women have been disadvantaged in many respects while a few view it otherwise. Makayi (*Makudo Ndomamwe*, 2004), Mutasa (*Sekai: Minda Tave Nayo*, 2005) and Chitsike (*Magora Panyama*, 1999) comprise the group, which agitate for the emancipation of women. Makayi presents education and unity as key in this regard. Mutasa also observes these as important, and in addition, he regards the land reform programme as quite instrumental in raising the status of women. Hence, whilst it emerged that women writers are better in enunciating their problems when compared to their male counterparts, it was also noted that it is male writers whose vision of female empowerment is wider when compared to that of female counterparts. However, although education is important, the study noted that it was however not an automatic guarantor for a good life, especially in modern society where many educated people are roaming the streets, having failed to find employment. Again, unity among women has been

shown to have strengths and limits. The research noted that such unity empowers them to get access to some social services but does not address all the socio-economic and biological expectations of women.

Among male writers are those that see legislation as necessary for the emancipation of women and those that condemn it as responsible for the chaos experienced in some African families. Moyo is an example of writers who vehemently write against legislation, showing it as the cause of most chaos in society. It however emerged from the study that, although most western forms of solutions to African problems have largely not worked, it is not true to write as if women do not have problems. Moyo's attempt to pacify women is just another level of insensitivity to their plight. Among those who celebrate western legislation is Chitsike who shows it as the best way to bring and safeguard the interests and freedom of women. The study concluded that, although it is imperative to raise the status of women, western forms of legislation do not always work for the good of Africans. Worse, it is an acceptance of cultural inferiority by Africans. In agreement, Kurotwi laments:

...our way of doing things is purely monkeying of the white man. That's why we fail because we are trying to run our things using methods we don't know and methods, which are not suitable because they are not ours (2003: 54).

However, although there is need for Africa to carve out an African way of doing things, African wisdom also advises that even a fool has much to teach us (Hove, Unpublished: 5). It thus emerged that, what is important is not a total rejection of western ways and practices or a blind acceptance of everything African, but a careful selection of those good aspects from western practices that can be fused with good elements from the African way of life. In all cases, it was observed that most writers misconstrue Shona patriarchy and customs as the cause of women's problems when in fact they are also victims of the new socio-economic order. Other writers, like Moyo and Chitsike also mistake customary law as traditional culture, weakening their plots. In their stories, the colonial images of African women as "indolent", "lazy", "slothful", "immoral", "frivolous", "savage" and "uncivilised" (Schmidt, 1992: 99) are manifest in one way or the other.

Lastly, the research focused on the HIV and AIDS pandemic. It noted that male writers have a broader conceptualisation of the factors that disempower society against the fight to limit the transmission of the HIV virus. Instead of blaming characters, they have shown that the new socio-economic order is such that lovers are distanced from each other and find themselves in crises, which they fall victim to. In addition, the need to earn a living in the harsh environment and the poor socialisation all lead to immoral acts whose ultimate result is the infection by, and transmission of the HIV virus. On the other hand, female writers tend to blame largely men, individual characters and traditional customs for the spread of the virus. The research observed that such female writers blame victims and not the root causes of their actions. The cause is the new way of life, which is characterised by perceived happiness and materialism. The solutions to the pandemic suggested are varied, with many writers seeing infection as the end of life while others still hope for the future. Not only do the writers misrepresent reality by equating infection with death, but they also fail to undertake their responsibility as writers who should help society find solutions to such situations. They fail to suggest ways of empowering society against the pandemic. The writers who offer solutions have varied recommendations. Whilst being faithful to partners is important, it was noted that the writers fail to get to the root cause of the partners' infidelity, hence skirt the real issue that needs attention. Individual character reformation as called for by many writers cannot be the ultimate solution; given the difficulty individuals have in remaining moral and chaste in a trying environment. A plausible solution for the infected is that suggested by Muganhiwa; that research be conducted in traditional medicine, owing to its affordability, accessibility and efficacy.

Overall, the research concludes that contemporary Shona novelists have done fairly well in probing the true essence of African people's lives than early writers. Their works of art demonstrate a fair amount of research, which is quite necessary in creative writing. They have seen, exposed and warned. They have however done this with varying degrees of competence. However, there is still a tendency among some writers to blame the wrong causes for the problems they raise in their fiction and to offer solutions that do not satisfactorily address the problems they portray. For those who focus on the problem of women, the weakness has been their failure to distinguish colonial and customary law from genuine traditional Shona way of life.

## **5.2 Recommendations**

The researcher notes that though a number of methodologies have been employed in the analysis of the selected fiction, more strategies can still be exploited to have a fuller appreciation of literary works of art. Since writers interpret the world from various standpoints, a multi-dimensional approach is also necessary to get more insights about the writers' perception of reality. This even applies to other genres of art such as poetry and drama. This allows a more inclusive and fulfilling appreciation of works of art. Again, the researcher emphasises that every work of art needs to be studied in its context to understand it fully. This is because every work of art is a product of a specific historical period with unique situations and experiences.

It is also recommended that authors do extensive research to truthfully depict Shona cultural practices, actions and world-view and not confuse these with colonial interpretations of the same. Such extensive research should provide sociological detail that makes characters and situations typical. Authors should search for the causes of individual behaviour and shoulder blame on the responsible cause, and not blame characters, their fellowmen or traditional customs, all of which are victims in most cases. Critics should also be on the guard so that their analysis of works on Shona culture can help to discern truths from falsehoods.

Again, writers should not just end at exposing reality, but should proceed to suggest solutions to the problems they raise. It is a kind of disservice for them to leave problems unresolved in their works of art. Equally importantly, there is need for authors to be more perceptive and suggest more humane and practical ways of facing challenges and not adopt the not-so-effective ways like imprisonment, retreat, and appeal for individual character reformation.



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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Questions for authors

1. Where were you born?
2. When did you start writing?
3. What is your occupation?
4. Who and what inspired you to start writing?
5. What can you say your novel is about?
6. Are you in anyway inspired by the circumstances surrounding your birth and growing or occupation in your writings?
7. Has your educational background had a bearing on the thematic issues that you handle in your woks?
8. In your opinion, are writers free to write what they like today? How does this compare with those who wrote in colonial Zimbabwe?
9. What has been the impact, if any, of the disbanding of the Literature Bureau on the development of literature in indigenous languages?
10. What do you present as the solution to the problems you raise in your novel and how effective do you think it is?

## **Appendix B: Interview questions on HIV and AIDS**

1. Having multiple partners has been proved to be main cause of the transmission of the virus. In your opinion, what are the causes of such behaviour?
2. What are the other causes of the transmission of the HIV virus?
3. Who do you think is to blame for the transmission of the virus? How justifiable is that?
4. What measures need to be taken in order to reduce the rate of transmission?
5. How effective do you think each of the measures can be?
6. How justifiable is it to blame traditional customs as also responsible for the transmission?
7. Do you think abolishing the customs can save the situation?
8. How feasible and effective is the need to be faithful to one's partner as a solution to the crisis?
9. How do you think society should help young widows in this crisis world?
10. The new philosophy and reality is that 'HIV is not the end of life'. How is this possible?
11. Anything you might need to add?



## **Appendix C: General questions for Zimbabwean citizens**

1. One of the problems society grapples with is that of unwanted pregnancies. In your opinion, what are causes and effects of such?
2. Who is to blame for unwanted pregnancies, men or women and why?
3. Another thorny issue is the disadvantaged position of women in modern society. In your view, what are the reasons behind such a scenario? Does paying of bride price in any way lead to the oppression of women?
4. How plausible is it to blame patriarchy for the unfortunate position of Shona women?
5. How effective do you think western are ways in addressing the suffering of African women?
6. What are the causes of prostitution, theft and practices like baby dumping?
7. Is it justifiable to blame individuals for the above?
8. What do you think society should do to limit cases as above?
9. Having multiple affairs is often blamed for a number of reasons. What do you think causes multiple affairs?
10. Are such multiple affairs prevalent among the married or the single?
11. How lasting are extra affairs between individuals in real life?
12. How do you think society can reduce the prevalence of such affairs?
13. Do you think traditional medicine and medicine men still have a role to play in today's Zimbabwe?
14. Which, do you think is more effective between traditional medicine and western form of medication?
15. Do you think Shona traditional religion still has an important role to play in a new Zimbabwe?
16. What aspects, if any, do you think traditional religion can help address in contemporary society?
17. Are children considered important in today's marriages? Why?