

**LANGUAGE CENSORSHIP IN SELECTED ZIMBABWEAN  
FILMS IN SHONA AND ENGLISH**

by

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**DECLARATION**

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I declare that **Language Censorship in Selected Zimbabwean films in Shona and English** is my own work and that the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

.....  
Signature

.....  
Date

## SUMMARY

The aim of this study was to explore language censorship in Zimbabwean films in Shona and English. The study concentrated on the themes of politics, culture and economic in the genre of the documentary, feature and short film genres. It was demonstrated that the Zimbabwean laws enabled authorities to impose censorship strategies that ranged from banning, restriction, persecution of filmmakers, withdrawal of films from circulation, and threats of withdrawal of permits of film retailers. These visible, direct and banal forms of censorship have forced some filmmakers to flee the country. Most of the filmmakers who have remained in the country have been forced to deal with themes that appear harmless to the state. This state induced form of self-censorship on the filmmakers has resulted in the production of uncritical, and unreflective films whose staple diet were embedded in cultural stereotypes. The study argued that language is a signifying practice that cannot be interpreted in a single direction. Thus, despite these realities of film censorship some filmmakers deliberately encoded or used verbal and visual film language that generated surplus meanings with which the films could be re-read in ways that reveal new linguistic strategies to evade and challenge both the restrictive censorship laws as well as criticise the undemocratic political culture that has taken root in Zimbabwe. The study used eclectic theories such as Marxism, audience-reception approach, critical legal theories and language theories to analyse the films. The explanatory capacity of these theories helped to reveal the contradictory ways in which the desire to impose restrictions on film meanings was constantly undermined in the innovative language of the films.

## **KEY TERMS**

- Zimbabwe
- Film
- Censorship
- Language
- Shona
- English
- Verbal
- Visual
- Subvert
- Dominant narratives
- Political film
- Cultural film
- Economic film
- Short film genre
- Documentary
- Feature film

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<b>AIDS</b>	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
<b>AIPPA</b>	Access to Information Protection of Privacy Act
<b>ANC</b>	African National Congress
<b>CAFU</b>	Central African Film Unit
<b>CCJP</b>	Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace
<b>CIA</b>	Central Intelligence Association
<b>ESAP</b>	Economic Structural Adjustment Programme
<b>GNU</b>	Government of National Unity
<b>GPA</b>	Global Political Agreement
<b>HIV</b>	Human Immuno Virus
<b>ICC</b>	International Criminal Court
<b>MDC</b>	Movement for Democratic Change
<b>MIC</b>	Media Information Commission
<b>PG</b>	Parental Guidance is needed
<b>POSA</b>	Public Order and Security Act
<b>VLSN</b>	Film contains Violent Language, Sexual scenes and Nudity
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>ZANLA</b>	Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army
<b>ZANU PF</b>	Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front
<b>ZAPU</b>	Zimbabwe African People's Union
<b>ZIPRA</b>	Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army

**ZNLWVA** Zimbabwe National Liberation War Veterans Association

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## **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

### **1.0 BACKGROUND**

Zimbabwe was colonised by Britain through a chartered company, the British South African Company (BSAC) led by Cecil John Rhodes in 1890. African resistance to colonisation in 1893 and 1896-7 culminated not only in the military defeat of the natives, but with the hanging of iconic leaders such as Nehanda. But, for the new white settlers, to have only militarily defeated Africans was not considered a sufficient deterrent against the possibility in future of another African inspired armed resistance. In order to consolidate their hegemony over Africans, the white settlers not only established a colonial government in Rhodesia, but proceeded to mount a systematic assault on African culture. The colonial government enacted a plethora of media laws to suppress the resistance of black people. In the field of film, the hastily introduced Obscene Publications Ordinance Act of 1911 and Cinematograph Ordinance Act of 1912 had negative effects on the rights of black people to express their ideas and opinions about the oppression and marginalisation that they were experiencing in Rhodesia. The Obscene Publications Ordinance Act prohibited blacks to publish what was perceived by the colonial authorities as subversive information, while the Cinematograph Ordinance Act of 1912 blocked black people from participating in telling their stories of white oppression through visual images (Patel, 1997). To force on Africans political conformity necessary to the running of the new political economy, the white settlers' department of Native Affairs promoted written publications and films that painted a positive picture of the colonial government while presenting Africans as a people without history. White writers authorised images of Africans as savages in need of perpetual moral and spiritual guidance from European settlers.

In the early days of the colony, Africans were not to be exposed to writing, or viewing film. In fact, the colonial government encouraged Africans to continue preserving some obscurantist cultural practices not considered subversive to white domination. In other words, colonial power valorised traditional African cultures and some moribund aspects of African cultures performed the service of disguising and legitimating colonial power (Moore, 2004). In Zimbabwe in the 1940s and 1950s, the white settler government took a step further in controlling Africans by authorising the creation of a genre of film for Africans by white film makers. This genre emphasised stereotypes of Africans as lazy, drunkards, and bloody-thirsty, a regime of negative cultural signifiers of an African narrative of

loss (Mbembe, 2002) emphasising a chronology of spiritual disease and moral decline or degeneration. Embedded colonial censorship of African thoughts took hidden dimensions in which Africans were supposed to view themselves as hopeless without the controlling hand of white settlers. The carefully choreographed genre of films made for Africans also embedded notions of self-censorship by presenting African characters that succeeded in a colonial context as composed only of those natives who religiously and uncritically took instructions from Europeans. Thus, diffidence as a form of mental censorship was deliberately induced into African characters in these films made by whites for blacks, calculated to take away or dilute the spirit of creativity among Africans.

Cultural censorship was to prove more pernicious among post independence filmmakers most of them who came to conceive politics narrowly, as mere representation of protest against the symptoms of power such as corruption and not focusing on the causes of that corruption. Other African filmmakers in postcolonial Zimbabwe internalised binary ways of representing reality and produced films emphasising one side of reality at the expense of unraveling the complexity of life in the Zimbabwean post colony. And yet other African filmmakers in post independence Zimbabwe who had inherited invisible modes of self-censorship produced films that failed to move out of the colonial film frame that could not depict ordinary people organising their lives without the presence of authorities such as African patriarchy, nationalist leaders or the donor community. In this matrix, cultural censorship became the most potent tool of political surveillance of the spirit of Africans, in the same way open colonial political censorship helped colonialism to codify cultural censorship into enforceable legal prohibitions through established administrative statutes of colonial law. These layered and mosaic patterns through which colonial censorship maintained itself evolved from the colonial vocabulary centred on the profit motives which in turn underwrote the rationale of colonial presence. Colonial modes of censorship also ironically drew the content and forms of their sustainance from a readily existing repertoire of African taboos and inhibitions that limited individual expression that colonialism took advantage of and manipulated to consolidate itself into what Grosfoguel, describes as the “coloniality of power” (2007: 215) that works through established African stereotypes, attitudes and patriarchally-defined gendered roles. This relationship of “dependency and antagonism”(Gilroy, 1993: 45) that made colonial modes of censorship feed from and found echo in African negative practices has, again, not been critically studied to enable one to

explain the durability of censorship in post independence Zimbabwean film, in a country that went through a political revolution that was supposed to detect and reject the culture of limiting creative thought and democratic experimentation with the film genre to enhance development of the country.

Thus, contrary to the romanticised narratives of nativist film critics, the “violence of falsifications”(Mbembe, 2002:241) on the works that analyse the history of film censorship in Zimbabwe is experienced in subjective accounts that emphasise colonial enforcement only and deny or underestimate ideological collusion of African filmmakers in authorising modes of self-censorship manifested in views that refuse to acknowledge that Africans are also responsible and should also be blamed for the catastrophe of limiting the meaning potential of the moving image in post colonial Zimbabwe. This theoretical gap in explicating the reasons for the reproduction of colonially-created forms of censorship that continue to haunt post independence filmmakers in Zimbabwe has not been addressed at all.

Of course, the colonially-derived forms of censorship that persist in post independence Zimbabwe in all their visible and not-so-visible forms have not totally crippled the creative psyche of all the African filmmakers in post independence Zimbabwe. Hungwe (2005: 14) asserts that there is, ‘...strong evidence that the colonial film-makers under-rated their audience, who developed rapidly with successive shows of films, and began to raise questions about the messages to which they were exposed, and how those messages related to their economic and political aspirations’. It is undeniable that Zimbabwean filmmakers possess “cultural capital”(Van de Werfhorst, 2010:157) linked to, derived or resourced from their own African ‘traditional’ values, sifted from colonial socialisation and also produced as a result of creative experimentation with the film camera. This nationalist narrative of the instrumentality of film in forging a communitarian identity emphasises an African collective “imaginaire of culture and politics [privileges] a manipulation of the rhetoric of autonomy, resistance, and emancipation [that gives] legitimacy to an authentic African [film] discourse”(Mbembe, op cit, 240-1). As Moore observes about the resilience of cultural capital in the face of onslaught by invasive outside colonial forces

The cultural field enjoys relative autonomy by virtue of two features. First, it is institutionally distanitated from the economic and political fields. It occupies its own social space, with its institutions, personnel, traditions, values, issues and forms of struggle. It has a specificity of its

own. Second, its agents are not ostensibly members of the dominant class or working on its behalf (2002: 449).

This insight about the indestructibility of African culture (Cabral, 1970) applies to colonial Zimbabwe especially with the oral genres of songs most of them patronised by ordinary Africans which ensured that these genres remained outside the creative economy patronised by colonial agents.

However, in the 1930s it was hardly possible to imagine Africans wielding a film camera as a tool of struggle. Colonial legislation such as the Entertainment Control and Censorship Act of 1932 widened the scope of control over African creativity to cover theatrical performances and public advertisements. Control of theatrical performance was particularly damaging to black nationalists, who, deprived from having access to mainstream media, had taken theatre and drama as important avenues to communicate political messages to the majority of fellow black people. In 1954 the colonial government had formed *the literature Bureau* and while its main target was censorship of political messages in African literature in indigenous languages, the bureau complemented other repressive laws in undermining the development of critical minds amongst Africans. With blacks increasingly demanding freedom from colonialism in the 1960s, the Rhodesian government responded harshly by enacting the Maintenance of Law and Order Act of 1965. Mazango and Chiumbu (2000) contend that the motive behind the Act was to prevent flow of information that was likely to undermine the Smith regime, and to legitimise violence as a means of controlling black political activism. As political protest among blacks became vicious, various instruments of Censorship provided under the ambit of Entertainments Control Act in 1967 were used extensively to regulate, control, restrict or prohibit the production of visual images, printing or publishing of information that promoted the liberation cause of the black people.

The victory of black nationalists in 1980 against the Smith regime, was not only on the military front; the new black government went to repeal some of the draconian laws in the political, economic and cultural spheres that had been inherited from the white racist government. However, in the process the new leadership retained some of the censorship laws which were reformulated and introduced under the Censorship and Entertainment Control Act of 1967. In the 1990s, the black and nationalist government in power in Zimbabwe introduced its own new laws such as the Public Order and Security Act (POSA) and Access to Information Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA). These laws

have been used in complementary ways to curtail freedom of expression in film, and their influences on the development of Zimbabwe's national culture[s] have been contradictory. Films in the Shona and English languages have been affected, and this study seeks to determine the extent to which the films have been influenced by these laws, and how in turn, filmmakers responded to these laws through their artistic works. The necessity to reveal this dialectical relationship between artistic freedom and the struggle against authoritarian legislation had been skewed in critical studies that ascribed colonialism with extraordinary powers to control all the facets of African culture (Veit-Wild 1993; Chiwome 1996) expressed through film and other forms of art. On the other hand, the capacity of film and others forms of art to resist censorship has also been exaggerated in ways that underestimate the possibilities of ideological infiltration of film messages by dominant values. This theoretical hiatus or gap produced by over celebrating film's resistive capabilities and failure to detect ideological and structural fault-lines in the colonial narrative simplify complex configurations in the resistance narrative and the colonial and postcolonial narrative. The idea that these categories are stable will be interrogated using, among other theories, the "decolonial episteme" which according to Grosfoguel, moves analysis of film beyond political-economy paradigms that pay little attention to how the use of metaphorical language in film does not simply confirm the presence of layers of censorship of ideas, but that metaphorical language in film produces "knowledge from below"(op cit 213) that encourages irreverence of, and reveal contradictions within both dominant and subaltern narratives. Therefore, theoretical aporias or gaps exist in the works that have examined the relationship between Zimbabwean film and the limits of censorship. This is because these works have not made use of approaches that emphasise the importance of the heterogeneity of film's languages or semiotic systems which can carnivalise, undermine and expose how official efforts to censor film messages is not total but also invite subversive elements of the verbal and visual signifiers of film to generate meanings opposed to official power and even reveal meanings unintended by the filmmaker.

## **1.1 AREA OF STUDY**

Since 1980 studies have been carried out by scholars on Zimbabwean films to show the potential of film to represent social realities. Drag(1993) points out that earlier film productions such as *Corridors of Freedom*(1987), *After the hunger and drought*(1988), *Consequences*(1988) and *The*

*Sanctions Debate*(1990) mainly focused on the representation of liberation struggle, identity crisis, social issues such as teenage pregnancy and economic problems. An article by Mabweazara(2010) entitled *The Post-Independence Development of Film in Zimbabwe* traces the development of film industry and the challenges the industry continues to face. The article concentrates on the technical challenges of film production without providing much information on how socio-political forces such as censorship impede on the development of the film industry in Zimbabwe. Focusing on film representations and trends on film development is a success in itself, but what is problematic is that it appears that there is a conscious or unconscious neglect of an equally important area which concerns film censorship. An attempt to establish a comprehensive study on how film is subjected to state restrictions is provided by Hungwe (1991). In the article *Southern Rhodesia Propaganda and Education Films for Peasant Farmers, 1948-1955*, Hungwe (1991) provides an analysis into ways in which colonial Rhodesia used film to suppress information. This was done by excluding pertinent themes of the liberation war in favour of less savoury themes that looked down upon Africans—especially the peasant farmer. Bryce (2005) and Zimmedia(2010) provide informed discussions on how the War Veteran Association sought to suppress the *voice* of female ex-combatants by threatening to ban the film *Flame*(1996) that depicts a male guerilla raping his female compatriot. This brief review reveals a short-sighted tendency in Zimbabwe film criticism that analyse films with open political themes. The view projected in these analyses is that colonialism, the liberation struggle and the post independent narrative of betrayal are the Zimbabwean master narratives that encode censorship. Other social and cultural narratives that do not reveal censorship in more obvious ways have thus tended to be ignored. How to discern political censorship in film narratives with an emphasis on culture is rendered difficult, and equally, how to identify culture-based censorship in film with obtrusive political themes are occluded. As a result, how to pinpoint ways through which films contest censorship is also left unclarified. My study argues that censorship manifests as most politically damaging to creativity in film through a range of manifestations such as in banning, persecution of filmmakers, reproduction of social stereotypes and enforcement of undemocratic laws that undermine freedom of expression. It will be demonstrated that filmmakers have also developed a wide range of rhetorical devices of film languages to counter the possibilities of co-optation of film meanings that seek to expand the democratic space of the freedom of imagination and creative dissidence (El Saadawi, 2007). My conviction is that more studies should be done in the area of film

ensorship such that people are informed about the forces that conspire against the development of film industry in Zimbabwe.

## **1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

Despite having fought a liberation war that was meant to create conditions conducive to freedom of expression, post colonial Zimbabwe government reproduced colonial censorship laws and in some cases introduced new draconian laws that cripple free flow of information. Whenever Zimbabwean critics debate how these laws suppress freedom of expression, the discussions focus on the impacts of these laws on newspapers, radio and television. This situation has created conditions in which the specificity of how films are affected by these laws has not sufficiently been interrogated. Furthermore, the little research that has been done on the impact of censorship laws on films gives the incorrect impression that the censorship laws have had a totally overwhelming control on film language. Studies that attempt to move away from this position that ascribes extraordinary powers to the laws in regulating film meanings have inadvertently embraced a theoretical simplification in which it is argued that filmmakers and their films possess, at all times, the creative power to undermine and subvert the censorship laws. These two ideological positions underestimate the fact that censorship laws can be challenged, and that the contestation of these laws in film is contradictory in so far as some films reveal evidence of having been infiltrated by dominant values. To compound the problem identified in this study, previous critical works on censorship of film have tended to explore those films that are openly political in order to provide evidence of state control. Films that deal with cultural issues have consequently not been highlighted as cultural spaces where censorship laws are either entrenched as well as being resisted in those films that experiment with new film techniques. Censorship practices that range from banning of films, intimidating filmmakers, and self-censorship encouraged by legal statutes have not been critically interrogated in their complexities. Therefore, the silencing of film messages through official film censorship has had negative repercussions. These *silences* have unfortunately tended to ignore possibilities that the film genre can challenge the restrictions imposed on it by the state censorship laws and self-censorship practices entrenched in the minds of individual filmmakers.

## **1.3 HYPOTHESES**

Therefore, the hypothesis upon which this study is based is that:

- If censorship laws and cultural stereotypes can influence, control and narrow meanings in film, resulting in undermining creativity of filmmakers, this must be analysed to establish the extent to which laws affect the development of diverse creative voices that form national culture.
- If filmmakers are not mere artistic slaves passively influenced by the censorship laws, the assumption then is that the filmmakers do select certain meanings from reality and fuse these with their new ideas in ways that modify and bring originality to their works. This study investigates the extent to which filmmakers have authorised alternative visual representations of reality in their films.

#### **1.4 RESEARCH AIM**

This study aims to analyse the language of censorship and the censorship of language in selected Zimbabwean films in the Shona and English languages. In this study, the expression ‘the language of censorship’, refers to the legal language used in the laws that govern film production, while ‘the censorship of language’ refers to the effects on and manifestations of various forms of language censorship in the actual films.

#### **1.5 RESEARCH GOALS**

The goals of this study are to:

- Sensitise society about how film censorship can negatively impact on the freedom of filmmakers to express ideas freely.
- Educate audiences about the need to reject laws that control, censor and limit the dissemination of ideas and images that are supposed to promote human dignity founded on the recognition of freedom of artistic expression.
- Equip policy makers with practical ways that they can employ to encourage the growth of film industry in Zimbabwe.
- Arm film critics with the theoretical language with which to explain clearly how censorship operates within the Zimbabwean film industry.
- Encourage audiences to interpret film images in non-canonical ways that should point to alternative values in society.

#### **1.6 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

The objectives of this study are to:



- Identify typologies of censorship and analyse words and expressions in Zimbabwe's Censorship laws that restrict or even prohibit filmmakers from expressing freely their ideas and opinions.
- Reveal in what ways film is censored and also demonstrate the capacity in the semiotic language of film to undermine censoring discourses
- Explain why sometimes, filmmakers practice self-censorship
- Apply language-based theories to explain how films escape film censorship.

## **1.7 RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

- What terms are used in the legal language of censorship in Zimbabwean laws?
- How does the choice of film language, selection of characters, contexts of film production and style of representation encourage self-censorship?
- To what extent have filmmakers created film language that resists control by state laws?
- How do film audiences interpret film meanings and what kind of values do they bring to the cultural practice of watching films?
- To what extent do filmmakers creatively exploit the verbal and audio-visual elements in Shona and English languages in creating a dissenting film culture?

## **1.8 JUSTIFICATION**

The intended beneficiaries of this study are:

- The general public who should be informed about the negative as well as the positive aspects of controlling and regulating film language.
- The policy makers and law makers who should enact policies and laws that should balance the rights of the public to be informed and protection of the rights of people against material that is pornographic and that undermines the society's morals.
- Filmmakers who should know that to produce and distribute ideas are inalienable rights without which society will not enjoy freedom of creative expression.
- Academics, scholars, film critics and the general public should be aware of the cutting-edge and dialectical theories that explain holistically, the internal dynamics of the language of film.

Apart from identifying intended beneficiaries of this study, there are other more important reasons that justify carrying out this study. First, most research in Zimbabwe done on censorship have tended

to focus on the mainstream media such as radio, newspapers and television. There is no substantive work written in Zimbabwe regarding the interplay between censorship on film language by the state and the open and subtle ways in which filmmakers practice self-censorship. This scholarly gap has tended to marginalise attempts at understanding how film functions in restrictive situations where the notion of ‘third cinema’ emphasises film’s liberatory ethics. Second, previous studies have tended to over-emphasise the role of State censorship of art carried out by institutions such as the Rhodesia literature bureau. This has created a false picture in which the power of the State to dominate and limit what art can depict is presented as overwhelming. Consequently, Zimbabwean art or film’s capacity to authorise counter narratives through symbolical language of images and metaphors has been underestimated. The exclusive critiques on State censorship resulted in hiding the fact that artists or filmmakers also practice self censorship that undermines the reproduction of the liberational potential of their art. This study reveals that State induced censorship is sometimes complemented by censoring discourses inherent in patriarchal systems wittingly and unwittingly used by the same ordinary people who want to free themselves from various forms of censorship. There is no comprehensive study in Zimbabwe that has made a direct link between the shrinking of democratic space offered by film as public culture to the introduction of state laws such as POSA and AIPPA. What is present are fragmented reviews, most of them focusing on single films. My study differs because it explores the effects of different forms of censorship on political films, cultural films, film genres and the economic film. This will allow the reader to experience how censorship manifests in differently themed films as well as how in the same films, the embedded rhetorical devices help to contest the hegemonies of censoring discourses. Third, previous studies have relied on the ‘dominant thesis’ paradigm promoted in sociological theories to explain the censorship of films in Zimbabwe. This paradigm accords undue or extraordinary power on the state to stifle creativity in film narratives. My study recognises the importance of sociological theories, but introduces language-based theories to the analysis of film to detect where censorship is most felt, and how film language works to undermine infiltration by dominant values. The explanatory energy of language based theories derives from the recognition of the instability in the images and metaphors used in film language. These fractures encourage interpreting the meanings of films in more than one way. Language-based theories are dialogic (Bakhtin, 1981); they reveal how in telling a story, film reflects on itself in the act of telling “pointing towards endlessly displaced, deferred and

different meanings and supplements to meanings, [that produce] a palimpsest in which earlier or alternative meanings are never completely obliterated (Brink, 2007: 335). This deconstructive principle emphasised in language theories is “dynamic and disclosive” (Lazarus, 2007:341). Film does not only concern itself with representing “experience through language but with experiencing language through a destruction of representation” (Brink, op cit 333). “Destruction of representation” in film is achieved by or through a subversive interpretation of film against the “totalising rationalist progressivism” (Lazarus, op cit, 342) embedded in State censorship laws. Lastly, appreciating language as a quest (even in those films that appear hopelessly censored) manifests the fantastic dimension of language that according to Jackson “traces the unsaid and the unseen of culture: that which has silenced, made invisible, covered over and made ‘absent’ (1981:4). My study therefore, takes the films discussed in here, as evidence of ‘third cinema’ whose revolutionary imperative is to oppose the closed, monological forms of the language of censorship laws with dialogical structures that scrutinise the categories of the truths and moralities contained in discourses of official narratives. But in order to understand how film narratives can be inhabited by censoring values and also to comprehend how film language can fend off the possibilities of being appropriated to serve dominant interests, we need to briefly discuss the concept of language.

## **1.9 Understanding the concept ‘Language’**

Language refers first and foremost to what Brink describes as a “system, as a phenomenon, as a practice, as a process” whose “material” (Brink, op cit 336) existence is manifested as Shona or English. According to Wa Thiongo, language has a dual character—that is, it is both a means of communication and a carrier of culture (Wa Thiongo, 1986). Language communicates ideas, norms, values, attitudes, prejudices and perspectives. For Wa Thiongo (1996) the ‘language’ of real life is the matrix of the social relations of power and powerless that reveals values contesting for ideological supremacy in society. Censors are interested in controlling the meanings of the struggles in the language of real life. The social struggles that manifest the language of real life are rendered in the form of written and unwritten modes that use words, visuals, colour, sound and light. Couldry (2003) writes that the symbolic power of language impacts negatively or positively on society in what people do and also how they describe their social, political and economic spaces. Representations of struggles to censor films or to deny censorship in films happen inside and not

outside language. Language frames thought and as such, language carries the power to control, restrict, prevent, persuade and even block others from expressing alternative thoughts. The referential theory of language identifies the meaning of language expressions with that which language metaphorically or connotatively refers to (Alston, 2000). The metaphoric aspect creates different 'escape corridors' where the user of language has the leeway to use words and symbols with hidden meanings that may not be easily monitored or 'policed' by dominant powers. Because of the symbolical instabilities inherent in language, it leaks and in the process creates potential 'gaps' and 'ruptures' (Bakhtin, 1981) that the people whose artistic works are threatened with control or censorship can manipulate to free themselves. Fanon underscores further, the dialectical nature of language when he writes that:

'To speak a language is to take on a world, a culture; to be in a position to grasp the morphology of this or that language. But above all, to assume a culture, is to support the weight of civilisation. A man who has a language...possesses the world expressed and implied in that language. Mastery of language affords remarkable power' (Fanon quoted in Chivaura, 2012: 14).

The moment Fanon (ibid) speaks about language and power, he brings to attention how language can be manipulated to coerce, persuade or convince its recipients to agree with concerns expressed through speech acts or through visual imagery. Similarly, through filmic language, audiences can be lured towards predetermined goals set by filmmakers and those who control the material and political conditions of film production and its distribution. Lenin once asserted that:

'By virtue of its social function, language is not and cannot be an independent realm; it is indissolubly linked with thought, social consciousness and objective reality...the needs of which language serves. Thought does not exist on its own it is embodied in language. Language is the direct reality of thought' (Lenin quoted in Chivaura, 2012: 14).

The power in and of language to be used to name, describe, explain, and resist values imposed from above links language to the concept of ideology. The censorship laws are contested spaces where struggles to dominate and liberate are waged. To fully understand how censorship laws are a force field marked by resistance, incorporation, infiltration and acquiescence, it is imperative to define film censorship.

## 1.10 Film censorship defined

The concept of film censorship has been used to refer to related, but quite different practices such as governmental prior restraint on expression, criminal prosecution and punishment for obscenity and administrative regulation of expressive content by film producers. Peleg (1993:4) defines film censorship as, ‘...the systematic control of content by a government through various means’. Some important aspects of this definition are that film censorship involves control of content and that the control is normally instituted by the government. However, Peleg’s (1993) definition does not explain control of content by those involved at the administrative levels of film production as well as control that can be explained by an actor’s failure to master suitable language of expressing his/her ideas. An informed definition is provided by Dick (2008) who redefines film censorship not just a repressive tool with predictable results but that film censorship is an unstable process of actions and reactions in the struggle for power which show the degree of powerlessness of those restricting information.

This conceptualisation of film censorship is significant because of its ability to re/defines censorship as an *unstable process* and that it reflects the *degree of powerlessness* on the part of the censor. The instability of censorship is brought about by the subjective nature of film art—refuting as it does predetermined interpretations of social reality. Also, the view that film censorship reflects the degree of powerlessness of the censor points to the reality that to censor a film, ironically, is to acknowledge the potential that the film medium has to influence the behavior of the audience. In other words, censorship becomes, ‘...an iron veil to hide the lies, deformities and fantasies of a ruthless, unproductive power[which] begets...a numbing collective fear of meaningful social conversation or public discourse, of openly questioning the way things are and imagining what they ought to be’(Zeleva, 1996:10). In fact, official assumptions have always been that if film is capable of influencing the behaviour of people positively, nothing can stop filmmakers from using film to communicate ideas and images that undermine the government or state laws.

On the other hand, to put restrictions on film is a way of reminding filmmakers that they have a social obligation of transmitting health ideas and images to the public. This viewpoint is supported

by Moto(2009:129) who defines film censorship as, ‘the restriction by which authority(political, religious and media institution)disapproves of any expression or image regarded as dangerous to that authority and to the political and moral order it sustains’. The idea of moral order shows that film censorship is ideological. The understanding is that state authority insists on upholding a moral order and the State is inclined to act as it does do to justify its existence as a state, and as a way of countering competition from *other* ideological forces. Taken from this angle, censorship of any kind becomes a system of control in which authority deals with language expressions that are likely to question the *status quo*.

However, the narrowness of Moto’s(2009) definition, like the one provided by Peleg(1993) is that the definition confines censorship to the actions of authority but not to filmmakers and individual characters who might put constrictions on what they say or do through self-censorship. Cohen’s conceptualisation of film censorship, ‘as the exclusion of some discourses as the result of a judgment by an authoritative agent based on some ideological predisposition’ (Negash 2003:133) is also similar to one provided by Moto (2009). Negash(2003) goes on to say that Cohen’s definition puts all the definitions—from Enlightenment to Constructivists, on the spectrum of judgment, and then emphasises judgment on ideological grounds. While Cohen’s emphasis of ideology will better inform one’s focus on politics, the constructivists fare better in laying out the context and the public/private spheres of film censorship and criticism.

A dynamic understanding of what censorship is, is provided by Jansen’s definition that emphasises that film censorship ‘encompass all socially and economically structured proscriptions and prescriptions which inhibit or prohibit dissemination of ideas, information, images and messages....’(2001:133) Jansen’s definition is distinctive from the one provided by Cohen in Negash(2003) in that it accentuates the social and economic sides of modern film censorship by reinforcing the idea that market forces have replaced the Enlightenment notions of message control. Examining film censorship from the vantage of those who fear the potency of film as well as from the perspective of those who seek emancipation reminds us of the dialectical relationship of censorship and efforts primed to resist censorship.

Balio(1985)asserts that the classical liberal definition of film censorship has the virtue of clarity but the vice of limitedness. As used, for example, in classical debates over the constitutionality of law

restricting free expression, film censorship has come to mean *prior* restraint of *subversive* language and images mandated by law and imposed by police, judicial or administrative power (ibid). Balio(1985: 9) goes further to say that, ‘All other restraints on free expression—from after-the-fact obscenity to boycotts or protests that exert pressure on film producers to conform(consciously or unconsciously) to conventions of taste or *quality* –fall outside the terrain of film censorship’. The classic liberal argument insists that, without the legitimacy and force given to filmmakers by state sanctions, the pressure exerted on filmmakers is more or less self-correcting or at least, partly balanced by countervailing forces. These countervailing forces involve the context(s) of film production and audience reception of film messages. Using a postmodern interpretation, Balio (1985) just as Dick (2008) has done, redefines film censorship not as one or more discrete acts of state repressive actions on free expression, but rather as unstable processes involving negotiations, acquiescence or opposition to dominant discourses.

## **1.11. Typologies of film censorship in Zimbabwe**

Below are different types of censorship that a film can be subjected to, in Zimbabwe. The forms of censorship can feature in separate ways or one can influence the occurrence of another at different or similar times, in different or same places.

### **1.11.0 State Censorship**

Film in Zimbabwe, manifests itself as verbal, written and visual art. According to Nel etal (2008:15) state censorship is, ‘...part of the criminal law system which is an extension of social censorship since rules formulated by the community to determine what may and may not be said freely, may be incorporated into rules enforced by the police, the courts and film institutions’. State censorship assumes one of two forms namely, *a priori* censorship and punitive censorship. *A priori* censorship is preventive censorship that was applied to the film *Flame* (1996) before its release. The Herald newspaper of 13 January 1996 reported that:

‘Police in Harare seized negatives of film *Flame* basing on the argument that it contains subversive information and some of its parts were pornographic. Police said they would seek the assistance of the Censorship Board who are expected to view the film and determine whether it contains and undesirable scenes or not’ (Zimmedia, 2010: 1).

A week after the first report, the Herald newspaper story of 20 January Herald 1996 was to further report that: 'Police cleared the makers of the feature film *Flame* of obscenity allegations and returned rough prints seized last week saying there was no basis for laying a charge of obscenity'(Zimmedia, 2010:1). The two examples cited above reflect that *a priori* censorship endows power to particular people (the police) or institution (Censorship Board) to examine beforehand the contents of what is to be said, depicted and written through a medium of communication. On punitive censorship, Nel et al (2008) contends that prior permission for distribution of information need not be sought, but fines, punishment, imprisonment or compensation may be imposed on those responsible for the distribution of information, in whatever form, if it is beyond certain parameters laid down by the law. Punitive censorship is mainly focused on controlling the distribution of material considered as subversive. In Nel et al's (2008) conceptualisation of censorship, the latter is formed by blind repression and encourages a culture of intolerance on the part of the state.

Ngugi in Negash(2003) provides an expanded and contradictory view of state censorship by presenting five strategies that a state usually enacts to contain the potency of film language, and these are: (1) co-opting the ideas of the film (2) banning the film completely (3)forcing self-censorship through police terror (4) taming filmmakers as praise singers for the state or ignoring their concerns (5)attempting the impossible task of bringing filmmakers into political leadership. If all these fail, maiming their mind and body or expelling them from society through death or exile is also considered a viable censoring option. Nyasha Mboti(2012) provided concrete examples of instruments used in state censorship of films in Zimbabwe:

**Question: Do you know Zimbabwean films that have suffered state imposed restrictions?**

**Answer:** It is difficult to cite many Zimbabwean films that were censored officially because censorship in Zimbabwe happens before even the film is made! There is no censorship in Zimbabwe because censorship is everywhere: one automatically knows what not to include—because the topics that get you in trouble are well known. Call it censorship or whatever. I think it's very structural and violent. In 2011 the much publicised case in which University of Zimbabwe Law Lecturer Munyaradzi Gwisai and several others were charged with treason for showing videos encouraging 'North-Africa style' uprisings comes to mind. Clearly, 'videos' can lead to charges of treason in



present-day Zimbabwe! At the end of the year 2011 the Media Monitoring Project of Zimbabwe's offices were raided and videos, hard drives and other material confiscated by the police on suspicion of being subversive or containing subversive messages.

Raeburn's *Flame* is one case in point—when the film was briefly banned and some material ordered cut—for apparent 'nudity/pornography' when in fact the rape scene in question seemed to have rubbed the state the wrong way—since rape was not an uncommon occurrence during the liberation war—leading to war veterans lambasting/demonstrating against the film. I heard or read—I can't remember from where but it must have been the *News Day* paper—that a government minister—it must have been Sthembiso Nyoni—walked out of the premier of the 2010 film *Lobola*, objecting against its perceived cultural blasphemies. The film was briefly delayed from showing in the cinemas (this point needs to be checked against the actual facts) while its suitability was being vetted.

There is also, of course, the common practice of donor-funders limiting 'Zimbabwean films' to 'donor-themes'! Anyhow, many if not most Zimbabwean productions resort to innuendo and metaphor to poke fun at or to critically discuss the government and other 'taboo' topics. A case in point are the recent proliferations of 'Zim movies' being made Nigerian movie style—cheap, DVD-format, unprofessional, street-marketed but popular while managing to by-pass the censor. This, I believe, is the dawn of the real Zimbabwean film. These movies have slowly begun to recover, via filmic means, the space that official censorship had made its own. (Questionnaire interview Nyasha Mboti, 29 January 2012, 16: 46).

For Mboti(2012) state-induced censorship on film is 'structural' 'everywhere', involves banning of some material, and is also practiced by 'donor-funders'. At the same time counter censorship strategies by filmmakers involve the use of 'innuendo and metaphor' to poke fun on 'taboo topics'. In support of Mboti(2012), DeWhirst (2002) views state censorship as a form of control that involves bans, forfeitures, destruction of subversive material, investigations, interrogations, trials in courts, criminal punishments and incarcerations. In Zimbabwe, state censorship can even involve Central Intelligence Organisation (CIO) members who are likely to torture and intimidate a filmmaker who has produced a film deemed to be on sensitive issues. Ngugi aptly captures the contradictory nature of state induced censorship when he expounded that:

‘To let an artist go into global space means attracting the attention of the world. Besides, the word of exile may very well travel back to the territory to go on haunting the state. The state would still like to overcome the contradictions of prison, exile and physical elimination by doing all it can so that the artist could end up being a homeless wonderer in search of space’ (Negash, 2003:134).

In Zimbabwe the state is not always directly imposing censorship through invoking POSA or AIPPA; secret law enforcing agents are empowered to control, and monitor the production and dissemination of information (DeWhirst, 2002). This result in another insidious form of state censorship carried out at the administrative level.

### **1.11.1 Administrative state censorship**

DeWhirst (2002) points out that administrative state censorship involves methods of control by institutions set up by the government. Administrative state censorship manifests itself through a government appointed body that directly and immediately ban material or sometimes classify material (Nel atal 2008). The now defunct Media Information Commission (MIC) was one such example of repressive administrative state censorship. Once headed by Tafataona Mahoso as its chairperson, MIC was responsible for the laying out and application of ground rules of how media in Zimbabwe conduct business. Mahoso had the power to contest in the courts of law against any material—printed or visual, that he deemed *unfit* for the interests of the government. Government objectives were also supported through a seventy-five percent (75%) local content policy adopted by the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Cooperation (ZBC). Although the local content policy helped to promote upcoming artists, it isolated Zimbabweans from receiving alternative broadcasting from other countries. The 75% local content policy excluded and restricted foreign film productions that were likely to broaden people’s understanding of social realities. The 75% policy on local content became a form of administrative state censorship that was meant to control an influx of foreign films likely to unsettle the ruling government’s monopoly on information production and dissemination. Unlike the administrative state censorship advocated by the state, institutional censorship in the film industry is applied by the personnel working in the administration of film production.

### **1.11.2 Institutional censorship**

Censorship resulting from the production and editorial policies in the film industry exemplifies institutional censorship. According to DeWhirst (2002) excluding ideas not conforming to the

editorial policy of the film industry is a form of censorship. Conversely, including ideas that conform to the editorial policy is also another form of censorship. This contradictory position, as Donald and Renov (2008) point out is brought about by the reality that the borderline between editing and censoring in film production is always difficult to establish. By implication, the two authors are assuming that the material that is left out during editing could otherwise be the one that addresses the concerns of the audience. Interestingly, DeWhirst (2002) argues that film scriptwriters, producers, directors and editors have never agreed on ways of perceiving social reality. This implies that whatever ideas are included in the final product have censored *other* ideas that threaten the status quo or ideas that are viewed as less important. The audience, operating at the receiving end, may not have the chance to contest the validity of the ideas or information included in the film narrative. The style and content of a film's story become a form of censorship by virtue of their power that manifest in closing alternative ways of telling the same story. In Zimbabwe, most films dealing with cultural issues such as gender are implicated in painting a negative picture of the roles women play in society and culture through stereotyping. This happens at the point of meaning inscription (Kuhn, 1988). Stereotyping is a form of institutional censorship that prohibits possibilities of imagining change regarding the roles of women in the Zimbabwean society.

### **1.11.3 Economic censorship**

Kuhn (1988) asserts that the ability of film industry to function properly is determined by the availability of funds. Lack of proper funding means that film projects take a longer time to materialise or are dropped out completely. The result, as DeWhirst (2002) observes, is that information or ideas can fail to reach the audience. The situation regarding lack of funding is described as economic censorship. Economic censorship in Zimbabwe usually arises from a situation in which the state, Non Governmental Organisations or independent filmmakers decline to fund a film project that does not support their aims and objectives. When the State funds film production the likelihood of 'patronage' is high. Chiwome describes patronage as a form of censorship (1996:30).

### **1.11.4 Patronage as censorship**

Donors are prepared to sponsor films with ideas that conform to their interests. The control by donors of film scripting and production of film is a form of censorship that can restrict the creativity

of script writers, producers and directors. Drag(1993) supports Chiwome (1996) in viewing patronage as censorship in that sponsors can divert the audience from focusing on pertinent issues by proposing less savoury themes. Emerging as it were from economic censorship, patronage can make filmmakers to promote foreign values that do not suggest solutions to problems being faced by local people. Patronage is thus, a weapon of propaganda that can be used by sponsors to promote self-serving interests (Chiwome, 1996).

### **1.11.5 Internalized or self-censorship**

Lambe (2008) contends that self-censorship entails suppressing information that one feels can jeopardise his/her life under specific conditions. Commenting on the sensitivity of the rape scene in the film *Flame* Lyon (1997) writes that: ‘Among the female ex-combatants the topic of rape is still a sensitive issue, and women in particular are not enthusiastic to discuss it. Many ex-combatants do not readily talk about the war at all. Often based on their own experience, they fear that by talking about forced sexual encounters they will be labelled prostitutes’. The fear in ex-combatants as well as the fear in characters of *Flame* to expose atrocities other than rape cases is a reflection of the psychological state self-censorship. Chiwome (1996) asserts that a ‘suppressed’ psychological state of mind is self-censorship that emerges to lack of confidence in deciding what must be included in film and what ought to be excluded. Suppressing deep feelings and convictions arises out of fear of being victimised. Self-censorship, for filmmakers in Zimbabwe sometimes appear as a self conscious act of removing scenes and language expressions from film that are likely to draw unfavorable comments from the public. Self-censorship is a result of fear of being persecuted or rebuked; it is a deeply internalised culture of submission (Zezela, 1996). Fear inhibits the creativity of filmmakers and their ability to speak out freely about human abuses perpetrated by the state or by those powerful members in the Zimbabwean society.

Ben Mahaka—a Zimbabwean filmmaker provides a repertoire of censorship styles and attitudes that have been imposed on filmmakers in Zimbabwe:

**Question: What types of restrictions can a filmmaker be subjected to?**

**Answer:** Movement, access to equipment, access to events and locations, licenses and permits (Questionnaire Interview with Ben Mahaka, 12 April, 2012 15:40).

The state can invoke subtle forms of censorship besides relying on force, banning of films, intimidation and incarceration of non-conforming filmmakers. POSA has been used to deny filmmakers the chance to shoot films on specific locations or have access to state information that could help filmmakers to develop their storylines. The Zimbabwean government has declined to issue licenses and permits to retail outlets that sell films. In the same interview, Mahaka further provides concrete evidence of his personal encounter with censorship imposed by local authorities working under the auspices of government:

**Question: If any, how do you describe your personal experiences with state imposed control?**

**Answer:** Denied access to Mbare farmer's market for a documentary film on conservation agriculture by the Harare City Council. [I was] denied permission to shoot a documentary film on women's rights in Makoni District. (Questionnaire Interview with Ben Mahaka, 12 April 2012 15:40).

If censorship of filmmakers does not directly come from Censorship Board that the major arm that controls entertainment in Zimbabwe, it can emerge from local authorities who work in consultation with the Censorship Board. Local authorities can use their discretionary powers to prohibit the 'shooting' of a movie that is likely to challenge government policies or bring into disrepute the morality of people in the community from within which the 'shooting' is taking place.

### **1.11.6 Political Censorship**

Political censorship in Zimbabwe reflects what Mbembe(2001) calls the banality of power in which laws are unashamedly passed in order to openly undermine creativity. The Censorship and Entertainment Controls Act [Chapter 10:04, Part 111] states that the censorship board shall not approve any film or film advertisement which in its opinion:

- Depicts any matter that is indecent or obscene or is offensive or harmful to public morals; or
- Is likely to be contrary to the interests of defence, public safety, public order, the economic interests of the State or public health.

In the Censorship and Entertainment Controls Act[Chapter 10:04] words such as *obscene*, *subversive*, *indecent*, *offensive* are embedded and entrenched as the vocabulary of legal statutes

designed to prevent artists from writing material or creating film images considered offensive by the State. The Public Order and Security Act (POSA) gazetted in 2002 (POSA) prevents political insurgency, banditry, sabotage and terrorism (Kubatana.net: 2003). POSA also prohibits, 'Publishing or communicating false statements prejudicial to the state' (2003:1). The Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (Chapter 10:27) enacted and passed into law by the new black government in 2003 controls the

- Right to information
- Access to information
- Abuse of freedom of expression
- Protection of information whose disclosure will be harmful to law enforcement process and national security
- Information otherwise available to the public (Kubatana. net, 2003:1&2).

The legal language in the laws that promote political censorship of ideas is crafted in ways calculated to confuse artists as what exactly is expected of them. Legal ambiguity thus attempts to intimidate artists from experimenting with film language because artists do not whether or not their artistic language falls within the range of what the State deems subversive.

## **1.12 Theoretical framework**

No single theory can adequately explain the complexities of the relationship between language, film and censorship. Therefore, this study is based on eclectic media theories that explain the ambiguities and ambivalence in the language of film meanings that makes films a site of ideological contestations.

### **1.12.0 Theories on Media law and film censorship**

Film theories must be able to provide answers to the questions such as: What are human values? What is morality? What is harm? How can film censorship safeguard human dignity? Human values are defined as criteria for selecting the right conduct or action – what Plaisance describes as the capacity by human beings to manifest and exercise “judgment, preference and choice”(2009:21). *Choice* suggests that audiences have rights to express freely, independence thought and constantly

search for suitable values that sustain and not stymie life. Harindranath (2009) contends that in appreciating film texts we must exercise the critical right to view images as neither completely polysemic to the point of encouraging semantic nihilism, nor capable of presenting its narratives as unified structures. This is because, as McCoy (1993) points out, while the object of the laws on film censorship is to cultivate the right values in people, the truth about the shifting nature of values can be obscured by those with vested interests and the power to conceal reality. Theories must enable one to question the morality informing censorship laws. Litch (2002) states that ‘...there are no objective facts: the truth of all moral evaluations is relative either to an individual or cultural moral standard’ (2002: 120). The view that moral objectivism concerning what is right or wrong depends on what the rules and laws of the state stipulates, and not on individual values or not on what any group of people think about legislated laws. This notion must be interrogated. In other words, the view must be questioned and clearly explained because it is based on the dominant powers’ understanding of what harm done by images is and is not. Bandura (1960) argues that if children are exposed to violent images and pornographic material they can be negatively affected and harmed as they are bound to *imitate* and *vicariously* participate in promoting undesirable behavior in society and culture. However, what is harmful to State interests can in fact provide the conditions of possibility of freedom for the majority of people. Thus, the legal and philosophical basis for film censorship is shaky; it is not truthful for all, and at all times.

In Zimbabwe, section 13 of the Censorship and Entertainment Controls Act [Chapter 10: 04] says that it is an offence to print, publish, produce, distribute or sell an undesirable publication. From this understanding, a publication or production is considered undesirable if it is indecent, obscene, offensive and harmful to public morals (Feltoe, 2003). Listed on harmful and undesirable publications are those are deemed as compromising the interests of defense, public safety, public order, the economic interests of the State or health. Mazango and Chiumbu(2000) have identified four elements of indecency or obscenity substantiated in Section 27 of Censorship and Entertainment Control Act. According to the two authors film material is deemed indecent or obscene if:

- (1) It has the indecency to deprave or corrupt the minds of persons who are likely to be exposed to the effect or influence, thereof, or it is in any way subversive of moral values.
- (2) Whether or not related to any sexual content, the material is considered unsuitable if it unduly exploits horror, cruelty and violence.

(3) Offensive to public morals and likely to be outrageous or disgusting to persons who are likely to read, hear or see it.

(4) Harmful to public morals and deals in an improper or offensive manner with criminal or immoral behavior.

Words such as *obscenity*, *indecenty*, *offensive*, *morality* and *national interests* are tentative (Nicol 1984). There is no agreement on the proper limits of they designate both in the censorship laws and as can also be understood by a heterogeneous audience. Applied to film, the differential *traces* and *slippages* in the meaning of film language and images produce counter-cultures that can question the ideological basis of using these words to enforce a dominant worldview. Deleuze argues that censorship laws are born out of fear and mistrust of *other* potentially competitive discourses.

For Ndlela(2003) freedom of expression is an important aspect of democratic processes because it promotes all other human rights (Lichtenberg, 1990; Barendt,1993). The degree of press freedom in any country is seen as a barometer by which to measure the democratic quality of government and its commitment to rights and liberties of its citizens. Suppression of film ideas through the imposition of draconian censorship laws underlines the lack and fear of freedom. Censorship laws provide, for ruling classes, the ideological *frames* with which to limit, prevent, and prohibit creative thought among artists. The reasons for imposing censorship laws on art are explained in terms of class struggle in Marxist theories that emphasises the Production/Prohibition model.

### **1.12.1 Marxist theories and the Production/Prohibition model**

Censoring the language of film is usually defended by governments as an important exercise done for the preservation of moral order upon which each and every citizen depends for his/her safety and well being. White(1997) argues that controlling film images protects the ideology of the ruling class, the rich and the powerful people. Protecting the prevailing ideology is considered vital because ideology serves to legitimise the ruling class and the various social, political and economic arrangements they oversee. Thus, film censorship operates, ‘...on the assumption that the thoughts, feelings, opinions, beliefs and fantasies of human beings ought to be a subject of moral judgment, and ultimately, social and government responsibility’(1997:56). Dick (2008) disagrees and asserts that film censorship reveals the condition of *powerlessness* on the part of the censor whose action is usually motivated by fear. The purpose of laws that control film language is to categorise types of



verbal and visual expressions as *illicit* primarily as a way of marking out distinct classes of people within society.

Although the Marxist explanation brings out the power of ideology on film, the perspective undermines the existential powers of individuals to resist official discourses of censorship. The artists can do this by using film language in ways that create various escape corridors. These escape corridors involve the use of new media technologies such as computerised film images and cellphones with *blue tooth* facility that can enhance the exchanging of film images considered obscene or subversive by the state. The above view contradicts the believe upheld in the 'critical theory' advanced by Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno and Herbert Marcuse for whom the culture industry such as film was totality infiltrated by dominant values, resulting in no film space to contest the values of the ruling classes.

In Marxist language, *framing* is usually used to refer to the way news reporters shape the content and context of news items by putting emphasis on what should be thought about and the range of acceptable debate on a particular topic/event. *Framing* also depicts the power of filmmakers to decide what issues should be thought about and debate in film. Entman in Fortunato(2005:51) asserts that 'To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described'. This study views the film audience as a heterogeneous group that can re-organize and give coherence to the components that constitute a film frame, and direct attention to particular aspects of the frame to reveal meanings that are not always anticipated by dominant narratives. Thus, while some theoretical aspects of the production/prohibition model in the Marxist theory cannot be ignored my own study argues that *audience re-framing* of film meanings is a process that implies that audiences can subvert or negotiate meaning from a film narrative. *Audience framing* also implies recognizing the capability of film directors to select and confine film images so that the images appeal to a particular audience formed by cultural issues of class, age group, gender and race. To complicate my own deployment of the concept of re-framing films meanings, *audience framing* can manifest itself as an unconscious process in which audiences manifest narrow understanding of social reality.

The production/prohibition theory perceives stereotyping as one way in which dominant frames are constructed by a film narrative to undermine possibilities for change in life for the film's characters. A stereotype is an arrested frame of reference, because it misrepresents the symbolical identities of human beings to their lived experience. Wolffe argues that stereotype is constructed on the basis of *excess and inhibition* (1992:706). By *excess* of depiction, Wolffe (1992) understands that a stereotype is described or named using singular values that censor *other* possible interpretations. Since a stereotype is built on fixed frames of reference that emphasise singularity of values, then a stereotype is mystical. It claims for itself unitary values based on racial, ethnic, gender, class and generational absolutism and in this way inhibits critical thought. For Homi Bhabha (1996), a stereotype is *sutured* and as such it is prevented from realising its full desire that is to censor meanings. In film narratives, cultural stereotypes simultaneously recognize and disavow 'racial/cultural/historical differences' (ibid,1996:40). Stereotype recognises differences by investing certain meanings, and not others, in film images. For Bhabha(1996:40) 'excess of signification' on one hand, and rejection of difference on the other, make stereotype a site of dreams, fantasies, myths and obsessions operating in a tight system informed by the *false* impression of cultural stability. My study argues that in attempting to project one meaning and suppressing other potential meanings, characters stereotypes in film narratives ironically invites the critic to search for alternative meanings outside the figure that is stereotyped. Interpretations of realities off the screen provide alternative routes to escape censorship embedded in cultural stereotypes contained in film narratives. Psychological theories also expand knowledge how film censorship manifests and is contested.

### **1.12.2 The psychological Explanation**

Psychological views on the censorial dispositions on film suggest that behavior may be explained as a projection of repressions tightly imposed upon a character. The repressions entail controlling powerful but deeply recessed drives toward sexual expression or aggression. By censoring behavior, according to Balio (1985), a film character reaffirms self-control and increases the gap between the conscious self and disturbing impulses or temptations within. While Balio(1985) attributes psychological views of film censorship to character behavior, an expanded perspective that explains how a government can control film, and by extension, people's attitudes is expressed by Lambe(2008:488)who asserts that, 'Understanding the structural properties of attitudes is key to assessing potential susceptibility to persuasive attempts by filmmakers, and predicting the extent to

which related behaviors will be cultivated in the audiences'. Lambe(2008:488) goes on to highlight four government responses to situations where a film's free expression conflicts with attitudes and behaviors stipulated by laws of the state. The responses entail:

- (1) Stopping the expression from happening (prior restraint)
- (2) Punishing the source of expression after the expression has occurred (subsequent punishment)
- (3) Defining when, where or how the expression can happen (time, space and manner restrictions)
- (4) Doing nothing to stop the expression from happening (allow)

Unfortunately, the psychological explanation that drives officials to impose censorship laws inadvertently project dominant narratives as always winning in the ideological war to make meanings out of film viewing. The sociological approach provides the material drives for the existence of censorship laws in society.

### **1.12.3 The sociological Explanation**

Balio (1985) points out that the quest to censor film language involves the desire to have the censor's own values, morals; cultural standards or those of the group or class to which the censor belongs reflected through film. In Zimbabwe, the status of the ruling class is enhanced or diminished by the degree to which the morals, ethical or aesthetic standards of the ruling class are enforced through film images (1985: 515). From this sociological perspective, the motives for censoring films are multifold. The motives include prevention of film pornography, violent and erotic depictions, as well as inhibitions placed on representing certain social, political, economic, religious and aesthetic values. Unfortunately, the sociological explanation of why censorship happens does not expand to include an analysis of why the audiences of films emerge with their own meanings out of watching the movies. This perspective is explained in audience-reception theories analysed below.

### **1.12.4 Film censorship and Audience-Reception Approaches**

Marxist theories are reductive; they underestimate the capacity of film audiences to implant their own meanings in the images they are viewing in film. Stuart Hall (1980) viewed texts as possessing *encoded* meanings which would then be *decoded* by the audience. Hall (1980) reads media texts as susceptible to diverse interpretations based on politico-ideological contradictions. According to Stam (2000), Hall proposed three broad reading strategies treated as the:

(1) *Dominant reading* produced by a viewer situated to acquiesce in dominant ideology and the subjectivity it produces.

(2) *Negotiated reading* produced by the viewer who largely acquiesces in dominant ideology, real-life situation provokes specific *local* critical reflection.

(3) *Resistant or oppositional reading* produced by those whose social situation and consciousness place them in direct oppositional relation to dominant ideology (2000:230).

Hall's conceptualisation of audience reception of media messages has got some relevance to the concept of film censorship. For instance, his proposition that the dominant ideology possess the power to define social realities underlies the idea that state censorship has got the power to define or even sanction the kind of attitude and behavior to be expected through film images. Yet, Hall states that audiences can create spaces of dialogue during the viewing process, so that values which define film censorship can be negotiated. By oppositional reading, Hall implies that the audiences do not simply acquiesce to the meanings in dominant discourses in film. The audience can totally disagree with the kind of values that are imposed on film images by the board of censors. Morley's (1980) modified Hall's romanticised audience responses to experiencing film when suggests that some media messages remain *structured in dominance*. The *structured polysemy* promoted by film censors provides a range of interpretations from audiences can be trapped in a discourse that appears to liberated, but in actual fact infiltrated subtly by dominant values. However, a theoretical shift in focus from *structured polysemy* attracted *polymorphous traditions* of message reception whose main emphasis considered the context(s)—primarily the micro-settings of reception. These micro-settings aligned film to diverse *taste publics* whose ability to use new media technology placed audiences on a much stronger ground against state censorship of film images. For example, these micro-settings enabled individuals to access and disseminate material considered *undesirable* through DVD'S, DStv with multiple and exclusive channel repertoire, Cellphones with *blue tooth*, Internet and U-tube facilities. In my study, I argue, particularly in chapter five that experimentation with form, technique and style in films can undermine forms of official censorship of films. The audiences' theories place emphasis on people's ability to manipulate language to generate meanings that had not been intended to be secured by censors and even the filmmakers. My study is steeped in the language-based theories that encourage broadening interpretations of the contradictory play of

ensorship and the desire to be freed from this subordination and submersion into the values of the ruling classes.

### **1.12.5 Language Theories and the politics of Interpretation**

Conceptualising the language/discourse of film censorship starts with recognising the symbolic instability of semiotic signs. Barthes(1967) showed that language is made up of signs such as words that communicate meanings. People's perception of the world and understanding of social reality is constructed through words and expressions that they use (Bignell, 2002). Once a sign is produced, it begins a life of its own independent from the person who generated it, continues using it or interprets it. The implication to the discourse of film censorship is that once state laws construct words and expressions to define the kind of values expected from film images, the polysemic nature of film language allows state laws to be read in many ways. In other words, a sign and its semiotic materiality is what lies beyond the sphere of the subject (whether the censor or the censored). Ponzio(1993) notes that the sign's constitutive plurivocality is determined by identities of *otherness*. Otherness implies difference which is the ability of a sign to mutate to new forms of meanings, themselves having the capacity to resist ideological containment.

The Saussurian assumption that a constructed sign starts an important life of its own underlies the arbitrary nature of signs. Yet, the same idea of signs having a life of their own can rob signs of human agency in directing signs to meaningful social, political and economic activities. Post-Saussurian traditions have pre-occupied themselves on establishing how signs can be combined together to form discourses of the powerful and weak in society and culture. Foucault is a post-Saussurian theorist who explained how hegemony and power can be sustained through discourse. The idea that power is productive as well as coercive, situational as well as pervasive adds a crucial dimension to Foucault's contribution (McCoy, 1993). The Foucaudian dimension also explains why state censorship of film images should not be viewed as totally a disadvantage. Power authorised through discourse does not work only as a form of repression but it also displays its productive side. For example, the language of state laws that sanctions film from producing pornographic material or extreme violent images is done for the moral health of communities.

Yet, power's reproduction of social discipline by acculturating film viewers to intended norms and values is a sure way in which the hegemonic tendency of power is displayed. The dilemma, as noted

by McCoy(1993:147) is ‘...how to discuss power while remaining faithful to power’s relational tendencies to emerge, displace, educate, abuse, appropriate, and control without making of it either a formula or transcendental scheme’. The functional nature of power is further expanded in the Foucaudian idea of ‘capillary form of existence’ (Milner 1991:74) which is a point where power reaches into the very existence of individuals, touches their bodies and inserts itself into people’s actions and attitudes, their discourses, learning processes and everyday activities.

Although strong in its visioning of power’s functional role, the Foucaudian ‘capillary form of existence’ (1991: 74) underestimates human agency encouraged by intentional actions and reactions. The intentional actions and reactions can explain why some audience choose to oppose censored material by viewing it as an example of how freedom of expression is muffled by the state or institutional board of censors. The discursive subject of censorship is not entirely the construct of culturally determining forces via discursive institutions and systems of knowledge. The implication of viewing the audience as entirely affected by official discourses place limitations as the view assumes that audiences cannot ‘think outside the box’ or ‘go against the grain’.

For Derrida, discourses are *incomplete* linguistic systems that are produced by the ‘play of difference’ (Howarth, 2002:42) and which mediate and organise our experience of the world. By the word *incomplete* Derrida implies that there are *gaps* and *points of undecidability* (2002:42) in the cultural texts which enable official discourses to both cohere and organise themselves, but at the same time, serve to undermine their coherence and unity. Put in another way, although official discourses of film censorship are organised in such a way as to focus on intended behavioral exposition, the weaknesses of such discourses can inherently be explained by the instability in the language of reference. In film, linguistic instability breeds ‘polysemy’ in language, which means character’s words, sound and music, colour, character’s actions and costume, can be subjected to multiple readings. Thus, by its very nature, film text is a reconstruction. In this recreated text, the film *writes* its text, modifies and combines its codes, playing some codes off against others, and thus constituting itself as a semiotic system. The system is a product of de/construction which is a form of textual exegesis—the un/packing of film text(s), a way of questioning unspoken discourses while being aware to the text’s discursive heterogeneity. The concept of ‘text’—etymologically ‘tissue’ or ‘weave’ (Stam, 2000:186) conceptualises film not only as a mimesis but also as a re/construction of

reality. This view is important to my study that explores how films narratives refuse to be totally subdued by dominant narratives that take the forms of state and even modes self-censorship.

The Bakhtinian concept of heteroglossia (1981) complicates Derrida's *play of differences* concept. Heteroglossia is based on the notion of competing language and discourses as they operate within both text and context. When applied to my study, this entails the presence of the interlocking language of the film censor and the censored. As Bakhtin points out, the language[s] of heteroglossia may be placed side by side, mutually supplement one another, in intertext or even contradict one another (1981). Theories of intertextuality view every text as related to other texts. For example, a television text can operate within the broader context of a film text. Or a newspaper story can create important *leads* to the main story of a film text. The dialogue that obtains refer to the open-ended possibilities generated by all the discursive practices of film culture, the entire matrix of communicative utterances within which the film text is situated (Stam, 2000).

Bakhtin(1981) goes further to suggest the idea of a chronotope. The chronotope in film mediates between two orders of experience and discourse: the historical and the artistic. These two aspects provide fictional environments where constellations of power are dramatised. The Bakhtinian chronotope goes deeper to reveal how concrete spatio-temporal structures in film shots amplify meaning, shape characterisation and mold the discursive space between the language of the film censor and the censored. Within the spatio-temporal structures of a film shot, 'language is split, conflict-ridden, dispersed and drastically heterogeneous' even as it is 'systematic, highly coded, patterned and regular'(Palmer, 1989:313). The post-modern chronotopic multiplicities on the film screen facilitated by computer, video technology, high definitive camera and three dimensional configurations further amplify possibilities for fracture, rupture and cultural polyphony. In short, it can be a difficult task to impose hard and fast laws of censorship on film images, conflict ridden as it is by the imaginative dynamics brought by new film technology, the underlying discourses of the state, ideas of filmmakers, audiences' horizons of expectations, polysemous nature of film language (verbal and non-verbal) and the context of film production. My study makes use of Bakhtinian (1981) ideas of how film language can carnivalise, undercut, and subvert monological dominant discourses. This will help me to account why some films pay obeisance to the structures of feeling infiltrated by dominant and censoring perspectives, while other films accept the principle of

linguistic heteroglossia that encourages dialogism within narratives of films aspiring to germinate and inseminate new values in society.

#### **1.12.6 The liminality of visual languages in film**

Fuery and Fuery (2003) theorised liminality and fluidity of visual images in films evoked by bodies of performing actors. The critics emphasise the importance of visuals such as, colour, props and *mis-en-scene* that can have the potential to elide state censorship as well as challenge the ideological containment induced by filmmakers. The two renowned critics proffer an in-depth analysis on how the bodies of film actors can create ambivalence and ambiguities through subtle movements, gestures, facial expression and complex speech acts that can indirectly attack the *status quo*. To put it in the words of Fuery and Fuery(2003:55) ‘...film characters exploit the shifting nature of verbal and non-verbal cues created their bodies to disrupt, challenge and revolt against the dominant regimes of interpreting social reality. What this implies is that the body of a film actor has the capacity to question the ‘unseen’, ‘the naturalised’, and ‘the buried’ aspects of culture. When film actors perform stories of the oppressed or the ‘censored’, their physical and psychological action reflects the internal contradictions of the ‘dominant’ and ‘subservient’ cultures. In other words, the body of a film actor is a language of viable physicality and it has the potential to generate images that contest the body’s ideological standing reflecting attitudes of both the censor and the censored. The image of objects and people in film and theatre, painting or on television is seen not for what it is, but for what it is to the interpreting subjects/audiences.

Investing power into the body as a visual image implies designating specific spectating positions from which the body can be read as a liberating force or a regime of regimenting ‘preferred’ social and political meanings (Foucault in Fuery and Fuery, 2003). Therefore, power relations can operate as bodily expressions of un/official ‘truths’ that are part of the construction of the visual image. In the power struggle for dominance, the subjects of censorship can resist and oppose homogeneous social, economic and political positions that seek to unify and totalise all individuals into governed position. Using the term ‘governed’, in this context means to be an object of a field of perception or action designed by the wielders of power. Hall(1980) provides a solid theoretical platform when he asserts that, to resist forms of restrictions from filmmakers legitimation of power, and state power’s ‘essentialisms’, the audiences can imagine the bodies of film actors on their own terms to confirm,



negotiate or oppose the seduction of visual images. To put it differently, power relations can be played out on the threshold of the spectator's gaze and the gaze of the body as a speaking subject during a performance. Each time the body of a film actor is looked at as an image, it re-asks back: 'who am I?' in the context[s] of power politics. In asking this kind of question from the position of the censor and censored, the body of a film actor is determining the position from which it is to be viewed. What this implies is that the body of an actor—whether in its abject condition or as an image reflecting the spectacular in life, has the power to lure the audience towards a specific purpose. These nuanced understanding of how the bodies of the censored or the prohibited can find alternative ways of re-discovering their 'voices', provide the social, economic and political dynamics in visual cultures as theorised by Fuery and Fuery (2003). This analysis of the power of visuals in both reinforcing dominant censoring narratives and in many cases suggesting alternative and liberating values will be explored in this study. The idea is to aim to define the semiotics of film language in a holistic manner that emphasises the constitutive languages of the verbal, visual, colour, sound and background as implicated in either supporting the status quo or fighting against values embedded in censoring narratives.

### **1.13 METHODOLOGY**

This study uses the qualitative research method to the study of the language of film censorship and the censorship of film language. For Bradley(1992) applying qualitative methods to the study of phenomenon[film censorship] should be guided by the need to reveal and explain variations in the phenomenon that is normally assumed to have single values. The idea is to critique using different interpretations; restrictions imposed on film language by the censors. Rubin and Rubin assert that explanatory potential of qualitative methods are that they can suggest and bring in new 'dimensions and nuances [to] the original problem that any one individual might not have thought of' (1995: 140). Qualitative method make use of the technique of 'open coding' understood by Babbie and Mouton(2001: 499) to mean the conscious search for information pertaining to films that are being analysed. Unlike positivist assumptions promoted by quantitative approaches, the qualitative paradigm analyses the subtle aspects of film censorship that film critics know how to describe with words and expressions. Furthermore, there can be no single, accurate description that film critics agree upon regarding the realities of film censorship in Zimbabwe. For example, abstractions

promoted by film censors such as moral values, attitudes and various human behaviors cannot be objectively measured but remain convenient categories invented by society and culture.

### **1.13.0 Textual Analysis**

As a qualitative method, textual analysis aims to study the meanings of words and expressions. Textual analysis is a suitable methodology to analyse film language with a view of establishing the extent to which language is used by state laws and filmmakers to censor alternative ways of perceiving social reality. My assumption is that textual analysis enables this research to place value judgment to the language of filmmakers, language of state censors, and the likely audience responses. This study uses a qualitative or textual approach in its exploration of the language of censorship in selected Zimbabwe films in Shona and English. Qualitative approach has been chosen over quantitative approach because it is first hinged on the belief that there is no one objective 'reality' which can be observed and neutrally quantified (Lemon in du Ploy, 2001: 33). In other words, qualitative approach is a descriptive research tradition for things that cannot be instrumentally measured, such as feelings, behaviour, speech, thoughts and culture. Secondly, researchers using qualitative approach do not believe that human beings are homogenous and they can be simply categorised. Thus, the researcher chose this approach in order to explore the heterogeneous nature of human beings in interpreting film texts. In a nutshell, the study takes an interpretive approach to the study of the language of censorship. Interpretive social sciences aim to understand how people in everyday natural settings create meaning and interpret the events of their world. A limited questionnaire will be used to elicit views on censorship from critics of the Zimbabwean film. There is no contradiction in using a limited number of interviews in a qualitative research for as long as it is clarified that the research methodology is qualitative and interpretive in nature. In fact, interviews only serve to support certain views points or complicate them, therefore, there is a relationship of complementarity rather than replacement between qualitative approach and the limited questionnaire administered to film critics. The study makes extensive use of secondary sources to help explain and argue the case of the manifestation of censorship in films. Secondary sources also provide a perspective from which it is possible to analyse how the same films encodes rhetorical devices that directors of film use to challenge different forms of censorship inside and outside the films.

## 1.14 ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY

Chapter one introduces the study, provides background to the study, delimit the area of study, defines statement of problem, states hypothetical assumptions, gives aim of the study, research goals, research objectives and research questions. The chapter also justifies the study, provides limited but key literature on film censorship, explains the theoretical framework, outlines the methodological tool and indicates how the study is organised.

Chapter two provides an extended literature review on works that explore, the terms of the legislative laws that the Rhodesian government used to restrict meanings of films. Second, the chapter reviews literature that analyzes the nomenclature, words and expressions that are used in language of Censorship and Entertainment Controls Act, Public Order and Security Act(POSA) and Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act(AIPPA) to control the potential of films to express ideas. Chapter two also examines the perspectives that have been provided by written literature on selected films.

Chapter three analyses political films and evaluates how censorship is imposed on the films. The chapter also analyses how the same films reveal their capacity to undermine political censorship induced by the state. The films to be analysed are *Cry freedom*(1987), *Flame*(1996), *Gukurahundi: A Moment Of Madness*(2007)and *The Interpreter*(2005). It is argued that the ambivalent nature of the allegory structure in *Cry freedom* allows the film meanings to initially reveal how the state embedded its narratives of controlling the meanings of the film. Because metaphorical allegory is fractured, *Cry Freedom* reveals the limits of state censorship by exposing gaps that manifests silences on the contradictions of the liberation struggle of Zimbabwe as well as silences on the fratricidal war in Matabeleland and the Midlands provinces in Zimbabwe. *Flame* authorizes alternative discourses that reveal the contradictions in the liberation struggle. *Flame* was subjected to state *a priori* censorship. *Gukurahundi: A moment of madness* reveals attempts by alleged state agents to not only ban the film but also harm the filmmaker through attempted abduction. The feature film *The Interpreter*, received negative evaluative comments from state intellectuals and the film was eventually removed from circulating in the public domain in Zimbabwe. Despite these forms of censorship, the political films analysed in this chapter subvert the censoring discourses because the films continue to circulate in circuits not easily patrolled by state machinery.

Chapter four explores films that deal with a variety of cultural themes such as gender, race and class. The films to be analyzed are *Mwanasikana*(1995), *Kapfupi*(2009), *Nhasi tave nehama*(1993), *Neria*(1991) and *Everyone's Child*(1996). The films *Mwasikana*, *Kapfupi* and *Nhasi tave nehama* are rendered in the shona vernacular language. The chapter argues that the films used cultural stereotypes to impose self-censorship on what women can do with their lives. It is argued in this chapter that stereotyped is actually *sutured* despite attempts to represent it as stable, and coherent. As such, some filmmakers used stereotype only to create ground to imagine alternative values not included in the stereotype.

In chapter five, the study focuses on the short film genre. The short films that shall be analysed are *Asylum*(2007), *Tariro*(2007), *The Whisper*(2006) and *Akakodzera Ndiani*(2008). The chapter argues that on one hand the shortness of the short film imposes self-censorship on the director since he/she cannot elaborate at length the ideas in this form. It is argued that on the other hand, the short film is complete its shortness. Its power to subvert censorships inheres in that it leaves the audiences with mental questions related to how they should continue imagining possible alternative meanings that are deliberately not included in the short film. In other words, does genre impose restrictions or open up avenues to say the unsayable in the short film? The chapter aims to explore how the short film's fragmentary nature can respond variedly to state imposed control.

Chapter six focuses on the films dealing with Zimbabwe's state of economy. The films to be analysed are *Fraud and Corruption*(1995 ), *Zimbabwe The Best Country*(2008 ) and *The Transition: The Land Reform*(2010). The aim is to find the degree to which the economic film has been disallowed from saying things that are viewed as sensitive, subversive and taboo by state censors and individual filmmakers. At the same time the chapter explores how the documentary form can subvert censorship because it relies on verifiable data on place, persons, and what they say, where, and why.

Chapter seven is a conclusion and summarises the arguments generated from the analysis of language censorship in Zimbabwe films in Shona and English. Based on the findings of the study, the chapter also offers recommendations on possible future research areas related to censorship, film and language in Zimbabwe.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Literature Review: Historical background on censorship in**

#### **Postcolonial Zimbabwe**

*The extent to which media such as film exercise freedom of expression in any country is a barometer by which to measure the democratic quality of a government and its commitment to the rights and liberties of its citizens (Ndlela , 2003: 6 ).*

### **2.0 Introduction**

This chapter provides an extended literature review on the historical background to censorship laws in post independence Zimbabwe. The chapter is divided into four sections. The first section recounts the history of the establishment of censorship laws in Zimbabwe from 1890 until the 2009. This is followed by literature review of the literary-legal-based language theories that explain the concept of written text in the history of censorship. Section three deals with Marxist, hegemonic and audience based visual theories of censorship. The last section provides a literature review studies on Zimbabwean film and which discussing the theme of censorship. The reason for structuring the chapter this way is that it provides a diachronic understanding the relationship of film and censorship in Zimbabwe. This linear approach also enables one to reveal the diction, or vocabulary embedded in the legal language used to control, restrict, and prohibit film images. This chapter also briefly but vigorously criticizes how previous works have explained the relationship of film, language and censorship. It is argued that the dialectical movement between attempts at censoring film and the constructed reality that films transgress or subvert in the legalistic language of censorship suggests that it is not possible to reduce a film and describe it either as totally overwhelmed by censorship laws or analyse the films only emphasising their resistance sensibility.

### **2.1 Rhodesian Censorship laws on Film in historical perspective**

Zimbabwe was colonised by the British in 1890. This historical process was accompanied by the use of physical and military force (Ranger, 1985). Apart from the use of force, the white settlers introduced a plethora of laws meant to censor or prevent Africans from advancing the liberation cause. The Rhodesian regime used cultural censorship and violence to block Africans from

producing and distributing information that was deemed *subversive* through a series of Ordinances and oppressive legal statutes. However, this was not sufficient to control Africans. They evolved clandestine ways of eluding state censorship. Not sufficient research has been done to reveal how the Rhodesian laws on censorship were extended into post independent Zimbabwe. The nationalist government wilfully resorted to oppressive laws in order to control, restrict and to ban visual images, music, written literature and other forms of popular art deemed subversive to the state.

### **2.1.0 Obscene Publications Ordinance Act of 1911**

The restriction of film content and form in Southern Rhodesia—now Zimbabwe, emerged from the introduction of the Obscene Publication Ordinance of 1911. Patel (1997) points out that the Ordinance prohibited the possession and posting of indecent or obscene publications of printed and visual matter. Also, the ordinance criminalised and penalised specific conduct such as the publication of inter-marriages between blacks and whites. Furthermore, it was considered a crime to publish political protests literature and circulate it among black nationalists. The Obscene Publications Ordinance Act of 1911 used vague legal terminology as *obscene, undesirable and morally objectionable* to describe what Africans saw as creative literature that promoted freedom.

The ambiguity of the terms *abominable* or *mischievous* could be interpreted by the authorities to mean anything. Although the Ordinance was established with print media in mind, its terms of reference were also used to curtail freedom of film to express *dissenting or opposing* ideas. The repressive attitude of the Rhodesian government manifested itself through several speeches by D.W Lardner – Burke who was the minister of Law and Order. In one of his [in] famous speeches, Lardner – Burke is quoted by Drag to have said that, “The government cannot permit the prized ideal of press freedom to be used for spreading subversion when all are engaged in fighting a cruel and reentries enemy” (1993:43). The word *all* refers to both government and press, and as a metaphor the word implied that the colonial press, legislators and government were supposed to support each other ideologically to block black political emancipation. The word *enemy* was a euphemism for all forces—internal and external that had committed themselves towards the independence of black people in Southern Rhodesia. While the Obscene Publications Ordinance Act of 1911 was primarily focused on restricting the content and form of print media, the regulation of written and visual

images was introduced later under the ambit of Cinematograph Ordinance of 1912 (Mazango and Chiumbu, 2000).

### **2.1.1 The Cinematography Ordinance Act of 1912**

The cinematography Ordinance of 1912 was a crucial piece of legislation to the Rhodesian government that ensured that visual arts conformed to the government's aims and objectives of preserving white supremacy. Patel (1997) provides two factors that he views were important points for the Rhodesian government to promulgate the Cinematograph Ordinance Act of 1912. First, the enactment appeared to have been put in place to control art on celluloid exhibitions rather than the moral purity of the audience. Second, exhibitions given in private premises were expressly excluded from the purview of statutory control. Patel's (1997) conceptualisation of Cinematograph Ordinance emphasises the technicalities that were involving in controlling film images. However, Hungwe (1991) and Drag (1993) argue that apart from the existence of censorship that could be explained in technical terms, the enactment of the Ordinance Act of 1912 was focused on restricting the ideological potency of film images. For Hungwe (1991) throughout the colonial period from 1890 – 1979, the British government established cinema propaganda machinery to strengthen the coloniser's hold onto the colonised.

The primary goal of colonial films was to promote the white settler worldview and maintain white standards and privileges while ensuring that limited socio-economic and political development occurred among Africans. Visual images were tailor-made to prove that whites were superior to the so-called *uncivilised* native Africans. Hungwe (1991:23) goes further to say that, 'Development was construed in terms of relationships between two races (Africans and Europeans) that were at different historical points of evolution, with no prospect of equality in their future.' The Cinematograph Ordinance described relationships between whites and blacks in Rhodesia as *undesirable* and *morally objectionable*. Correspondingly, film images were not allowed to depict possibilities of relationships among blacks and whites. Instead, the legislation used stereotyping as a way of controlling black advancement within the social, economic and political spheres in a colonial context. Drag(1993) points out that much of the stereotyping directed to black people in Rhodesia was accomplished through informational and educational films that were screened in rural areas. Through those colonial film images, black farmers were depicted as poor, ill-equipped to deal with

the demands of modern farming and that they were illiterate. In contrast, white farmers were depicted as successful, enlightened and ready to respond to modern ways of farming. As a way of constructing the binary of good (white farmer) and bad (black farmer) stereotyping became a form of institutionalized form of censorship. Screening of these films in the rural areas was meant to spread ideas of white superiority among the black population living in the rural areas. Harry Franklin and Bill Gale who worked for Central African Film unit(CAFU) in Southern Rhodesia—now Zimbabwe, point out that, ‘...colonial development and welfare funds were conditional on proposed film unit concentrating exclusively on making instructional films for African audiences’ (Nell,1998:100). The strict conditions imposed on film through economic censorship also ensured that few locally-made films were shown to the African audience. Of the few films that were availed to the Africans, most of them projected colonial tropes of Africa as *uncivilised* and *barbaric*.

### **2.1.2 The Rhodesian Literature Bureau and Censorship of African fiction**

Although this thesis applies to film censorship, it is pertinent to briefly show how other forms of popular art such as fiction were restricted or even banned by the Rhodesian censorship laws. Chiwome (1996), Kahari and Veit-Wild (2008) provide comprehensive studies to show how the Rhodesian publishing policies sidelined African authors who specialised on fiction. According to the three literary critics, the Rhodesian publishing policies were mainly driven by commercial imperatives rather than African cultural considerations. An institutionalised form of economic censorship adopted by the Rhodesian Literature Bureau was meant to discourage creative works by Africans that were viewed as controversial by depriving the market for those creative works. As Chiwome contends, the Rhodesian Literature Bureau ‘...felt that adventure and crime fiction rather than serious novels would be suitable for the given type of market’ (1996:47). To make matters worse, Rhodesian publishing companies did not have competent editors. The editors used condemnatory terms such as ‘chaff’, ‘crap’, ‘awful’ and ‘naïve’ (ibid) without considering the cultural contexts within which those works of fiction were produced. These negative evaluative comments undercut the potential of black writers to reach many readers since a greater number of their novels were actually dismissed before reaching the public domain.



However, although Chiwome (1996), Kahari and Veit-Wild(2008) make the reader aware of the impediments that were placed on African literary creativity by the systems of Rhodesian censorship, the trio assumed that the influence of the literature bureau on African fiction was final and uncontested. Black writers evolved rhetorical devices through which they expressed views that undermined the restrictions imposed on African literary works by Rhodesian Literature bureau (Hungwe, 1991). Authors valorized their traditional values. Some, like Aaron Chiundura Moyo in *Ziva Kwawakabva* (1976) renders Cabral's concept of 'Return to the source' (Zegeye and Vambe, 2009: 93) in creative form and shows that ordinary people can create meanings outside the inhibitions imposed by colonialism. Within the field of visual images, the same kind of subterranean resistance and awareness is noted by Hungwe who asserts there is '...strong evidence that the colonial film-makers under-rated their audience who developed rapidly with successive shows of films, and began to raise questions about the messages to which they were exposed, and how those messages related to their economic and political aspirations' (2010:14). However, the growth in political awareness of black people was monitored by the colonial system which then intruded more drastic changes and amendments to the colonial laws in order to undermine African people's quest for freedom and extend white hegemonic control on black political activism.

### **2.1.3 Censorship and Entertainments Control Act of 1967**

The amendment of Obscene Publications Ordinance introduced statutes that restricted and prohibited the circulation of visual media considered subversive among African communities. Later, the legislation became Entertainment Controls and Censorship Act in 1932. The Act established the Board of Censors whose purpose then was only to scrutinise films and film advertisements (Ndlela, 2003). In 1967 various strands of the 1932 Act were combined to form the Censorship and Entertainments Control Act. The Act was meant to prevent the flow of information that was likely to undermine the Smith Regime. Hungwe observed that with the growing black political agitation in the 1960s:

“The state sought to counter African nationalism with a vigorous propaganda campaign that included taking over the broadcasting services, banning newspapers sympathetic to African aspirations and introducing draconian censorship regulations. Of particular interest to the history of film was the banning of a Michael Raeburn's film, *Rhodesia Countdown*(1969), which satirized white attitudes and racism against Africans”(2005:85).

As if this was not enough, Raeburn's book about the struggle for independence in Zimbabwe called *Black Fire*(1978) was also banned(ibid). He was forced to flee the country until after Zimbabwe's independence in 1980. The 1967 Act, together with the Emergency Powers (Maintenance of Law and Order Act) gave the powers to the Rhodesian government to regulate, control, restrict or prohibit the printing or publishing of newspapers as well as the production of films viewed as subversive to the colonial regime. Some 'benign' forms of censorship occur even in the most democratic society in the world. However, in colonial Rhodesia the degree and insensitivity to which freedom of expression was undermined among African communities was deliberately meant to cripple their thinking capacities and prolong as well as de-activate revolutionary consciousness agitating for political independence. What was described as censorship for the *public interests* actually served the interest of a minority of white bent on holding onto political power and discriminate against Africans in economic matters.

## **2.2 Capturing moments of transition: From Rhodesia to Zimbabwe**

The moment of transition from Rhodesia to Zimbabwe can be captured using Althusser's notion of the power of ideology as a 'social practice' (Howarth, 2005:92) that functions to turn individuals into subjects. Furthermore, ideology provides subjects with particular characteristics such as *class outlook* and specific social and political identity. As Althusser argues, these *class outlooks* are embodied in and *naturalised* through ideological state apparatuses such as media, schools, church, political associations and family (ibid).

Above we saw that the colonial era, the ideological state apparatuses found legitimacy and extension through the repressive state apparatuses (Army, Police and the Legal system) that were used without remorse to control a restive black population as well as persecute Black Nationalist leaders. Through the predominately white army and police, Law and Order (Maintenance) Act (1965) and a litany of laws cited above, public platforms for blacks and liberal whites who were agitating for political change were dismissed at all costs. Many a times Black Nationalists had to use clandestine means to further the agenda of the revolution.

Ndlela (2003) points out that when the new nationalist government of Zimbabwe assumed power 1980, it amended and introduced new laws as well as retained some laws under the ambit of

Censorship and Entertainments Control Act of 1967. The Rhodesian-style of implementing full state control on media was adopted by the new government of Zimbabwe to curb dissenting *voices* (Zaffiro, 2002 and Chuma, 2010). Moyo puts it more succinctly by asserting that both colonial and postcolonial governments in Zimbabwe used media for ideological and hegemonic purposes, although this was disguised as '*national interests*', '*national security*' and '*national sovereignty*'(2004:12). Furthermore, the Censorship and Entertainments Control Act promulgated in 1999 introduced *draconian* statutes that curtailed freedom of filmmakers to express ideas and information. These statutes projected themselves as naturalised *givens* with universal *truths*, and yet they were hiding specific class interests, political and the ideological limits of their claims.

The new black government put concerted negative efforts to maintain a regime of laws that would stymie the creativity of cultural producers. However, some Zimbabwean filmmakers learnt to use both overt and covert ways to counter the censorial motives of Censorship and Entertainments Control Act. Wayne (2001) provides a redeeming feature that characterises film language by contending that it [language] is slippery, and can articulate meanings that constantly shift into new terrains that can exceed individual, institutional and state intentions to put restrictions on film images. Film language has the potential to undermine legal and censorial fantasies of a unified and totalised world free of social and political contradictions. Theorising on the transformative nature of contradictions in art such as film, Spirkin (1983) writes that contradictions are subsumed, created and revived to articulate new forms of social and political realities. O'Neill & Wayne calls attention to 'the dialectical image' (2008: 29) that has the potential to awaken in the audiences the ideological power of moments of disjunctures and ambiguities in film narratives. The dialectic principle of contradictions is socially and politically embedded in film images, and this allows films to be read in different ways that can bring into crisis the *preferred meanings* of censorial powers. Films can create open-ended 'spaces of the visible' where audiences are absorbed into the activity of 'deliberation', even if the audiences do not individually participate in the process of producing film images (Thompson, 1995:244-258). However, the damaging effect of state censorship cannot be taken lightly. This is evident in the following state censorship laws promulgated in post-independent Zimbabwe to restrict and also prohibit films from reaching the public domain as part of *a priori* censorship.

## **2.3 Zimbabwean Laws on film censorship**

The Zimbabwean laws that are notoriously applied to control, restrict and prohibit films viewed by the authorities as '*obscene*' and '*subversive*' are Censorship and Entertainments Control Act promulgated in 1996, Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA) officially pronounced in 2001 and Public Order and Security Act (POSA) promulgated in 2002. Censorship and Entertainments Control Act is frequently invoked whenever the state feels that filmmakers are operating outside the preferred frames of officially sanctioned meanings. AIPPA and POSA are also invoked to complement and strengthen the terms of Censorship and Entertainments Control Act.

### **2.3.0 Censorship and Entertainments control Act 1996 [Chapter 10:04]**

The Censorship and Entertainments Control Act [Chapter 10:04] regulates films in Zimbabwe using ambiguous and vague terms. For example, the law is not clear on what is deemed, 'undesirable, offensive or harmful to the public morals' (Mazango and Chiumbu, 2001:63). In terms of Sections 11 and 27 of the Censorship and Entertainment Controls Act, a publication is deemed undesirable if it:

- (1) Is indecent or obscene or is offensive or harmful to public morals.
- (2) Is likely to be contrary to the interests of defense, public safety, public order, the economic interests of the State or public health.

The element of indecency or obscenity is substantiated in Section 27 which says that material shall be deemed to be indecent or obscene if:

- (1) It has the indecency to deprave or corrupt the minds of persons who are likely to be exposed to the effect or influence, thereof, or it is in any way subversive of morality or:
- (2) Whether or not related to any sexual content, it unduly exploits horror, cruelty or violence, whether or otherwise.
- (3) Offensive to the public morals if it is likely to be outrageous or disgusting to persons who are likely to read, hear or see it.

(4) Harmful to public morals if it deals in an improper or offensive manner with criminal or immoral behavior.

Terms such as *obscenity*, *indecent*, *offensive* and *national interests* are not clearly defined and as such the vocabulary in the Act is the starting point of the State's censorship practices. The terms are characterised by a multiplicity of meanings and lack agreement on the proper limits of the application of law (Nicol, 1984). Patel (1997) argues further that assuming the possibility of some objectively ascertainable response to what is obscene; the paradox is that the charge of obscenity may be avoided by raising the *aversion* defense. The contention is that material cannot be deemed obscene if it is so repulsive that it discourages the sexual drive rather than stimulate it. This argument, although bordering on sophistry, has been accepted in several instances as a means of exculpating literature of merit (ibid, 1997). Similarly, to determine the constitutionality of restricting obscenity regarding film images, several questions have to be posed and these are:

- (1) Does the restriction interfere with the right to freedom of expression as guaranteed under the constitution?
- (2) Is the restriction 'prescribed by law' or 'under the authority of any law'?
- (3) (3) Does the restriction serve a legitimate objective of sufficient importance to warrant overriding a constitutionally protected right?
- (4) Is the restriction reasonable, and necessary or justifiable in a democratic society? (Stevens, 2000).

### **(1) Freedom of expression as guaranteed under the constitution**

Stevens (2000) contends that the purpose of the *interference test* is to ensure that strict requirements of constitutional law are applied only in the context of *restrictions* that actually limit freedom of expressions. The test should address both the effect and the objective of legislation so as to determine whether there is an abridgement of freedom of expression or not. If, for example, the restrictions in the law of Censorship and Entertainments Control Act [Chapter 10:04] have the purpose and the effect of banning and restrictively classify publications and films, then the law clearly interferes with the right to freedom of expression.

## (2) Restrictions Prescribed by Law

Restrictions on fundamental rights are prescribed by or under the authority of law. A restriction does not satisfy the *prescribed by law* part of the test if it is so vague that citizens cannot reasonably predict what the requirements of law are. Such a statute or such part thereof will be void on the grounds of vagueness (Stevens, 2000). For example, when the rape scene in the film *Flame (1996)* was dismissed on the grounds that the scene was *obscene* and *pornographic* the law could not justify what was pornographic about that scene. Ultimately, the producers of *Flame(1996)* were acquitted for the criminal case of showing pornography and obscene images but the producers were forced by the Censorship Board to remove the rough cuts that included much of the ‘uncensored’, and therefore, some of the most authentic images about the contradictions of the liberation struggle. In some jurisdictions, words such as *indecent* and *obscene* have been rejected as being excessively vague. Charges on obscenity become problematic because they attract questions such as: ‘What behavioral response is it that the law seeks to curb or eliminate? Is it feelings of disgust, the sense of shame, tendencies to sadistic cruelty, unbridled lust or merely the sensual urge—or all of these things’ (Patel, 1997: 65). Similarly, terms such as *offensive or harmful to public morals* of section 11 and 27 of Censorship and Entertainments Control Act are fundamentally ambiguous. The ambiguity, in the case of Zimbabwe, would mean the government can put restrictions to any material that it deems fit to qualify within the description: ‘offensive or harmful to public morals’ (Stevens, 2000:14).

To invoke a parallel example as a point of comparison with Zimbabwean censorship laws, in South Africa, legislators have opted for a detailed list of prohibited material. Schedule 1 of the 1996 Films and Publication Act, as amended, defines **XX** Classification of prohibited publications as material which contains a real or simulated visual presentation of:

- a. Child pornography
- b. Explicit violent sexual conduct;
- c. Bestiality

- d. Explicit sexual activity which degrades a person and which constituted incitement to cause harm; or
- e. The explicit infliction of or explicit effect of extreme violence which constitutes incitement to cause harm. For their part, films in South Africa have codified the nature of images that can be expected, for example:

**13 PG** – means children under the age of 13 can watch the film but parental guidance is needed,

**16 VLSN** –means the film is strictly for 16 year olds and above because it contains violent language, sexual scenes and nudity.

**18®** - means the film is restricted only to people who are 18 and above because it contains pornographic scenes and extreme violence (Nel etal, 2008).

Though not the most liberal of censorship laws in the world, the South African laws on censorship indicate and provide clear reasons for what is described as *permitted* or *not permitted*. This is unlike in post-independence Zimbabwe where statutes on censorship have retained linguistic vagueness, and ambiguity that can sometimes allow the state to arbitrarily use them against artists viewed as creating values outside the political line favourable to government policies. On one hand, the example of Zimbabwe laws reveals how it is possible for censorship laws to be used arbitrarily to choke freedom of expression. On the other hand, the example of the South African laws and how these laws strive to be as clear as possible reveals how laws can be used to enable filmmakers to know the limits within which they are creating images. One can argue that all two examples carry the desire to censor, but as argued above the degree to which censorship is practiced in the two countries alluded to differ. The important questions become not whether or not films must be censorship but to what extent, for what purposes?

### **(3) Restrictions to serve a Legitimate Objective**

Stevens (2000:15) makes an important point when he asserts that, ‘Restrictions on freedom of expression must serve a legitimate legislative objective which is of sufficient importance to justify limiting a fundamental right’. It is a fundamental right for audiences to be informed through visual images. However, if films expose, especially to children, pornographic material and images with

extreme violence, law has a legitimate objective to protect children from being corrupted by such obscene images. Feltoe (2003) supports the above viewpoint by contending that it is clear that the prevention of harm to children satisfies the standard of law's legitimate objective. However, it is much less clearer that the objective of preventing offence to public sensibilities warrants restricting freedom of expression, especially when the language in the ordinances and statutes obfuscates rather than clarify what is and what is not subject to censorship. The ideological silences embedded in legal words that are vague, are in fact calculated to undermine film creativity and then disown responsibility and consequences for doing so. This is a subtle form of censorship upon which the basis of enforcing other banal forms of censorship such as banning or prosecuting, and intimidating artists rests, and serves the authorities in power. When artists are harassed then they are likely to censor their next piece of art, resulting in self-censorship which ultimately serves the interests of dominant values in society.

#### **(4) Restrictions that are Reasonable, Necessary or Justifiable in a Democratic Society**

Even when the censorship laws serve legitimate objectives, the language of law has to be carefully designed and expected to advance legitimate objectives in practice. Measures which in practice fail to achieve it cannot be justified (Stevens, 2000). Second, the effect of any restriction must, so far as is possible, be limited to the harmful expression which it is designed to restrict. According to Section 20 (2) of Censorship and Entertainments Controls Act, a harmful expression is tantamount to violate, "...interests of defence, public morality or public health or for the purpose of protecting the reputations, rights and freedoms of other persons." (Ndlela, 2003: 7) Although the legitimate aim in the above statute is to protect national security and individual reputation, its terms are wide and ambiguous. In practice, and especially in Zimbabwe, experience has shown that the concepts *national security* and *public order* have been widely defined to include virtually every aspect of national life (Ndlela, 2003). By implication, it means any film that elects to depict security forces violating the humanity of ordinary who may/or may not have a just cause will be prohibited from being screened. The film can easily be misinterpreted by authorities as inciting the public and therefore viewed as a threat to *national security* or *public order*. Therefore, in a democracy, there is a need to provide specific provisions that clarify limitations on the nature of a right, the importance of the purpose of the limitation, the nature and extent of a limitation and the relation between the



limitation and its purpose (Ndlela, 2003). The limitations of law and its application are not also clearly defined in the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA) of 2001 and Public Order and Security Act (POSA) of 2002 that the new nationalist government imposed on its people under the guise of preserving national sovereignty.

### **2.3.1 Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (Chapter 10:27) of 2001**

Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA) enacted in 2001 is generically connected to the Rhodesian censorship laws such as Law and Order [Maintenance] of 1965 and Official Secrets Act of 1970. Ndlela(2003) points out that the Rhodesian government justified these repressive laws on the grounds that the country was facing a security threat from the African nationalist struggles and the general political unrest in African townships. Similarly, in the post-independent Zimbabwe, the promulgation of AIPPA was done within the context of a political and economic *crisis* in which the state justified the existence of AIPPA as a piece of legislation that safeguards Zimbabwe from foreign intervention. Contrary to this official viewpoint, Chuma (2010) argues that AIPPA was designed to silence a critical media and increase the influence of the Minister of Information on mediated communication systems in the country. Indeed, the aggravating effects of AIPPA are evident in the closure of the *Daily News* and its sister weekly, the *Daily News on Sunday* in September 2003. The weekly *Tribune* suffered a similar fate in May 2004. More so, the restrictive terms of AIPPA makes it difficult for a filmmaker to research on or have access to information that he/she can use to create a film, especially one that is critical of the social, political and economic conditions in Zimbabwe. The major provisions of Access to information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA) are:

- Right to information
- Access to information
- Abuse of freedom of expression
- Protection of information whose disclosure will be harmful to law enforcement process and national security (Kubatana.net, 2003).

## **(1) Right to Information**

The function of media such as film is to provide the platform for the free exchange of ideas synonymous with a '*marketplace*' of knowledge. The concept of marketplace of ideas emerges from the philosophical arguments raised by John Milton about truth and falsehood competing with each other in a free and open encounter. Similarly, the theorist Habermas proposes the concept of 'public sphere' (Ndlela, 2003:5) to describe a space where rational critical discussion has the purpose of influencing civil society. Film censorship has the unfriendly character of violating the right of citizens to access information that they can use to engage in constructive debate. While democracy assigns the ultimate responsibility to the public on how it wishes to live, it presupposes that the public is adequately informed when it makes that judgment. The right to produce and access cultural messages is instrumental in fulfilling the above role. The question that this study explores is to what extent the films reveal this, and if they do not, one needs to account why it is so.

## **(2) Access to information**

Regarding access to information, part 11 of AIPPA stated that:

(1) Where an applicant is granted to a record or part of a record, the head of a public body shall:

(b) give him the opportunity to take notes from such record or part thereof; or

(b) where the applicant has requested a copy of a record or part of a record, provide him with such copy if it can be reproduced, and where it cannot be reproduced, give the applicant an opportunity to examine such record or part thereof (Kubatana.net,2003).

The above provisions lay down conditions for accessing information from a public body. Ndlela (2003) argues that access to information is an important element of freedom of expression, which includes the right to seek and receive, as well as to impart information and ideas. Filmmakers have an intellectual obligation to generate ideas, and a social obligation to inform the public. Lichtenberg (1990) and Keane (1991) view access to information as a vital part of the democratic process. Citizens in a democratic society need information upon which to base their decisions. Access to information enables the public to know what the government is doing well or not doing well and

empowers people to question why? This is linked to the watchdog role of media. Ndlela (2003) asserts that government bureaucracies are by their very nature hostile to free flow of information which is the cornerstone of modern democracy. Mathews optimistically writes that:

“The key to the turning of bureaucratic power and to the introduction of bureaucratic power and to the introduction of bureaucratic accountability is an effective right to official information available both to legislatures and individual citizens” ( 1978:14).

However noble Mathew’s (1978) argument is, in Zimbabwe, a filmmaker wanting to research and produce a documentary film about how Parliament conducts its business can be restricted not by provisions on Access to Information but by complex bureaucratic procedures and processes. For example, the head official can simply delegate duties to another person – a permanent secretary or deputy, involving conditions and restrictions as the head deems fit. Those who have been delegated what to do cannot do what they think is correct. Through this way, government assumes absolute control over downward flow of information, thereby making the state to claim/assume that it is the only authentic source of uncontestable *truths* or information. This form of censorship by default suggests a multitude of instruments that *power* can command in order to protect its existence. In addition, Ndlela points out that, “the heads of public bodies may refuse to disclose information that is described by the Act as ‘not in the public interest’ (2003:29). Moreover, Part (iii) of the Act presents challenges to any filmmaker hoping to have subtle details on how public bodies function because Part (iii) bars media workers from having access to any deliberations of cabinet and local government bodies, information deemed harmful to national interests, national security as protected by the Official Secrets Act, foreign relations and personal privacy of officials. Furthermore, terms such as *national interests*, *national security* and *personal privacy* are terms that are usually used to undermine access to information. Ndlela criticises the restrictive nature of Zimbabwean laws when he writes that, “The procedures of access and the hierarchical structures undoubtedly work towards the suppression of information” (2003:29). The present study explores how laws such as POSA and AIPPA contribute in censoring film creations in Zimbabwe. The study also examines the ways in which Zimbabwean independent filmmakers use different languages of films such as the verbal, the visuals, sound and light in order to side-step censorship and access or make available alternative visions of Zimbabwe from those provided in officially authorized films in Shona and English.

### **(3)Abuse of freedom of expression.**

While accepting that freedom of expression is a highly valued fundamental right, it is also important to note that the right to express one's self freely can be subjected to abuse. Plaisance (2009:1) argues that in view of the principles of human behavior underlying ethical conduct, filmmakers cannot simply say, "but it is just a movie. It is just entertainment, when put to task about the morality of their productions". At the same time, film industry and individual filmmakers may not be held responsible for the ways people interpret or react to a movie. A fact emphasized in the social responsibility theory is that filmmakers should not hide under the banner of freedom of expression when in fact are bent on transmitting subversive information to the public. Ndlela (2003) contends that freedom to expressing oneself through film operates within a context of competing rights and interests so that it is not justifiable for filmmakers to simply violate *other* people's rights in the name of exercising freedom of expression. One Zimbabwean film critic, Nyasha Mboti responded to a question on the potential role of film in promoting freedom of expression in a tentative answer:

**Question: What is the role of film in addressing the critical issue of freedom of expression?**

**Answer:** Well, in my experience of studying films in social contexts, film plays two roles, depending on the context of use. If we divide the world into Fanonian categories ('settler vs native, town vs country' [Fanon 1963:37-39], which is what I always do when treating things conceptually, then film is used in the service of justice or injustice. Now, it depends on what that 'freedom of expression' is being used for. Is it a just or unjust freedom of expression? Because we see things differently, and see different things in the films we watch—depending on whether we are coming from the metaphorical 'settler towns' or 'native towns'—we will always USE films in different ways. As such, there is really NO one role for film. I studied Hollywood films about Africa in my PhD thesis(Mboti 2010, University of Zimbabwe) and observed that films generate 'gazes' about the world—a result of films being fragments of lived realities. As such, it depends on what realities one is living. Interpretations follow from empirical realities. People do not see things they do not live. You see the films you live.( Questionnaire interview Nyasha Mboti, 29 January 2012 16: 46).

It is clear that the concept of freedom of expression is problematic. It is viewed with different 'spectacles' that are informed by lived realities where film can be used to promote a just or an unjust social order. However, where Mboti seems to miss the point is when he asserts that 'people do not

see things they do not live.’ This kind of approach is likely to stifle creative imagination that can make individuals imagine film as a convenient medium of communication that can promote freedom of expression even in the most oppressive, restrictive or prohibitive conditions created by totalitarian regimes. Mboti’s understanding that film interpretations follow from empirical realities is scientifically deterministic. In other words, Mboti’s attempt to quantify and oversimplify human experiences can fail to explore fully the subtleties and ambiguities of human behaviour and attitudes *vis a vis* freedom of expression. Inadvertantly, ‘*People do not see things they do not live. You see the films you live*’ is a form of censorship that critics can unknowingly impose censorship on the creative imaginations, be they of filmmakers or audience. My study argues in a different direction and will emphasize the point that the metaphorical language (verbal, visual) in film makes this medium possess the capacity to anticipate contradictions in the future life yet to be lived. This perspective is underscored and supported in Garuba’s (2003) famous formulation that African art can pre-possess the future using its fantastic elements that project the desire for a better future against previously lived conditions in abjectivity.

To return to the censorship laws in Zimbabwe, according to Part XI of AIPPA, a person registered in terms of this part abuses freedom of expression by any means of a mass media service for the purpose of publishing when:

- (a) Information which he or she intentionally or recklessly falsified in a manner which (i) threatens the interest of defense, public safety, public order, the economic interests of state, public morality or public health; or (ii) is injurious to the reputation, rights and freedoms of other persons (Kubatana. net, 2003: 29).

The terms such as *public order* and *public morality* are wide and ambiguous to the extent that the executive can misuse the *open ended-ness* of these terms to justify restriction on the freedom of expression. However, this study argues for the necessity to view film differently, that can imply paying attention not only to words but to the visual elements in film, the mixture of colour and lighting because these have the capacity to fracture or supply surplus meanings that censors may not be able to limit and control. I argue throughout the study that film meanings are not only created at the point of production but more importantly, the meanings are re-configured at the point of reception, where audience exercise their rights to view films in their own terms, whether these films

are circulating in individualized group circuits or in official channels such as national television stations. I am part of film audience and in my analysis of selected films, this point is highlighted to reveal how the subjective element of viewers brings to the interpretation of film horizons of expectations which are values and meanings not intended or even expected by both the filmmaker and the official censor.

#### **(4)Protection from harmful information**

Media is subject to a range of restriction, and amongst these, is the desire to prevent military secrets from falling into the hands of the enemies of the state. According to Feltoe (2003:46) “there are also a variety of provisions aimed at preventing access to and disclosure of state information which government legitimately requires keeping secret”. In Zimbabwe, the main act dealing with this area is the Official Secrets act (chapter 11: 09). The main purpose of this legislation is to, “prohibit the disclosure of any purpose prejudicial to the safety or useful to an enemy; to make provision for the purpose of preventing persons from obtaining or disclosing official secrets in Zimbabwe (and) to prevent persons from making sketches, plans or models of and to prevent trespassing upon defense works, fortifications, military reserves and other prohibited areas” (Feltoe, 2003:49). What is clear in this *essentializing* language of the law is that, sometimes what are termed ‘secrets’ are actually ‘secreted’ statutes that have been created to stymie access to information, and violate people’s right to adopt dissenting views on projects of national development.

In chapter three, I shall explore the work by Zenzele Ndebele—one Bulawayo based filmmaker who uses the facticity of the language of a documentary narrative to expose the atrocities that were carried out in Matabeleland and Midlands in 1987 to demonstrate filming how violation of human rights by State agents is criminalised in the provisions of the Official Secrets Act. Commenting on the weaknesses of the terms of Official Secrets act, Feltoe (2003) contends that the Act can be manipulated to protect information that legitimately needs to be known by citizens for them to make informed decisions on their lives and not be protected from that vital information. The Official Secrets Act can also be used to cover up political blunders and corrupt practices in government department as well as in private companies. In addition, the fact that the official secrets act was conceived in 1970 by the Smith Regime means that its terms and provisions were deliberately made wide and vague enough to cover up the abuse of white officials towards black people in colonial

Rhodesia. Since Zimbabwe's independence, not much has been done to ameliorate the suppressive scope and effect of the Official Secrets act. This is despite the fact that some amendments to section 4(1) of the Official Secrets Act were brought about by the introduction of section 92 of the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (chapter 10: 27) in 2001.

### **2.3.2 Public Order and Security Act (POSA) No. 18 of 2002**

The political context that gave rise to Public Order and Security Act (POSA) in 2002 is aptly traced and critically analyzed by Moyo(2010). In his treatise on the dearth of public debate in Zimbabwe, Moyo(2010) points out that POSA was conceived in the context of crisis management and intervention approach, where the state single-handedly formulated media policies that excluded stakeholders such as civic society, opposition parties and market forces. All these forces, especially the opposition parties, were/are viewed as antagonistic puppets of the former British colonisers created to effect a change of regime in Zimbabwe. Significant opposition also emerged from within the ranks of the ruling party itself, taking the form of independent candidates. As Moyo further argues, the law on Public Order and Security Act(POSA) attempts to instill in the public minds a 'narrativised ideology through a formulaic articulation and naturalisation of the discourse of the nation, so as to frame nationalism as the answer to the Zimbabwean crisis'(2010:117). Ranger views Zimbabwean nationalism as anti-pluralistic because, according to him, versions of ZANU PF's 'patriotic history' (2005, 217-243) and its forms of nationalisms are not only narrow but they do not entertain criticism.

What is implied by Ranger(2005) is that censorship can be embedded in the ideologies we live by and hold dearly. In the case of POSA its diffuse legal rhetoric language inhibits the freedom of filmmakers to express themselves as it regulates the power that governs not only what can be said, but who can speak, when and where. The language of violence in POSA authorises state agents, especially the police to round up and question any gathering of people that the police may deem suspiciously organising, politically, against the government. Even when the police do not find incriminating evidence, the people whose fundamental human right of freedom of association have no recourse to the courts, because in the first instance the country's constitution empowers security agents to do so. Chuma concurs with the foregoing viewpoint by contending that POSA criminalises

the ‘publication of false statements prejudicial to the state (Section 15), and in the context of a paranoid state, mild criticism can easily pass for a prejudicial statement, resulting in criminal prosecution of the individuals or organisations concerned’(2010: 98). The statements by Moyo (2010) and Chuma(2010) are important bearing in mind that POSA is used to unduly protect the top government officials against criticism that can be vented on television, in newspapers, on radio and through film images. This clearly goes against the values of openness, accountability and debate—all of which are embodied within the principles of democracy (Ndlela, 2003 and Moyo, 2010). Media such as film must acquire a measure of freedom to analyse not only actions of politicians but the implications of their policies. To further demonstrate the damaging effect of POSA, it is pertinent to critically review the language of censorship structured within its statutes and terms of reference.

According to Part 11 number 15 of POSA, it is an offence against constitutional government and Public Security to Publish or communicate false statements prejudicial to the state (Kubatana.net, 2002 and Chuma, 2010). Accompanying the above offence, a communicator is liable for prosecution if he/she produces or distributes information that is likely to cause *fear, alarm* and *despondency* among the public. The first offence appears to be clear in its conceptualisation in that it emphasises ethical conduct among communicators of information. However, the second case falls short of outlining the characteristics of information or images that may cause *fear, alarm* and *despondency*. The effects of such ambiguous expressions are that they can narrow democratic space and participation. For example, making everybody think that land is the only thing worth talking about (Mugabe, 2001) narrows the field of operation by sidelining other important areas of the economy. The question that this study investigates is the extent to which this legislation on film has censored or encouraged self-censorship among Zimbabwean filmmakers. Since the filmmakers work with English and Shona languages, what is the effect of using one language in a film and not another? What is the effect of using visuals and metaphors in film? These questions can enable one to evaluate the extent to which filmmakers can also evade or deliberately undermine censorship laws when the artists introduce new forms of film languages.

However, it is ironic that filmmakers may be victimised for not falsifying the depraved political conditions of post-independent Zimbabwe. In other words, although a case against communicating



false statement prejudicial to the state passes the ‘legitimate objective test’ (Stevens, 2000:12) on the grounds of ethical conduct, telling a true story that offends government can be penalised under claw-back clauses of POSA. For example, it may be viewed as an offence to produce a film that interrogates government officials about the alleged diamond looting at *Chiadzwa* in *Marange*, Mutare. Such a film is likely to be restricted or even banned on the basis that it is ‘defamatory’ ‘subversive’ (Sokwanele Report, 2010:7) and that it has the capacity to undermine public trust on the work of Government officials.

The ambiguous terms of reference in POSA, differ, for example, from the relatively clear provisions of the South Africa Films and Publications Act 65 of 1996. In South Africa’s Film and Publications Act, “Publications, Films, entertainment or plays may not be made available to the public when these

- Amount to propaganda for war
- Incite imminent violence
- Advocate hatred on race, ethnicity, gender or religion and which constitutes incitement to cause harm”(Nel etal, 2008:95)

The South African Act goes further to indicate the kind of film language that amounts to propaganda, inciting violence and advocating hatred among the people. In addition, the procedural prerequisites for prosecution if a filmmaker wittingly or unwittingly undermines the provisions of Act 65 are that:

- Proceedings can be instituted only in high Court.
- The publication, film or play may be prohibited while awaiting the outcome of the trial.
- The state must prove that the Board has not found that the publication or film lacks the content complained of (Nel etal, 2008:95).

In contrast, in Zimbabwe some of the terms of POSA not only lack clarity, but that state agents can arbitrarily on behalf of the state arrest an artist, if the agent believes, even without sufficient evidence that the filmmaker has contravened some parts of law relating to access and distribution of information. Both the state and its agency can interpret the laws on behalf of the courts, and in the

process usurp the power of the courts. In short, Ordinances and legal statutes relating to film have, in post independence Zimbabwe, remained hostile and restrictive of what filmmakers can experiment on.

Filmmakers creating images in the Shona and English languages manifest uneven levels of awareness to the functioning of censorship. While some filmmakers have developed complex film languages to question and transgress official censorship, others tend to practice self-censorship by either towing the official line, or failing to experiment with new content and form in imaginative ways. The central question that this study addresses is how to explain the different types of film censorship and why these manifest themselves in the forms they do. As part of continuing review of literature, in the following section, I use theories of the language of legal discourse to propose a model that can be used to explain and interpret how the Zimbabwean media laws in general and laws enacted work to control film messages. I also use the same model to argue that the ambiguity in the verbal and visual film language can overflow legal discourse and in fact, suggest modes of self liberation in some Zimbabwean films. In film semiotics, *text* refers to written words, visuals narratives and other paralinguistic features that manifest in a film in the forms of sound, light, colour and con-text.

## **2.4 Ambiguity in legal discourse**

Legal language is replete with cases of ambiguity. Ambiguity serves a dual purpose. On one hand, ambiguity can be used by the state to hide its social, political and economic intensions through using language that ‘fails’ to name objects precisely. The “freedom to fail”(Grant & Crossan 2012, 97-104) encoded in the diffuse and ambiguous legal jargon has the intended and unintended collateral damage that help to maintain official order, and protect repressive laws from being changed. On the other hand, filmmakers can deploy and exploit the figure of ambiguity in legal language by inseminating non-normative ways of telling a story. Filmmakers can tell a story through sound or the play with colour. This can cause uncertainty and make it difficult for censoring discourses to place a finger exactly on that which is being addressed. Filmmakers can also experiment with silent language in short films so that censorship language enacted to suppress verbal (words) are rendered obsolete when applied to film frames that are unfamiliar to the repressive repertoire in official legal discourse.

## 2.4.0 Legal Ambiguity further Re-defined

A concept, term or phrase is ambiguous if it has more than one meaning. Problems of textual interpretation and application of law is compounded by the existence of ambiguity as a permanent feature of language used in different contexts. Of this inherent ambiguity of legal discourse, Kennedy asserts that:

“Legal work can often destabilize the experience of a given case as involving only issues of rule application, in effect generating a gap, conflict or ambiguity that had at first appeared to require some kind of extra juristic basis for decision. When these things happen, are we to understand them as a process of discovery of an underlying, trans-argumentative reality about legal materials, or as “ungrounded?”(1991: 323).

The above quote locates gaps, conflicts of meaning as embodied in the ambiguity in legal language whose desire to represent itself as complete, closed and coherent sets itself against the instability inherent in any system of signs whether these are written texts, or visual images. In legal jargon, as in symbolical elements of film, the unbearable wrestling with multiple meanings that language signifies can authorize wide range re-interpretations of the texts which is not easy to domesticate. As Kennedy further notes, in legal discourse, “where creativity in law is called for, ambiguity becomes ....a process of discovering underlying, trans-argumentative reality about legal materials....” (1991:323). What is also implied is that if ambiguity in law encourages *de-centred* interpretations of meanings, it means ambiguity can be exploited by legal practitioners to create extra-judicial meanings. Thus, a projected wish by legal discourse to effect exactness and extreme correctness can lead to the reification of legal language. The reification, as Jackson (1985) points out, is the most dangerous result for use of legal language because language ceases to function as a means of effective and creative communication. In other words, legal language becomes a rigid cast where pre-formulated legal terms are applied without reference to social contexts. This can encourage censorship of creative works.

However, in social contexts, ambiguity creates connotative meanings to human activities. Galdia (2009) brings in the social dimension of the legal discourse of law when he says that the legal discourse is formed in complex political and professional set-ups that provide interpretive

ingredients into its context. Correspondingly, if ambiguity in law is informed by political and social contexts, it means the language of law ordinances and statutes laid down to control film production and consumption cannot be viewed as inherently pure. If banning a film or intimidating an artist are performed arbitrarily, audience might become more sympathetic to the persecuted artist than to the reason which he/she is being demoted. It happens even when the State is justified in persecuting the artist. If a film is withdrawn from circulation by officials, this act can actually further whet the appetite of viewers who will then reproduce the copies they have and circulate them clandestinely in their own circuits. If officials encourage filmmakers to make films that openly side with one perspective of life or stereotyped reality, film critics can be drawn to comment more on what the film has been prevented from saying than focus on the obviously patronised reality. In other words, in as much as ambiguity can be used to obfuscate meaning when interpreting law and film, the same literal figure of ambiguity can be creatively exploited by filmmakers to open up spaces of thinking, feeling and experiencing life differently in ways that the dominant official script of legal discourse could not have expected. It is at this point that censorship of film is subverted by the languages of film.

Lexical, textual or narrative ambiguity makes it possible to critically imagine the development of a model of legal language that encourages polysemy of the sign. Tiersma (1999), Mattila (2006) and Schane (2007) claim that legal language strives to avoid ambiguity by excluding polysemic terms, phrases and statements that can be interpreted in many ways. But as Lotscher (2008) argues, attempts at totally eliminating ambiguity in legal language are an illusion. Laws provide universally applicable rules that are formulated without regard to a specific context or situation. Legal practitioners have to creatively apply laws in contexts where their decisions are contestable. Inversely, if laws are contestable, then the basis of their principles and language of legal ordinances and statutes are subject to various interpretations (Kennedy, 1991). This *intolerable wrestling* with the interpretation of the exact meanings of language in legal discourse is *Janus-faced*; it can allow censors to prefer certain meanings over others on one hand resulting in controlling film images. On the other hand, it is the split personality of language of the imagination that enables filmmakers to render it thinkable to suggest and then, encode subversive meanings that officials are not always able to detect and expunge in film. This dialectical understanding of ambiguity in legal language is

important when explaining how censorship is executed and enforced by officials or how it is challenged by artists.

### 2.4.1 Ambiguity and legal fictions

Ambiguity in legal language is a phenomenon that can be manipulated by filmmakers to challenge and circumvent normative interpretation of censorship laws. Lotscher (2008) suggests that the normative principal of *lex iubeat no doceat* implies that law must formulate provision, and that law should not argue or give explanations. However, contrary to the view that law only deals with provisions and factual information, terms of re/presentation often create legal fictions. For example, visual images in film that are restricted by censorship laws on the basis that they have the potential to cause fear, alarm and despondency, create a *real* world out of the imaginary. It is the assumption of the *likelihood* but not the *real* (Luhmann, 2004:47) that the panic associated with fear, alarm and despondency becomes speculative, fictitious and imaginary. The ambiguity surrounding the words fear, alarm and despondency depends on what descriptions, evaluations and imaginary projections are provided by the censorial powers. In place of the words *fear*, *alarm* and *despondency* in film, images become ‘doubtful’, ‘indefinite’, ‘indeterminate’, ‘indistinct’ and ‘unsettled’. (Schane, 2007:50).

In his book, the *Legal Fictions*, Fuller (1967:11) proposes ‘the attractive nuisance’ doctrine. Applied to a practical situation, the doctrine contends that if a child wanders onto a stranger’s property and is injured due to the presence of unsafe condition on the premises, the dangerous object or condition is an attractive nuisance that has *invited* the child onto the property, and consequently, the child is treated not as a trespasser but as an *invitee*. Although the above scenario appears vague, it has some analogical relevance to film censorship. The analogy can be stated as follows: If a filmmaker decides to produce a film about serious political conditions in his/her country, the film should not be viewed as subversive, but the political conditions are an attractive nuisance that has *invited* the filmmaker to produce such a film. Following this logic, a government would need to address the root cause of the problem rather than restrict a filmmaker from exposing such a problem. Draconian censorship laws are a symptom of authoritarian narratives that attempt to persuade citizens that just because official narratives are ugly, therefore life is ugly. Imposing inhibitions on creative energy is one way officials valorize the “success of ‘failure’” (Bharucha, 2012:101) to expand spaces of individual

freedom of expression. If filmmakers do not fully confront and interrogate State projects, film will have contributed in “failing failure”(ibid,). In other words, the absence of criticism on official narratives makes filmmakers be accomplices and part of the machinery that aid in naturalising self-censorship. However, if filmmakers tackle head on authoritation tendencies in official narratives and at the same time the filmmakers resist being coopted into participating in ideologically propping up disabling social conditions, then as artists, filmmakers can be considered to have ‘failed official’s failure’ (ibid) expectations to totally inhabit the structures of creative frames insisting on introducing new values and counter film narratives in society. My study is concerned with revealing the workings of censorship laws on film creativity as confirming the ‘failure’ of the Zimbabwean authorities to build cultural sites where freedom of expression is not begged for; most significantly, the study argues for what Bharucha describes as “positive failure”(ibid), a concept that celebrates the “irreverence” to authorities’ oppressive narratives that stifle, and brave film practice can enfold by revealing contradictions within values inhabiting cultural spaces that the Zimbabwean authorities project as natural and acceptable.

My study follows the lead provided by Fuller (1967) who argues that anyone who has thought about legal fiction must be aware that it presents an illustration of the all-pervading power of the word. In this game of power politics, legal fiction becomes a creative and imaginary way of solving legal cases. The linguistic phenomenon associated with legal fiction has its basis in metaphor. It is erroneous to think of metaphor as belonging mostly to literary and rhetorical language. In the cognitive theory of legal fiction, metaphor is not only a way of seeing or saying; it is a way of thinking and knowing. The method by which legal experts structure reason is fundamental, not ornamental. A metaphorical theory that can be applied to the interpretation of legal statutes is that, ‘(m) earning is neither ‘in us’ nor ‘out there’ but resides in the imaginative processes by which we order experience and make it meaningful’ (Berger, 2004:174). The conceptual metaphors in legal fictions are reflected in linguistic metaphors. For example, some conceptual metaphors promoted by critical legal studies are that: law is politics and that law is the politics of representing legal cases. This conceptual and ideological slant, coming as it were from post-modern interpretation of law, marks a paradigm shift from placing absolute faith in law (Hutton, 2009). In addition, the doubt cast on law depicts that statutes that govern censorship of film images should not be viewed as omnipotent. The language of law can be questioned as the ambiguity created in it is prone to

manipulation by a government to restrict or even ban film images. My study emphasises the significant ways in which filmmakers creatively intervene with words, and visuals to alter or bring into crisis authoritarian narratives that attempt to nationalise censorship by depicting it as unassailable, when in fact film's paralinguistic features can disrupt the monolithic official narratives in political, economic and culturally themed films.

### **2.4.2 Ambiguities within the spaces of censorship**

Most legal concepts, terms, phrases and statements possess more than one meaning. This sometimes makes it difficult to apply the most intelligible interpretation to legal documents. Ambiguity of expression can be a form of oppression because it restricts the meaning potential of images. In other words, when clarity in meanings is limited by ambiguous statements in interpreting legal statutes, ambiguity becomes a form of censorship (Hart, 1997). However, at another scale of theoretical analysis of film language, play with and manipulation of the symbolical trope of ambiguity in depicting social reality is liberatory. The liberating nature of ambiguity in film inheres in that audiences can decode the film in different ways, thereby encouraging the capacity to produce multiple meanings that can escape state censorship. For example, in contemporary film images, it can be difficult to distinguish between tastefully erotica from distastefully pornographic material (Patel, 1997). The implication is that the state censors can be placed in a dilemma whether to persecute filmmakers or not. The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/law-language>) suggests the possibilities of countering censorship that manifest itself through ambiguity when it asserts that:

“Any good account of the meaning and interpretation account of the meaning and interpretation of legal language needs to deal with the way in which application of law depends on (1) the context of its use (2) [and] evaluative considerations”.

From the above assertion, it is important to note that any resolution to counter the censorial effect of ambiguity in interpreting legal documents lays in distinguishing between the meaning of a legal terminology and a decision about how to interpret a legal act using that legal terminology. However,

Wiklund adopts a radical stance to the question of ambiguity, censorship and interpretation by arguing that:

“...legal reasoning and justifications of courts are ‘only’ argumentative techniques. There is never a “correct ethical and political solution to a legal problem... rule application cannot be isolated from subjective or political influence” (2003:539).

The implication of Wiklund’s statement is that where ambiguity re-surfaces in legal statutes, its driving force is rooted in the politics of interpretation that is influenced by the ideological slant of legal practitioners. In Zimbabwe, the politics of interpreting legal statutes of Censorship and Entertainment Control Act [Chapter 10:04] that govern film images create vigorous debate because ambiguity built in its terms of reference is manipulatable to suit different artistic, and politically preferred meanings. Ambiguity creates uncertainty in the legal language. Politicians have been known to manipulate this uncertainty in order to advance their interests. Bellies contends that:

“Politicians have either an emotional connection with the laws they make, or else they are gearing those laws in part to attract the attention of people. Either way, the politicians will want words that reflect their worldview. These words are potentially ambiguous – creating connotations” (2008:198).

To lend support to what Bellies (2008) says, Nicol (1984) points out that national government do manipulate the ambiguity in terms and statutes of Censorship and Entertainment Controls Act to gag the freedom of films to express ideas through images. However, the indeterminate nature of ambiguity in law means that for every rule or principle there is another equally important counter-rule or principle. Applied to film, the deliberate manipulation of ambiguity can introduce revisions, traces and slippages in the meaning of film language with the capacity to produce counter-cultures that can question the ideological basis of laws on film censorship. If ambiguity is a deadly form of censorship, vagueness and obscurity in legal language has been also been exploited by states to confuse filmmakers and make them not know what is expected of them as artists.

## **2.5 Vagueness in legal language**

Vagueness is very common in legal language. Legal texts are vague if they use concepts that have indefinite application to particular cases. Endicott (2001) says that a legal term is vague if it has



borderline cases. Borderline cases occur in the legal language in which terms of reference are neither true nor false. Alston (2005:85) contends that, ‘The word ‘vague’ is commonly used very loosely to apply to any kind of looseness, indeterminacy, or lack of clarity.’ Alston (2005) goes further to say that thinking about language has often been dominated by the unformulated and un-examined assumption that vagueness as a semantic characteristic is always undesirable and that an ‘ideal’ language would contain no vague language. A situation desirable for the use of vague language is when two countries communicate to each other using vague terms to ease tension that would otherwise deteriorate to conditions of war. However, in law, vagueness is discouraged because it entails the use of abstract evaluative expressions (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/law-language/>). Abstract evaluative expressions have the capacity to attract borderline cases that are legally indefinite or unsettled. Vagueness can have profound effects on the interpretation of legal language.

## **2.5.0 Vagueness and Interpretation**

The fact of vagueness creates a variety of interpretive issues in the philosophy of legal language. When a legal text is vague, it is usually the case that interpretation may not resolve the vagueness. Endicott (2001) asserts that interpretation may not resolve vagueness for the reason that the meaning of a legal text—coming as it were from the linguistic background, will need creative intervention of legal practitioners if a legal text is applied effectively to a particular case. Endicott goes on to propose a solution by asserting that “Construction allows legal actors such as judges to devise a supplementary rule or procedure that resolves the vagueness. Thus, a legal text may supply a vague standard (“freedom of speech”), but construction may yield a more particular rule (“no prior restraints”) (2001:3).” In a similar vein, the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/law-language>) states that to minimize vagueness in legal language, meaning and interpretation of legal language needs to deal with the way in which language application depends on (1) the context of its use, and (2) its evaluative considerations. The implication is that when legal practitioners are judging the morality of film images, they should consider the cultural context within which that film was produced. In other words, any judgment that is pronounced to restrict or even ban film images should first of all resolve the contradictions of film as art on one hand, and of law as a body of principles and standards that are declarative in nature on

the other hand. This is because the existence of vagueness in legal language contained in censorship acts has the potential of controlling film images from addressing important social, political and economic issues.

### **2.5.1 Vagueness as censorship**

If vagueness creates situations of indecision, it means judgment on whether a film is morally sound or not, can be problematic. Galdia (2009) argues that judgment is less likely to be clear for the reason that film language – by its very nature, has the potential to attract *borderline cases*. Against this backdrop, officials who censor films are likely to be forced to make hard decisions on the content and form of any particular film, especially when those censors fail to appreciate or even understand the contradictory ways in which films resolve social, political and economic issues through artistic means. Furthermore, the unstable nature of language—even in its normative and standardised way, allows vagueness in legal statutes to bring out a variety of interpretations. The irony is that the more the censorial powers attempt to achieve precision in regulating film images, the more the independence of film language can be eroded. From a philosophical perspective, when one sets out to make a term precise, it will turn out that the terms he/she employs to remove the vagueness will themselves be vague, though perhaps to a lesser degree and/or in different respects (Alston, 2005). From the assertions made by Galdia (2009) and Alston, (2005) what can be clear is that vagueness in law remains a permanent feature of language. Therefore, inasmuch as censors of film promulgate laws to control film meanings and impose restrictions on the freedom of film to express ideas freely, it is also in the nature of film images to be metaphorical and inherently *vague*. It is these qualities in film images that make film to achieve and possess a transgressive character that makes it almost always impossible for censors to completely dilute the filmmaker's intended meanings. The irony is also that the metaphorical process by which films symbolise reality can go against the intentions of the filmmaker with the result that film images begin to assume their own life and meanings outside the original intention of the filmmaker. When this happens, film displays capacity to evade official as well as self-censorship. When I interviewed Ben Mahaka—the director of Mahaka film production, about the extent to which legal terms used by Zimbabwe Censorship Board can control film images, his response was very informative:

**Question: To what extent do you think the specific legal terms used by Censorship Board control film images?**

**Answer:** Legal language can and does control film images because it outlines what it is and what is not acceptable in terms that are broad enough to be manipulated to fit pretty much any agenda. Vague definitions leave too much discretionary powers in the hands of those applying the law. (Questionnaire Interview with Ben Mahaka, B. 12 April, 2012 15:40)

Indeed, too much “discretionary powers” have lead the authorities in Zimbabwe to ban the circulation of the films *Gukurahundi: A moment of madness*(2007) and the *The Interpreter*(2005). A manifestation of discretionary powers is when the state invoked vague terms such as ‘tribal based’ (Sokwanele Report, 2011:40) in order to dismiss the images of the documentary film *Gukurahundi: A moment of madness*(2007). As shall be demonstrated in chapter three, the Zimbabwean state could not completely control the circulation of the documentary since audiences simply resorted to ‘guerrilla’ or ‘underground’ channels of producing and distributing the documentary *Gukurahundi: A moment of madness*.

## **2.6 The question of clarity in the language of Censorship Laws**

The search for clarity in legal language which regulates film production is a response to a desire to overcome law’s ambiguity. Clarity can be understood from the linguistic perspective of readability, simplicity and conciseness. Yet, as Fluckiger (2008) asserts, clarity can also be viewed from a more legal perspective—that is, precision of wording. By implication, Fluckiger (2008) is saying that a legal text is clear if it provides the reader, immediately and unequivocally, with a precise solution in a concrete case. The paradox is that the principle of clarity may not be as clear as it appears; since every text is constructed on the basis of suppression of some information that could have been included in the produced narrative, but have not, due to ideological selection. The undeniable fact is that a written text can be clear in one sense, but obscure in the other or vice versa. Viewing film as *texts* introduces complications because the visual, the verbal, sound; light and colour are all constitutive of film text. It is not easy for film censors to succeed in limiting the audience’s appreciations of these forms of film language. Not only do audiences bring their own interpretive

grids to film consumption; different film narratives encourage polyphonic meanings that deny the possibility that the film can be read or interpreted in one way.

## 2.6.0 Criteria for clarity in Film language

The liberal conception on law is that its terms of reference should be clear and readable to an average person. In contrast, a film-maker use metaphoric and symbolic language[s] that are appreciated subjectively in contexts in which audiences generate surplus meanings through associating linguistic signs. In fact, as Mhiripiri argues, the avant-garde Zimbabwean short film celebrates unclarity; “stylistically and thematically experimental short movies made by a new generation of film-makers [avoids] didacticism...”(2010: 93) In film, abstractness of images even where the images appear accessible helps to generate semantic instability that is so necessary in preventing stereotypical images.

### 2.6.1 Readability/understandability

A readable legal text or decodable picture or film shot is an intelligible text that probes for critical reflection. Fluckiger (2008) is correct in saying that a text should be simple for communication purposes, his assertions are let down by the reality of the convoluted nature of legal texts that make them difficult to understand. Opeibi (2008) provides a list of some obscure legal terminology that can be made clear by using simpler terms.

<b>Obscure</b>	<b>Clear</b>
Quiet, peaceful and undisturbed	Peaceful
Covenants, undertakes, guarantees	Undertakes
Give, devise and bequeath	Give
Sells, coveys, transfers	Sells

shall	Will/may
forenoon	Before 12:00 pm
Did steal	Stole
To wit	Which is that is
Abuttals	Attachments
Indemnify	Attachments
Verged	Marked
Assigner	Seller
Assignee	Buyer
Sale, assignment and transfer	Sale

**Fig 1** From obscurity to clarity (Opeibi, 2008:231)

The above table shows how a complex legal term can be made to appear clearer by using its simplified form. What Opeibi(2008) seems to suggest is that legal language should be de/constructed such that it appeals to a wider audience who are the subjects of its application. Although Bellies(2008) argues that perfect clarity in legal writing is illusory, a relative clarity can be obtained through paying special attention to the sensitivity of cultural context (s) in which legal writing takes place and is intended to be used. In Zimbabwe, the language of legal statutes are too narrowed or diffuse and vague resulting in discursive censorship, a term that describes how disciplines practice exclusion by maintaining a type of vocabulary intended to be peculiar to that discipline. In art, as Bakhtin(1981) argues, every utterance, image or statement is marked by heterogeneity encouraged by the reality of film narratives that are made up of various genres that deny any one genre to claim

monopoly of referencing uncontested absolute truth. This formal openness encouraged by the nature of the rhetorics of film precludes the possibility of total submersion under censorship laws.

## **2.7 Homes and the semantic approach to censorship**

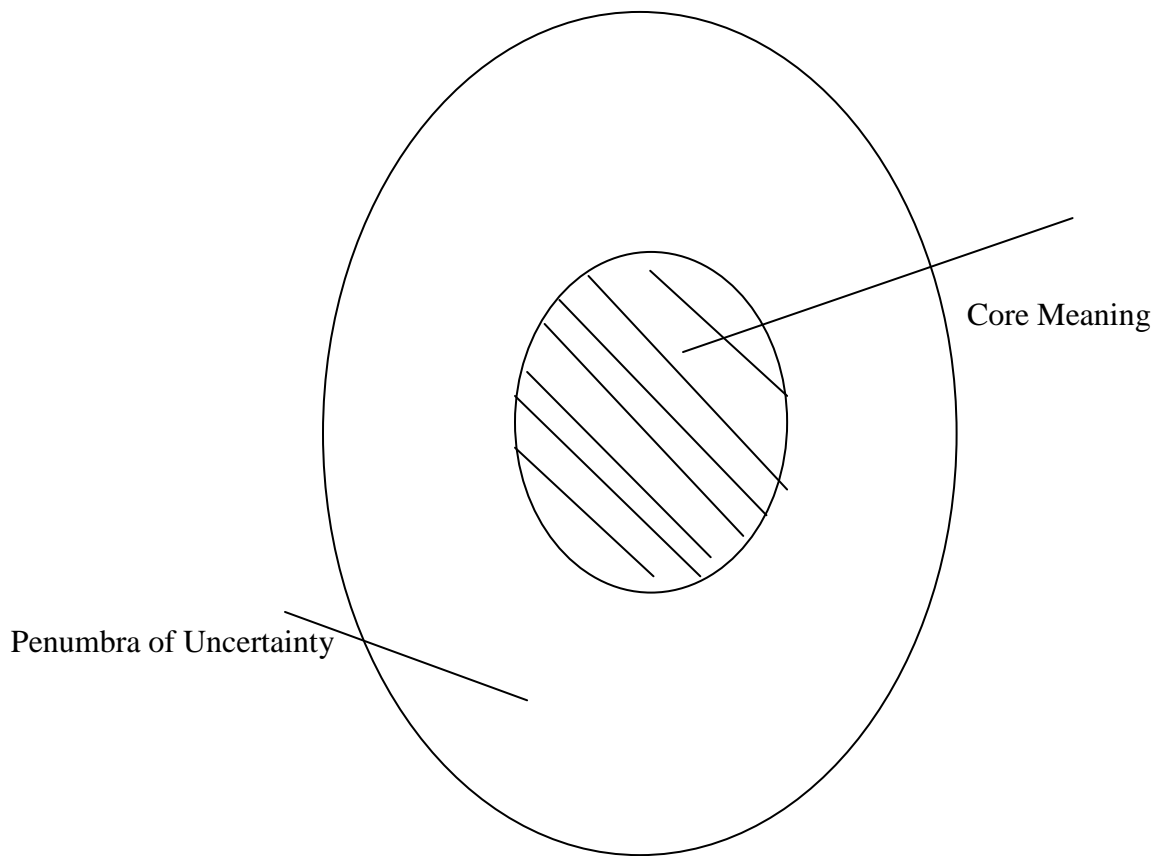
Homes's ontic approach to semantic indeterminacy in legal language is based on the assumption that "...language used in legal statutes and precedents is sufficiently imprecise to require courts to clarify the application of certain legal terms to actual cases." (Underson, 2006:14). Waismann supports this view about the inherent semantic indeterminacy of legal language when he writes that:

"The idea of a closed system of law lasting for all time, and able to solve imaginable conflict, is a Utopian fantasy which has no foundation to stand upon. In actual fact every system of law has gaps which are, as a rule, noticed and filled out only when they are brought to light by particular events" (1965:76).

In simple terms, neither language nor legal standards can be so completely specified so that all doubt is removed, and that all possibilities are anticipated. Applied to film censorship, this implies that the language that is used to restrict film images is not stable or settled. Language is open-textured and the rules of using open-textured language do not provide a determinate meaning in borderline cases. A censor must exercise discretion to provide a meaning for the open-textured term in a borderline case (Underson, 2006). A borderline case in film can be exemplified by a situation in which film images are used to depict extreme violence that is focused on saving the lives of hostages abducted by terrorists. The film may not be prohibited because it uses violence as its main avenue to solve the problem nor can it be applauded for using violence as a way of solving that problem. As Underson (2006) intimates, 'gaps' inherent in legal language are also 'gaps' in meaning and interpretation. These gaps visible in what words cannot capture can enable a filmmaker to authorise values that are opposed to the censorious '*gaze*' of dominant systems that would want to impose their values on the outlook of people.

The open-texture nature of film language suggests that images are surrounded by 'a penumbra of uncertainty' (Hart, 1983:49). The value of Harts' ideas on 'open-textured' texts, whether these are written or visual rest on the observation that when interpreting a film, censors cannot eliminate this duality of a core of certainty and a penumbra of doubt [that] imparts to all [film texts] and its rules of interpreting the film, a fringe of vagueness and 'open texture' (1983:49)

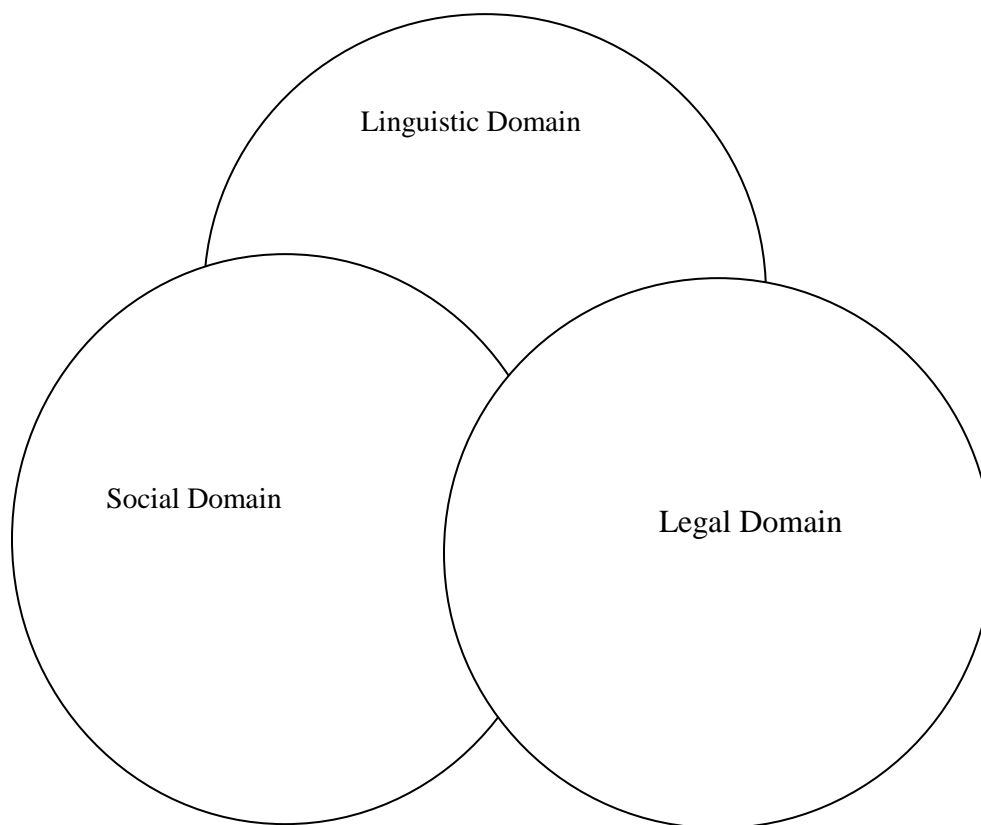
When represented as a model, Hart's (1983) idea of the open-texture nature of films includes core meaning denoted in the zone where film-makers and censors can inscribe *preferred readings* to a film text. The 'penumbra of uncertainty' is the potential meaning force field that the images of film can suggest in an audience's mind.



**Fig 2** Model of legal and linguistic meaning (Hart, 1983:49)

Evaluators or censors of films are uncertain as to whether the rule they apply to control or ban a film are beyond being contested, if not in court of law, but through the process of symbolizing reality in film where desire for narrative instability is already fulfilled or embodied in the metaphoricity of the

primary language of film. It is the indeterminacy within the penumbral region that characterizes filmic modes of expression. To complicate legal rules, linguistics and social context(s) of film production, Schane (2007) proposes the following model:



**Fig 3** Complicating law, linguistic and social domains (Schane, 2007:30)

The above diagrams by Schane(2007)depicts that there are important areas in the conceptualising and application of law. First, there is the social environment which is composed of other arms such as the media, family, political institutions, church and school environments. These environments are regulated using laws agreed upon by citizens of a country. Within those laws are terms, expressions and phrases that refer to statutes and regulations. The terms, expressions and phrases constitute the linguistic domain that makes people understand processes of communication within the social and legal domains. The importance of Schane’s (2007) model is that it acknowledges the fact that law does not operate in a vacuum. An area of interface offers possibilities for negotiating meaning among the social environment, linguistic and legal domains. What is also important is that the model



realizes the existence of ‘penumbra of uncertainty’ in which terms among social context(s), language itself and legal contexts remain unsettled and largely indefinite. The existence of the penumbral region emphasizes the arbitrariness not only of the sign as language, but also of interpretation of the sign to generate meanings. In other words, there is an always *contestable* interpretation that film’s suggestive images encourage against the rigidity of censorship laws that are declarative in nature.

## **2.8 A Critique of theories on Legal Discourse**

The theory of the language of legal discourse helps in understanding how censors arrive at their judgments on the morality of certain films. Legal discourse is significant for this study because it reveals the constructed-ness of the language of law that is used to control film images as simply arbitrary. A language based approach to film analysis recognizes that film text is a composite of different genres such as the verbal, the visual, sound, light and colour. Each of these is constitutive of a film narrative, and as such they are constantly engaging each other in the same medium to enable an audience to arrive at potentially different meanings after watching the film in different contexts, times and spaces. The theory of ambiguity of the language of legal discourse is useful to my study because it helps explain why political censorship in its extreme form of banning printed and visual material happen on film. Ambiguity as theory of language also enables my study to explain self-censorship. More significantly, the theory of the ambiguity of the text (written or visual) has explanatory affinities with Bakhtin’s(1984) notion of *heteroglossia* in language ,and as such helps my study to theorize how filmmakers can manipulate the cracks or fissures inherent in any text as sign and subvert official efforts to censor film. Polysemy suggested by ambiguity in the legal discourse and metaphorical language of film expands the dialectical view that filmmakers use and generate new forms of film languages that transgress, and circumvent the authority of censors contained in legal ordinances and statutes.

However, the theory of ambiguity and semantic instability of legal language has been criticized for failing to highlight the significance of social ideologies in the formation of censorships law. An over emphasis on ambiguity and instability in film can have the negative effect of rendering the wished-for new values to be subverted before they have been authorised. This approach over dramatises the arbitrariness of film’s semiotic language to a point where new meanings are barely recognisable. The materiality of language is its approximation to lived experiences that is actually lived in time and

space. Thus authorising what constitutes censorable film material is also dependent on whose prevailing ideological values are in circulation, and whose values are socially marginalised in the political life of a nation. This cause of social and political censorship is addressed in the Liberal rule of law, and radical theories of censorship propounded in orthodoxy Marxism and revised in Gramsci's concept of hegemony.

## **2.9 The Liberal rule of law**

The liberal rule of law censorship is understood in relation to the autonomy of law that is viewed as impersonal and impartial, and loyal to its text. Hogan argues that interpretation in law and other disciplines is centrally concerned with 'our behavior as ethical agents', and that ethics must be confirmed by "Enlightenment ideals of clarity and rationality, a concern for truth and an advocacy of intellectual freedom" (1996:194-5). Bix asserts further that "language has, for the most part been a false focus theory and that linguistic questions, have been used as an excuse for decisions that are more properly attributed to political or policy decisions" (1983:178). An example of political decisions being used arbitrarily to ban a film is explored in chapter three where the study critically analyses the political context in which the banning from circulation in Zimbabwe of the documentary film, *Gukurahundi: A moment of madness (2007)* was mainly triggered by political concerns other than the claims that the film is 'tribal-based' (Sokwanele Report, 2010:1). The government could not elucidate the basis of that bias nor open-up possibilities to redress the purported bias. In this case, the terms *tribal based* were used by the government to mask the reality that officials view as a threat any artist who make a film critical of the government of the day from the subject matter of mass killings that happened in Matabeleland and the Midlands in the early years of independence between 1981 and 1986. An open explanation of censorship in terms of power and class struggles is further emphasized in the Marxist theories.

## **2.10 The Marxist Imperative**

The Marxist views on censorship are that it is a reflection of class interests. In the Marxist tradition (Eagleton, 1976) censorship reveals how film texts are prevented from saying certain things by the dominant ideologies within which the film is created. All art such as film springs from an ideological conception of the world. For the literary critic Raymond Williams words are, "condensed social

practices, sites of historical struggle, repositories of political wisdom or domination.” (Williams quoted in Eagleton, 1998: 317-18). As sites of ideological struggles the verbal and visual elements of film texts are avenues that the dominant classes in society can infiltrate and infuse with particular class values, and vision in ways that prohibit other competing values from being manifested.

Orthodox Marxist theory is reductive; it subscribes to the ‘dominant thesis’ in which the ruling class has total control to dominate the political, spiritual ways of those that they rule. The theory does not admit that ruling classes and the ruled sometimes traffic cultural resources that these classes use to fight each other with. Ruling classes do not entirely censor everything that is consumed by the ruled. The ruled do not necessarily accept everything coming from the ruling class. The dominant classes may use censorship laws to narrow the operational field and metaphoricity of film images, thus revealing the tendency in the dominant classes to use its ideological state apparatus to control cultural productions in order to project the ideology of the ruling class. According to Macherey in Eagleton (1985), open forms of censorship reveal not only through the power of the ruling class, but through how the ideological *iron cage* of the dominant class is used to inhibit new expressive images that challenge *stabilised* images of the material condition of classes that constitute society and the nation. For Macherey, the ideological state apparatus ranges from brute physical or military/political force used to vanquish dissenting voices, to schools, churches that can be used as conduits to *naturalise* the world-view of the ruling class (Eagleton, 1985).

Marxist theories on censorship depart from a concern with ambiguity in words but also reify the workings of censorship. The theory emphasises the role of socio-economic and political culture of the ruling class as decisive in influencing the nature of images in film, and open political forms of censorship imposed on those film-makers who do not conform to the social thought of the *status quo*. This explanation is useful in my study because it helps explain the political context of film censorship in Zimbabwe.

However, the Marxist theory underestimates the existential powers of film-makers and audiences to use various *escape corridors* as counter-measures to state restrictions and prohibitions. Marxist theories that assume that film content is totally shaped, that film images are already pre-determined, initiated and infiltrated at all times by the perceptions of the ruling class. Classical Marxism emphasise content of form when in fact in film analysis, it is possible to reveal the ‘form of content’

(White, 1987). Furthermore, with the advent of digital media technology, the word *mass*—often used to refer to mainstream media has been subsumed under individualised viewership and accessibility to media information. This implies that new media technology and individualised viewership can challenge the dominance of a master narrative, and introduce in film *uncensored* images embodying the views of ordinary people.

In over-emphasising the extraordinary capacity of the ruling class to choreograph film images, the possibility of the marginalised classes authorising their own images is occluded in the theory. Moreover, an understanding of censorship that puts premium on open, political forms of restrictions underestimate that a work of art can say more from what it has been prevented from saying, than from what it says. A pre-occupation with explaining banning of films with open and visible political themes underestimate that the *political* in film or the film in the *political* does not always manifest itself at all times as open struggle against the ruling class, and that the *political* in film reveals also the contradictory ways in which filmmakers simultaneously work for and against the system. Though based on historical materialism, some versions of Marxism lack a nuanced dialectical approach that can help account for the materiality of metaphor which constantly defer meanings, and in the process reveal the split nature of the film image. It is out of such ruptures, cracks or fissures in the metaphor of the verbal and visual aspects of film that artists are able to subvert censorship (Madsen, 1994). Classical Marxist theory of film production has been challenged, supplanted, replaced and complicated by the notion of hegemony.

In his use of the term hegemony, Gramsci(1971) maps out how dominant classes not simply impose their will on those that they rule; ruling classes coerce and seek consent to exercise authority on those that they rule over. In the words of Gramsci(1971:164) hegemony

‘...works through ideology, but does not consist of false ideas’ perceptions, definitions. It works by inserting the subordinate class into key institutions which support the power and social authority of the dominant order. It is, above all, in these structures and relations that a subordinate class lives its subordination.’

This quote is important to my study because it can help explain why some films display an ambivalent attitude to censorship; the films are at one and the same time coopted and resisting cooptation. That is why for Fiske (1987) the explanatory potential of hegemony resides in the insight

it brings which is that there is a constant struggle against a multitude of resistances to ideological domination, so that any balance of forces that it achieves is always precarious, always in need of re-achievement. Thus hegemony informs my study because in it the authoritarian censorship laws are not ascribe unassailable features and the subalterns are also depicted as wielding extraordinary capacity to always win struggles against their oppressors. This perspective helps to explain the phenomenon of self-censorship as well as partly account why some films are entirely steeped in dominant values even, when the films have been authorised by the oppressed. Despite these insights from the theory of hegemony, King (2009) complicates it, and notes that there is a residual element that implies that the ruled prefer compromise with the rulers. In King's words

‘Hegemony depends on ambiguity and does not radically cut off the subject from what it threatens it, but takes on that which is *Other* and accept itself to be in perpetual danger. Hegemony kills in the name of life, lives at the behest of death, curbs the other's suffering for profit and establishes narcissistic power while pretending to reveal the abyss. Despite assertions of its own (fictional) stability, hegemony is always marked by and dependent on ruptures and fissures: the hegemonic is thus open and closed, splintered and sutured, impossible and viable....’(2009: 370)

Unlike in Gramsci's formulation of hegemony in which the subjectivities of ordinary people are depicted as uneven, Kristeva's(1982) notion of *abject hegemony* depicts the most depraved conditions of human life. However, abjectivity does not only speak of a life of suffering. Desire for a better life is at the heart of the abject. In other words, *abject hegemony* creates and helps the oppressed to imagine alternative conditions of liberated film aesthetics.

The theory of hegemony does not only suggest that artists have a voice but also that filmmakers' relationship to the power bloc is contradictory since it involves resistance to, cooperation with, cooptation by and sometimes acquiescence to ruling classes. The spatial limitations proposed in the dialectic of coercion and consent helps in explaining how and why some filmmakers come to openly support the status quo or exercise self-censorship because artists are already in hegemony implicated as partners to the ruling classes when ever artists exercise their right to consent to official policies. Alternatively, the notion of filmmakers consenting to some cultural values of those in power does in fact show that filmmakers are not or perhaps should not be discussed as if they are always fighting official policies. Therefore, in theory, filmmakers are not simply *cultural dupes* (Hall, 1980); they

can use film to escape censorship and fashion possible alternative world-views not always patronised by the aesthetics of dominant values. However, the problem with the theory of hegemony is that it retains a residual notion that what is *political, resistive and dissentious* in film is framed only by a binary dichotomy of coercion and consent. There is therefore, no envisioned room for artists ever to completely break from the clutches of the dominant order.

So far the theoretical approach reviewed in this chapter have assumed that censorship is aimed only on the word. How the visual aspects of film are tempered with by censorship laws, and how in turn film-makers manipulate visual language to free creative imagination is left out in the above approaches. For Fuery and Fuery (2003) visual objects, particularly the human body with its shapes, contours and actions exemplify the questioning of social institutions, their values and meanings fashioned in the signifying practices that structure the dominant symbolic order. What this implies is that the body as an image in film allows different positions, transgressions and transmissions that may not be envisioned by the dominant symbolic order imposed by state laws on film censorship. The picture is further complicated by the fact that within the visual culture of film, the body is a viable physicality functioning as the signifier of disruption, challenge, revolt and subversion to the *intended readings* (Hall, 1980) of state censorship laws or self-imposed restrictions by filmmakers. Morley(1980) adds another dimension where the micro-settings engendered by new media technology (Television, DVD's, Internet, DStv) enable individuals to access and disseminate material considered *obscene* or *undesirable*. This perspective that ascribes audience with power to re-inscribe their own meanings in an interpretive experience of a film is shared by Deleuze and Guattari (1993). Film takes effect in the consciousness of the audiences through the powers of a re/constituted spatio-temporality with a marked shift of perceptions, perspectives and distortions that give positive meaning to *difference* (Shaw, 2007). It is this *difference* that liberates audiences from the suffocating discourses of state restrictions and the ideology of self-censorship imposed on film images by filmmakers. These insights are useful for explaining the limited visuals that have been selected and included in the study not as accessories but as constitutive of the totality of the film narrative experience.

## 2.11 Locating ‘gaps’ and ‘silences’ in Scholarly Criticism about Zimbabwean films

In Zimbabwe, criticism on film images is fragmentary. Criticism of film in Zimbabwe tends to focus on film images that deal with overt political issues. For example, Mahoso argues that the film *Flame*(1996) rubbished the liberation struggle(2001). The critic refuses to confront the gendered perspective that favoured that the film rejects as another master narrative. Patriarchy is depicted as male centred institutions that wielded powers to limit and censor what women could do during the struggle. The allegation that *Flame* manifests “epistemologies of the West’ (Mabweazara, 2010: 1) is unfounded because the film shows that rape and violence black women is not the monopoly of colonialism. Chikowero (2010) adds that in *Flame*(1996) the masculinist public memory is contested, in particular within narratives of the haunting memory , trauma and exilic heroism associated with war of independence fought between 1967 and 1979. In the same breath, Bryce(2005) writes about the incendiary interpretations and the patriotic imperatives in *Flame*(1996) without elucidating on how the discourse of patriotism in post-independent Zimbabwe has narrowed alternative interpretation of country’s history. An attempt to move away from the clutches of the political interpretation of film is done by Hungwe(2005) whose analysis on the historical growth of the film industry in Zimbabwe stresses the limits that have been placed upon on the film genre by economic factors. An added dimension is supplied by Mhiripiri(2010) who lucidly reflect on the emergence of the short fim. Unfortunately, Mhiripiri (2010) believes that the form of the short film is a mongreal cultural product occasioned by lack of understanding of the dialectics of film in the political and the political in film. For him, the short film in Zimbabwe is characterised by an “avoidance of political subjects for material produced during an obvious crisis” (2010). The limitation of this criticism is that it displays a shallow understanding of what is ‘political’ in the short film. The Short film is not a new phenomenon in the history of film development. It is a genre complete in its own right. In Zimbabwe, its production may be influenced by financial constraints, as Mhiripiri’s suggested. However, the short film is neither a “product of last resort” (ibid 2010) nor simply cultural ground for “training budding film-makers” (ibid). Mhiripiri’s problem is how to interpret and read the ‘political’ in short films based on cultural themes, just as Mahoso(2000) has no critical vocabulary to identify and account for the presence of cultural elements in politically overt

films. Lack of a theoretical framework in Mhiripiri's (2010) exploration of the short film is also manifest in failing to understand that the "slump" crisis in the economy enabled the emergence of this form, and that this is the most political statement that the film-makers are putting across.

## **2.12 Review on Selected Films**

The review below intends to provide a glimpse into the criticism that has been made so far regarding the impact of state control on politically motivated film images. An in depth analysis of the modes of censorship and the degree of damage, and even liberation done by the state on political films shall be carried out in chapter three to do with political censorship.

### **2.12.0 *Flame* (1996) and the Limitations of political criticism**

The feature film *Flame*(1996) sparked some controversies for its inclusion of a rape scene depicting a female combatant being raped by his male compatriot. Lyons(1997: 1) comments that the film was criticized for: "...graphic scenes of rape and sexual harassment, girls exchanging sex for food, camps being bombed by the Rhodesian jets and freedom fighters burning down a shop for revenge and fearing to engage a truck load of Rhodesian forces at an ambush". Through the language of exclusion, the scene depicting new recruits being locked in underground dungeons for interrogation and girls exchanging sex for food that were in the rough cuts of the film were removed. The Zimbabwe National Liberation War Veterans (ZNLWVA) attempted to have the film banned. However, as Lyons(1997) argues while the war veterans association were not intending to provide free publicity for the film their attempt to control the production actually stimulated a debate about how female combatants were handled during the liberation struggle. On the part of female ex-combatants, there has been a deep seated self-censorship about revealing their war experiences. Lyons comments that:

"Among female ex-combatants the topic of rape is still a sensitive issue, and women in particular are not enthusiastic to discuss it. Moreover, many female ex-combatants do not readily talk about war at all. Often based on their own experience, they fear that by talking about forced sexual encounters they will be labelled prostitutes" (1997:1)

As a counter-attack to accusations of censorship, the Africa Film Web Meeting(1996) responds that if the Zimbabwean government supplied material resources in the form of planes and technical



support, what makes Sinclar—the director of *Flame(1996)* think that the government was against the whole production? The Web site goes on to accuse the producers of *Flame(1996)* of *rubbishing* the liberation struggle by reducing it, “...to a pointless exercise in which guerillas are portrayed as villains and not heroes”(1996:2).The controversies sparked by *Flame(1996)* did not interrogate how patriarchal values were re-asserted by male fighters at the end of the film. The cultural aspects of the film were subordinated to the political, thereby reducing film criticism to political witch-hunting.

### **2.12.1 *Gukurahundi: A moment of madness (2007)***

For years the Zimbabwean government has shown that it will not tolerate alternative *voices* that interrogate the seamy side of Zimbabwe’s history. This has manifested through state censorship. For example, since the production of the documentary film *Gukurahundi: A moment of madness (2007)* by Zenzele Ndebele, the government has been making frantic efforts to bar the film from reaching the public domain. In fact, a repeated kidnap attempt on Zenzele by some unknown assailants who posed as state agents reveals that the worst type of censorship is that which seeks to eliminate the film-maker.

Ngugi in Negash(2003: 134) captures the contradictory nature of state censorship when he expounds that: “The state would still like to overcome the contradictions of prison, exile and physical elimination by doing all it can so that the artist could end up as being a wonderer in search of space”. In yet another manifestation of state prohibition of *voices* about *Gukurahundi*, Owen Maseko—a Bulawayo artist was arrested on 26 March 2010 initially on charges of violating section 30 of the Criminal Law Codification and Reform Act which alludes to insulting or undermining the authority of President by displaying artwork on *Gukurahundi*. The Zimbabwean Journalists(2010: 1) writes that,

“ In a government gazette published on Friday August 27, 2010 Home Affairs Secretary Melusi Matshiya announced that it was an offence in terms of Censorship and Entertainment(Cinematography and Publications, Publications of Pictures and Statutes) for anyone to show *Gukurahundi* material. The Zimbabwe Journalists goes further to say that film, words and paintings on the walls portraying the *Gukurahundi* era is dismissed by the Home Affairs as ‘ tribal based’(2010:1) event.

Zenzele’s documentary does circulate in the public domain. Even audience found in possession of the film is arrested. Censorship criminalises the film-maker as well as the potential film audience.

African Commission on Human and People's Rights Banjul Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression in Africa declare that freedom of expression and information includes:

“the right to seek, receive and impart information and ideas, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other form of communication as a fundamental and inalienable human right and indispensable component of democracy”( Zimbabwe Journalists, 2010: 1).

Although the state appears to have succeeded in prohibiting Zenzele's documentary film from entering effectively the *macro-settings* or public domain, the documentary's availability on DVD'S has in a way helped to define the dynamism of *micro-settings* where individuals can have access to the film as well as evolve clandestine ways of distributing it.

## 2.13 Conclusion

The aim of chapter two was to review literature relating to how censorship is inherently structured in legal language. The chapter also explored statutes with the hope of foregrounding the historical dimension of legislation on film from colonial to post colonial Zimbabwe. It was argued that most terms that were used by the Rhodesian Publications Ordinance of 1911, Cinematograph Ordinance of 1912 and Entertainment Controls Act of 1967 were ambiguous and vague. The chapter argued that after independence in 1980, the new black government used some statutes inherited from colonial Rhodesia to curtail the freedom of filmmakers. In this chapter it was practically demonstrated that some terms, phrases and expressions contained in the Censorship and Entertainment Controls Act [Chapter 10: 04], Public Order and Security Act (POSA) and Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA) are used by the present government to restrict filmmakers from expressing ideas freely. The chapter also reviewed current film theories such as Liberal theories, Marxism, Hegemony and theories of performance and visibility. Marxist theories emphasize the *dominant thesis* of censorial powers thereby underestimate the existential powers of filmmakers and audience to create ways of escaping state restrictions. The contradictions and ambiguities of state power are explored by Gramsci's theory on hegemony. This theory views filmmakers and state as parties always in struggle to win the approval of the audiences. Theories on visibility foreground pictures enable film-makers to create space that is not totally controlled by self-imposed censorship as well as state restrictions. It was also emphasised the audiences can evolve

clandestine interpretive practices that evade state restrictions on access and dissemination of prohibited film images by resorting to new media technologies such as DVD's, Internet, Facebook and DSTv with multiple channels. The chapter sampled out the films *Flame*(1996) and *Gukurahundi: A moment of madness*(2007) to depict the extent to which state censorship affects film production and meaning potential of film images. Here, it was argued that previous works reveal that film critics do not know how to interpret the political in culturally based films, and the cultural in politically based films. Chapter three explores *Cry Freedom*(1980), *Flame*(1996), *The Interpreter*(2005) and *Gukurahundi: A moment of madness*(2007). The aim is to establish the extent to which these political films have been subjected to state censorship. The chapter will also indicate in what ways the film-maker's use of rhetorical devices enable them to suggest alternative frames of existence that transgress the boundaries imposed by state as well as self-censorship. This is the dialectical relation of censorship and the quest for freedom that this study addresses critically because this scholarly gap has not been explored in studies on the Zimbabwean film from the perspective that harness eclectic film theories.

## Chapter 3

### Censoring and Censuring the political film in Zimbabwe

*'Every film is political inasmuch as it is determined by the ideology which produces it'*(Comolli and Narboni, 1976:22).

#### 3.0 Introduction

This chapter explores the manifestations of political censorship in four films from and on Zimbabwe. *Cry Freedom*(1987), *Flame*(1996), *Gukurahundi: A Moment of Madness*(2007) and *The Interpreters*(2005) are considered representative of the different ways through which the notion of political censorship is embedded in the film narratives. The range of censorship attitudes which form possible reactions by authorities can be banning, prior restraint; subsequent punishment, manner restrictions, allow and protect. The other important form of political censorship considered in this chapter is state denial that there is political persecution of artists in Zimbabwe. The response to these forms of political censorship by those whose work is being censored can engender the tendency to endorse or not endorse censorship, which is a function of how those who are being censored are constructed in the dominant discourses. I demonstrate that *Cry Freedom* was a state project authorised to recall the Pan African nationalist sensibilities of the 1980s in Southern Africa; that the film is politically censored from the point of its production, and then that the contradictions that *Cry Freedom* is not allowed to enunciate are captured in *Flame*. Here, I show that political censorship of *Flame* was largely manifested through organized protests by some disgruntled freedom fighters who felt the film distorted their authorised version of the Zimbabwe's liberation struggle. The banality of political censorship is captured in allegations by Zenzele Ndebele that State agents attempted to silence his film, *Gukurahundi: A moment of madness* through threats of abduction to eliminate him. Finally, I show that the hostile reception of the film, *The Interpreters*(2005) and its subsequent banning from circulating in Zimbabwe reveal how the Zimbabwean state successfully mobilised its own intellectuals and critics to impose political censorship of the film through sustained negative critical evaluation.

### 3.1 Understanding the political in film and the film in the political

The political in the film manifests through restrictions, banning, prohibitions or control of film by state machineries of censorship. To ban film images, arrest and intimidate film-makers forms part of coercive power that a state can deploy as it exercises its political power over producers of film images. McCoy(1993) points out that sometimes political censorship of film images is arbitrary where officials just operate outside the provisions of the censorship laws to impose sanctions to films that do not project the ideology of the ruling elite class. For example, the film *Flame*(1996) was subjected to *a priori* censorship for denting official historiography about the liberation struggle when the film included a rape scene in its narrative. The political in film can also infiltrate the film director's sensibility that may encourage a narrow political imagery that channelises audiences towards predetermined goals set by the state. This way, the political in film produces constrictive 'realities' so that the power of those who control film images is viewed through a prism of a single, naturalized and essentialised mode of language codification. Louis Althusser proffers the concept of 'interpellation' to argue that every person's concept of self or identity is determined and produced by the dominant powers (Chincholkar-Mandelia, 2005). Althusser goes further to assert that when a person easily identifies with film's verbal and audio-visual language[s], and gets pleasure out of it, the process of 'interpellation' would have taken place as the person is seduced into blind conformity by the formal and ideological powers of the image.

In its ambivalence, power has the capacity to co-opt, abuse and appropriate the language of the film image in order to rob filmmakers the chance to produce counter-cultures (Gilroy, 1993). At the same time, political power cannot be understood clearly by thinking exclusively in terms of force or coercion; power also seduces, solicits support, induces forms of pleasure and pain and wins consent even from those that are subjected to power's restrictions or prohibitions. In Zimbabwe, state control and prohibitions imposed on sensual and seductive film images can be demonstrated through a analysis of the dangers of political messages in *Cry Freedom*(1987), *Flame*(1996), *Gukurahundi: A moment of madness*(2007) and *The Interpreters*(2005).

The dialectic of film in the political is subtly captured in the book *Political Film: The dialectics of Third Cinema* by Wayne (2001: 1) who contends that, 'All films are political, but films are not all political in the same way'. The different shades of 'politicalness' hinted by Wayne (2001) derive

from film's ability to deploy its verbal and audio-visual narratives to challenge the political *status quo*. Also, the 'politicalness' of film images can be reflected through a film's 'silence' on ubiquitous political injustices. In this formulation, a film says more from what it does not say than from what it is authorised to speak. Griffiths (1994) complicates the notion that it is always the ruling class who can prevent a film from saying what it ought to say than what it ends up saying. For Griffiths (1994), there is no guarantee that even when a film is directed by members of the subaltern it will necessarily portray the world view of the lower classes. This is possible because the subaltern filmmaker can be spoken to by the discursive space he/she occupies in the larger creative economy.

Fortunately, when a film becomes 'silent' about critical issues, this can force audiences to seek out the truth about the forces that make filmmakers to lose their voice. In other words, 'silence' becomes a form of language that points to the degree to which a film is allowed to certain things, and yet disallowed to say out things that are viewed by the state as subversive. Apart from the issue of funding that influences the way the political is narrativised, the director of Media for Development Trust (2012) suggested in a written response to my questionnaire interviews that the tense political mood in the country is the most active factor that discourages a proliferation of open political films in Zimbabwe. Individual filmmakers are not free to discuss the specific details of their experiences with political censorship for fear of victimisation.

### **3.2 Legislature and political censorship**

As argued in chapter two, at independence in 1980, Zimbabwe inherited a plethora of legislation aimed to censor printed material, and moving images that were deemed subversive by the Rhodesian government. The content of what was considered a threat to the authorities was defined vaguely in terms such as *obscene, undesirable and morally objectionable*. The ambiguity of the terms *objectionable* means many things to many people. D.W Lardner – Burke who was the minister of Law and Order believed that the colonial "government cannot permit the prized ideal of press freedom to be used for spreading subversion when all are engaged in fighting a cruel enemy" (quoted in Drag, 1993:43). His speech would suggest a case for banning materials such as film thus demonstrating a form of open censorship. Hungwe notes that in the 1960s, the colonial government

"sought to counter African nationalism with a vigorous propaganda campaign that included taking over the broadcasting services, banning newspapers sympathetic

to African aspirations and introducing draconian censorship regulations. Of particular interest to the history of film was the banning of a Michael Raeburn's film, *Rhodesia Countdown*(1969), which satirized white attitudes and racism against Africans”(2005:85).

These Rhodesian-style state restrictions on media were adopted by the new government of Zimbabwe to curb dissenting *voices*. Zimbabwe's new leadership imposed a series of media laws for ideological control but disguised as 'national interests', 'national security' and 'national sovereignty' (Moyo, 2004:12). The Censorship and Entertainments Control Act of 1996, chapter 10, sections 11 and 27 describes as, 'undesirable, offensive or harmful to the public morals' a publication deemed to be contrary to the interests of defense, public safety, public order, the economic interests of the State or public health. Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA) enacted in 2001 was introduced in the context of a political and economic *crisis* to silence a critical media. The aggravating effects of AIPPA are evident in the closure of the *Daily News* and its sister weekly, the *Daily News on Sunday* in September 2003. The weekly *Tribune* suffered a similar fate in May 2004. The Public Order and Security Act (POSA) Act No. 18 followed in 2002, and attempted to instill in the public minds a 'narrativised ideology through a formulaic articulation and naturalization of the discourse of the nation, so as to frame nationalism as the answer to the Zimbabwean crisis' (Moyo, 2010:117). POSA criminalises the 'publication of false statements prejudicial to the state (Section 15), but mild criticism can easily pass for a prejudicial statement, resulting in criminal prosecution of the individuals or organisations concerned' (Moyo ,2010: 98).

### **3.3 Metonymic allegory in *Cry Freedom*(1987)**

After a successful liberation struggle (1970-1979) Zimbabwe saw itself as a centre of revolutionary thought. This narrative of nationalism is immortalized in the film, *Cry Freedom*(1987). The film was directed by Richard Attenborough and set in the late 1970s, during the apartheid era in South Africa. The film was primarily shot on location in Zimbabwe due to political turmoil in South Africa at the time of production. The narrative of *Cry Freedom*(1987) was motivated by the need to chronicle the political achievements of the black activist Steve Biko. He was the founder of Black Consciousness Movement whose major goal was to fight apartheid for the liberation of black people in South Africa. According to Hungwe (2005), *Cry Freedom*(2005) delves into the ideas of discrimination, political corruption and the repercussions of violence in apartheid South Africa. In the film, Steve

Biko is arrested, tortured and murdered while in police custody. The production of the film induced a strong sense of solidarity among African countries that were still struggling under the colonial systems of oppression. The high-water mark of the film narration is when the film's epilogue displays a graphic image detailing a long list of anti-apartheid activists who died under suspicious circumstances while imprisoned by the government.

Here, the producers of the film allow it to pass for an allegory understood by Jameson (1981) as a story of the misfortunes of one country that represents the suffering of people in all Third world countries. Such a preferred interpretation by the state allowed Zimbabwean authorities to consolidate their power in the 1980s by reminding people of the bonds of solidarity that should prevail not only in Zimbabwe but in Africa. By co-funding the production of the film *Cry Freedom*, Zimbabwe saw itself as the champion of African struggle and renaissance. However, this historically positive self appointed role and the dominant narrative that Zimbabwe authorised through *Cry Freedom* also contained some paradoxes and contradictions in that there were some meanings embedded in the *Cry Freedom* that amounted to half disclosure of the film's ideological intentions. These undeclared intentions or silences can be interpreted in ways that bring out the dimension of embedded political censorship.

### **3.3.0 Suppression of 'Gukurahundi' narratives as a form of political censorship in *Cry Freedom***

In order to get to these absented meanings we must consider the concept of time of narration and narrated time. Time of narration relates to the time the story is told and in *Cry Freedom* the 'time of narration' is 1985 when the film was produced, when Zimbabwe was embroiled in a civil war although this war is not thematised or mentioned at all. The authorities chose to highlight the threat posed by apartheid and not the contradictions in the new Zimbabwe. This diversionary tactic within focalization is a form of political censorship.

In *Cry Freedom* 'narrated time' is the 1980s when apartheid was the main enemy of blacks in South Africa. *Cry Freedom* was meant to limit what audience should know about Zimbabwe's own



liberation struggle and the internecine war in Matabeleland and the Midlands. If the act of narrativizing gives “moral authority without which the notion of a specifically social reality would be unthinkable”(1996:284), as White argues, then, Universal Pictures and the Zimbabwean authorities imposed hidden political censorship on the range of possible meanings of *Cry Freedom* by controlling the process that turns “knowing into telling”(ibid, 276). These co-producers aimed to represent the events displayed in their film with “the coherence, integrity, fullness, and closure of an image of life that is and can only be imaginary” (ibid, 273). In reality the narratives deliberately left out point to an alternative version of Zimbabwe that the audiences were prevented from accessing under the guise of promoting the spirit of Pan Africanism.

### **3.3.1 Diversion, ‘silence’ and historical amnesia as forms of political censorship in *Cry Freedom***

The production of *Cry Freedom* (1987) imposed historical amnesia about Gukurahundi atrocities in Matabeleland and Midlands province in Zimbabwe. This historical amnesia is a result of failure to constantly speak through the power of the image about the history of post independence Zimbabwe. While ‘silence’ born out of officially imposed forgetfulness can be viewed as an absence of communication, silence is a communicative act in itself (Sheriff, 2000; Weingarten, 2004). As a politically motivated form of forgetfulness, ‘silence’ was used to censor a collective remembering about *Gukurahundi* atrocities by focalising on South African history. In other words, an officially imposed amnesia was manipulated by the Zimbabwe’s ruling elites to muzzle alternative histories and memories of what could be said or remembered through film about the narratives of *Gukurahundi*. The act of assisting to narrate South African history is described by Mhiripiri(2008:40) as ‘political diversion’ which is a conscious act that involves giving focus to something of less importance while being ‘silent’ about pertinent issues. Diversion, silence and officially imposed amnesia are therefore the forms of political censorship used in *Cry Freedom* to conceal by postponing engagement with the contradictions within the Zimbabwean liberation struggles. However, what is redeeming is to know that in wanting to oppress the reality of *Gukurahundi* by diverting people’s memories, the government actually cultivated curiosity in people to want to unearth and interrogate the hideous narratives of post independent Zimbabwe. One Zimbabwe film critic, Nyasha Mboti argues that in co-producing *Cry Freedom* the government of

Zimbabwe saw an opportunity to project its official narrative as the only construction through which people of Southern Africa could understand what was happening in South Africa and not in Zimbabwe:

**Question: Would you agree with the view that although *Cry Freedom* was produced with the participation and some form of cooperation from the government of Zimbabwe, it represents the State's capacity to control the meanings that the audiences get to decipher?**

**Answer:** Yes, the state participated in the production of *Cry Freedom* because it saw itself as a stakeholder in the whole process—as all governments tend to be. And, of course, the government would not have been so keen on the project had it not felt able to re-package *Cry Freedom* for its own ends. (Questionnaire Interview with Nyasha Mboti, 29 January 2012 16: 46).

For Mboti(2012) one of the 'ends', would suggest that the Zimbabwean government got involved into the production of *Cry Freedom* to promote the spirit of Pan-Africanism hitherto started by the late Ghanaian president and Nationalist Kwame Nkrumah. The other possible ideological 'end' for the government's involvement in the production of the film that Mboti(2012) suggest with the phrase "re-package *Cry Freedom* for its own ends" was the need to politically divert Zimbabweans from questioning the [im]morality of a government that committed massacres in its own backyard, and yet the same government was championing itself as the custodian of revolutionary practice. However, as Madsen (1992) reminds us, metaphorical allegory is inherently fractured despite attempts to present itself as coherent. We shall see in this chapter how *Cry Freedom's* Pan African nationalist narrative is subverted by some political films emerging from Zimbabwe.

### **3.3.2 The myth of homogeneity in the narratives of black struggle in *Cry Freedom***

The production of *Cry Freedom* in 1987 was a positive gesture to African nations in that the film seeded the spirit of African nationalism and Pan-Africanism. However, while it was pertinent to depict the ruthlessness of Apartheid, the phenomenon of black –on-black violence in the townships such as Soweto, Thembisa, Soshanguve and Mamelodi in South Africa in the 1980s is conveniently occluded in *Cry Freedom* to give a sense of cohesion to nationalist forces during decolonisation at a

time these forces were also fractured from within. The leading African National Congress (ANC) party was marred with internal frictions and contradictions that tended to undercut its effort to fight the Apartheid regime. Some members of Inkata Freedom Party (IFP) sold out to the forces of Apartheid leading to the arrest and persecution of young African nationalists who were mobilising people to fight against the evil system of Apartheid. This valuable piece of history is censored through occlusion or over-shadowing which is a process where one piece of history is emphasised at the expense of the other. The contradictions within the Zimbabwean liberation struggle that *Cry Freedom* was not allowed to surface are captured in the film *Flame*.

### **3.4 *Flame*(1996) and engendering fractured memories of Zimbabwe’s armed struggle**

*Flame* (1996) is centred on a relationship between Florence (comrade Flame) and Nyasha (comrade Liberty)—two fifteen year old girls living in a small village in Rhodesia. It is 1975 and the war is at its peak. The pretty Florence’s aim is to get married to a man who takes care of her—while Nyasha, the educated of the two, wants a job in the city. One night a group of freedom fighters arrive in the village to ask for volunteers who can join them. In return, the comrades promise scholarships, military training and the glory of fighting for black freedom. But the promises that initially touched the hearts of the two young girls were later to be challenged by the realities of the armed struggle and the contradictions of post war Zimbabwe.

#### **3.4.0 *Flame* and the interrogation of the official version of the armed struggle**

In *Flame* the rape scene allowed the filmmaker to stage a symbolical ‘overthrow’ of the authorities’ romantic narrative of the armed struggle. The depiction of two young women crossing into Mozambique alone, unaccompanied by men is a point that one does not see in male narratives. The treatment of female narratives at the camps as mothers and couriers is another fact that undermines the representation of women imaged as brave fighters at the front. The poverty that afflicts female ex-combatants that the film reveals at the end of the war undermines the certitude that the armed struggle brought economic benefits to all who participated in it. Furthermore, the gathering of ex-

combatants in the film, in their own different physical space as opposed to the celebrations at the Heroes Acre patronised by politicians that the film juxtaposes, reveal that in future, ex-combatants will command the potential to create their own ideological space where they can authorise values different from the master narrative of official nationalism that emphasises the telos of war, peace and progress for all in Zimbabwe.

*Flame (1996)* is an alternative voice that underlines the need to uncover and confront the shadowy side of the liberation struggle. Drawing attention to the dark side of the liberation does not deny the genuinely heroic and courageous sacrifices of many African nationalists and ordinary citizens. That political censorship was imposed on the reception of *Flame* is because the film introduces the process of narrating the nation by voices from below. *Flame* rekindled diverse curiosities in the ordinary people that resulted in them questioning how a liberation war fought in the name of ‘mass participation’ was manipulated by authorities when they told one side of the story. *Flame(1996)* suggests that the ‘nation’ as a narrative construct is marked with continual slippages in meanings so that the nation is not a ‘totalised or finished entity’ but that, it is always in a flux or in a ‘state of becoming’(Zegeye and Vambe, 2009:16). The subversive meanings authorised in *Flame* also contest patriarchal power expressed through African orality.

### **3.4.1 Political Censorship and the struggle to deconstruct African orality in *Flame (1996)***

*Flame* deconstructs the notion that African orality only can represent as ‘authentic’ African cultural values (Vambe, 2004). In the film, the Shona song, ‘*Nyika Yedu Yababa*’ (Our Fatherland) insists on the gendered constructions of nation. The metaphor implied in ‘*yedu*’ meaning ‘ours’ sits uncomfortably with the patriarchal association of the nation with the term ‘*yababa*’. ‘*Yababa*’ is not simply a rhetorical expression, but has connotations of men who have power to control the new nation. In ‘*Tinofa tichienda (We’ll die going to Zimbabwe)*, freedom fighters derive spiritual energy from the figure of Nehanda, the legendary woman who defied white colonisation, yet in the film as in real life women such as Flame or Florence have no jobs, and after the war these women still have to defer to obscurantist cultural practices upheld by men. Chikowero(2010: 137) reminds us that when song is deployed through the discourses of *Flame(1996)* it is cogent to ask: ‘Whose versions of

the songs get to be remembered? Whose memories are privileged and what locus of ideological understanding of the liberation struggle is being promoted?’ Popular Shona songs are used to police the boundary of what female combatants say or how women can act in front of men. After the war, comrade Liberty (Nyasha) is employed as secretary to a male boss who only knows the language of reprimands and commands, while comrade Flame (Florence) ekes out a precarious existence in the rural areas. Her husband, comrade Danger is a drunk who does not care about the welfare of his family. When Danger is confronted by his wife for his apparent lack of concern, he slaps her and shouts, ‘You think I’m a woman’. Eventually, Florence runs away from Danger and joins her friend Nyasha who works in the city. In *Flame*, comrade Liberty asserts her need for unfettered freedom when she says, ‘I had to make it alone in a men’s world. You know what they are saying? They say we are prostitutes’.

### 3.4.2 Silencing and censoring of *Flame*’s political narratives

*Flame* (1996) encountered its public life in a controversial way. In attempting to confront and expose political censorship of narratives of war, the film’s reception was met by some freedom fighters who accused the filmmaker for distorting the nationalist war narrative. The central scene of the film where a male comrade rapes a female comrade sparked the protests among war veterans who read that the narratives of *Flame* had the effect of undercutting the liberation cause.



**Fig 4** Shot from *Flame*(1996)

The above shot taken from the film *Flame*(1996)shows Comrade Che forcing comrade Flame to be intimate with him. The resultant rape scene angered some members of the war veteran association who then demonstrate against *Flame*(1996) accusing it of rubbishing the liberation struggle. Following the demonstration by members of war veteran association, the film *Flame* was subjected to *a priori* censorship by the Zimbabwe Censorship Board. *A priori* censorship which is preventive restriction was applied to the images of *Flame* so that by the time the film entered the public domain it had lost most of its raw or ‘uncensored’ material focusing on the narratives that reveal the abuse of some female combatants during the war of liberation struggle.

When I interviewed Nyasha Mboti to make a clear distinction of who exactly was involved in scuppering the reception of *Flame*, he provided a subjective response:

**Question: There is controversy over whether or not it was ex-combatants or government officials who attempted to scupper the reception of *Flame*. Can you separate the two in this debate. And, also apart from the famed rape incident in the film what other aspects would you think rendered *Flame* objectionable?**

**Answer:** I have already partly addressed the Flame issue above. Anyhow, Flame may also have been objectionable to the government for the reason that the government felt that since it was the (self appointed) custodian of the official liberation war narrative, Raeburn had no right to dare to attempt to animate it into a type of film over whose meanings they had little or no control. While Flame itself is an average film in terms of dramatic appeal, one imagines that it would still have been embraced by the powers that be if it had left some space in its script for key official slogans pertaining to war. (Questionnaire Interview with Nyasha Mboti, 29 January 2012 16: 46)

It appears that government is not comfortable with narratives that are constructed by people with no liberation war credentials, and worse still, white filmmakers. The idea of anticipating the liberation war narratives to come from war veterans is selective, constrictive and above all, segregatory of the alternative stories that the ‘masses’ can tell about their experiences of the liberation war. The filmmakers of *Flame* had their own way ahead of the government in creating a film based on the liberation war. In response to my question as to why the government of Zimbabwe had failed to produce a classic liberation war film, Mboti(2012) offered a number of reasons:

**Question: In your opinion, what made the Zimbabwean government fail to produce a classic film about the liberation struggle, even when such a possibility would have produced a film that reflects what Ranger describes as ‘patriotic history’ (2005:220)?**

**Answer:** There might be a number of differing reasons, of course. One obvious factor is investment in just such an idea. Epic costs—in terms of conceptual scope and money. Film is currently not seen as a core industry in Zimbabwe and no one would like to invest in what might prove to a waste. Remember the government did attempt, in the 1980s, to build the local film industry through attracting co-production and foreign productions into the country (King Solomon’s Mines; Cry Freedom)—but reportedly made some spectacular losses. That would have been a good base—but the losses turned off the state players. That gap was promptly filled in by the NGOs, to the apparent detriment of the local industry.

A second factor is the type of hegemonic, official Text preferred in Zimbabwe currently. In my PhD I studied the ZTV broadcasting gaze and made observation that those who manage the public media in Zimbabwe are still to move away from the over-used tactic of constant repetition and iterative sloganeering, to a much more nuanced national ideological template. Of course, such ‘classics’ would have to be propagandistic, and propaganda is difficult to sell if it’s not clothed in everyday clothes. The public media managers in Zimbabwe would have to learn to package propaganda in nuance. Look at Eisenstein’s *Battleship Potemkin*—the classic of the Russian Revolution. It is a piece of socialist propaganda, but still astounding in its cinematic effects and overall subtlety. Even Leni Riefenstahl’s *Triumph of the will*—a sinister Nazi idea that still comes to life as documentary—as does Griffith’s racist classic *Birth of a Nation* and other celebrated Hollywood titles such as *How the West was Won* and *Ben Hur*, among others. (Questionnaire Interview with Nyasha Mboti, 29 January 2012 16: 46)

Costs of productions, and lack of ideological nuance in creating a film narrative that can compete with independent productions are cited as possible reasons why the governments resents filmmakers who produce alternative versions of the history of the war of liberation. This response partly addresses why when *Flame* was produced, the authorities responded quickly by imposing *a priori* censorship which is a preventive form of restriction that was meant to block the film from being released into the public domain.

The *Herald* newspaper of 19 January 1996 reports that: ‘Police in Harare seized negatives of film *Flame* basing on the argument that it contained subversive information and that some of its parts were pornographic. The police sought assistance of the Censorship Board to determine whether *Flame* contains and undesirable scenes or not’ (Zimmedia, 2010: 1). After the law failed to justify criminal charges on *Flame*(1996) regarding ‘pornography’ and ‘subversive information’, the Herald newspaper on 20 January reports that, ‘Police cleared the makers of the feature film *Flame* of obscenity allegations and returned rough prints seized last week saying there was no basis for laying a charge of obscenity’(Zimmedia, 2010:1). Even when *Flame* was cleared of the charges on ‘pornography’ the fact that the government and war veterans initially responded to the film in negative ways reveals the official narrative that resents uncomfortable questions being raised about the role of women in that struggle. In its response to *Flame* the government invoked the provisions of legal statutes. The official narrative used vague terms such as ‘undesirable scenes’ to censor the film. This lends credibility to the fact that apart from physical banning of a film, the state resorted to other ideological apparatus and the most readily one available was the legal language.

### **3.4.3 Arrests of Vendors who sell DVDs of *Flame* as political censorship**

The moving image is potentially if not inherently subversive because the meanings that can be interpreted from it are not necessarily the ones that authorities would like to be assured of. Since authorities cannot at all times succeed in policing the moving image, the only chance for authorities to control meaning is to make sure that the film that they do not desire is not freely circulated in open and public domain. The case of *Flame* is that today, it is hard to find a copy in many video stores in Zimbabwe. Owners of video stores confess that once they sell this film, their licenses can be revoked by municipal authorities. Vendors who sell videos can ‘burn’ several copies of a film such as *Flame* but they will only be able to sell it using underground or ‘guerrilla’ circuits because once the film is found on display, it is confiscated by the various arms of government agents who invoke different laws designed to stymie film distribution in Zimbabwe. However, the micro-setting conditions of reception in Zimbabwe have enabled the secret circulation of *Flame*’s(1996) DVDs since it was released.



### 3.4.4 The problems of self-censorship in *Flame*'s narratives

Apart from experiencing state imposed *a priori* censorship, the director of the film *Flame* is guilty of embedding some internalized forms of restrictions. It can be argued that although it was pertinent to include the rape scene in order to highlight the realities of Zimbabwe's armed struggle, the scene had the negative effect of sensationalising the armed struggle, and thus, undercutting its historical significance. Ultimately, what becomes memorable about the film is the rape scene than the knowledge that some people died while attempting to free Zimbabwe from the shackles of colonialism. Once the film is read this way, its central narrative of liberation struggle is occluded within the visual grammar of spectacularity. In the film narrative, the war ended with celebrations for independence at Rufaro Stadium in 1980. A disgruntled group of comrades do not participate in the celebrations feeling that the leadership has betrayed them for not giving them opportunities to occupy higher offices. Evidently, this ZANU versus ZANU class war reveals fractures within the ZANU PF official narrative of the war, but the same characterisation of the ZANU vs ZANU narrative can also censor *other*—but important narratives of the war. For example, the period of the armed struggle as well as the post war period depicted by the film *Flame* has deliberately drowned out the history of ZAPU –largely composed of Ndebele people, by not including the narratives of ZIPRA forces. What is projected by the film are ZANU contradictions, its ideology of what defined the armed struggle and the internal class struggle in post war Zimbabwe ruled by the ZANU PF party. Here, the producers of *Flame* parochially reveal that only ZANU fought in the liberation war, and that contradictions were only typical in the ZANU camp. This portrayal help project and inadvertently support the view that it is only ZANU forces that brought independence to Zimbabwe. This ideological erasure imposed on alternative histories and memories is what makes *Flame* parochial in putting into perspective the history of Zimbabwe's armed struggle. Whereas *Flame* was politically censored in the form of protests and forced withdrawal of rough cuts that were thought to rubbish the significance of the armed struggle, the documentary film *Gukurahundi: A moment of madness* (2007) received harsh treatment of an outright ban by government.

### 3.5 Screening the prohibited: *Gukurahundi: A moment of madness* (2007).

The political censorship of *Gukurahundi: A moment of madness* (2007) was more vicious. It took the unsavoury nature of not only attempting to silence the film that deals with the hot issue of genocide in Matabeleland and the Midlands Provinces, but also of actually attempting to attack its director-producer, Zenzele Ndebele. Ndebele testifies that he was nearly abducted by some people that he alleges were the 'state' secret agents at Bulawayo Centre Complex. Ndebele is quoted by Shumba(2010: 1) in *The Zimbabwean* newspaper as having said that an attempt was made on his life to eliminate him:

‘Two men wanted to abduct me at Bulawayo Centre Complex on Saturday afternoon. Initially when I met these guys, one of them said he wanted to know about my *Gukurahundi* film then I told them it's in the public domain. Sensing danger, I decided to leave the scene. Then one of them called me back to check a message on his mobile but I refused and he tried to grab my hand. Was it not for my quick thinking, I'm not sure what would have happened to me by now'

Although this version is denied by the government's media, *Gukurahundi* never made it to the State controlled Zimbabwe Television (ZTV) where other documentaries are screened. In the case of *Gukurahundi: A moment of Madness* what was viewed by the authorities as threatening to its own narrative of unity where the revelations in the documentary of maimed people, and mine-shafts alleged to have been found where dead bodies of innocent people and those of some political opponents from Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army(ZIPRA) were dumped. In the film it is also revealed that nearly 20 000 people—mostly of Ndebele origin, from Matabeleland and parts of Midlands were killed. The killings were carried out between 1982 and 1987 by the North Korean trained fifth brigade. According to the Catholic Commission of Justice Peace(1997) report the killings of people during *Gukurahundi* involved severe beatings that caused death, and summary executions. Mutizwa corroborates this view and argues that 'in the ZANU PF context *Gukurahundi* becomes a concept and not an event; it is a political survival principle in which an elite group, 'musvo' descends on political opponents with the aim of completely eradicating them' (2008: 19). The Sokwanele report says that the whole regions of Matabeleland and Midlands were referred to in

the language of *Gukurahundi* as places that needed ‘reorientation’ and ‘change’ (Sokwanele Report, 2010: 1), the euphemist language of ‘soft or hidden censorship’ (Zibareva, 2008:26).

In *Gukurahundi: A moment of madness*(2007) former minister of defence, Enos Nkala appears in a cut-up image forcing out testimonies from young men accused of being dissidents. According to Mbembe(2001), power that is faked demonstrates its banality by applying systematic pain to those that are ruled. In the film, the vulgarities of authoritarian tendencies are further exposed through eye-witness accounts and testimonies of the survivors who contest official versions of the war. The survivors authorize their own narratives in which they construct themselves as victims.



**Fig 5** Shot from *Gukurahundi: A moment of madness*(2007)

The above shot depicts one of the surviving victims of Gukurahundi atrocities. He is at pain to describe how women including her sister were raped and killed in front of the people. The victim was beaten and accused of being a sell out because he was able to speak both Ndebele and Shona languages. Such images of oral testimonies recorded live and depicting government heavy handedness in Matabeleland and Midlands have not gone down well with the ruling elites involved in the saga. The ZANU PF officials immediately ordered the banning of the film thereby curtailing the film’s chances of entering the public domain. However, despite government action of banning *Gukurahundi: A moment of madness*(2007), survivors that are in the documentary and those that were not included project themselves as fighters who use oral testimony to give voice to their experiences that had been politically censored for more than thirty years.

The peasants in the film deconstruct the notion of a peaceful and unitary Zimbabwean nation that official discourses promote at the expense of the memories of some part of the regions of the country that have different stories to tell. Peasants in *Gukurahundi: A Moment of Madness*, refuse to have their alternative narratives politically muzzled. They turn up-side down the idea from President Mugabe that the whole ‘*Gukurahundi*’ episode was done in ‘a moment of madness’. In the film, one young man who claims to have lost sisters, and was himself physically molested asks: ‘Was it a time of madness? Whose time of madness? His time of madness or the soldier’s time of madness?’ Ndlovu(2010) views Mugabe’s ‘apologetic’ statement as a form of political censorship since, for Ndlovu(2010), it insinuates that the atrocities were temporary and committed by soldiers who acted without state permission. In this evaluation, Mugabe’s statement uttered in 1999 during the burial of Joshua Nkomo is deliberately de-contextualised so that it appears in the film as a form of ‘hidden censorship’ (Zibareva, 2008: 26) in which Mugabe refuses account for the events that occurred over a period of five to six years.

Another peasant in the film believes that the Shona people hate Ndebele people. He says the nation does not “love us Ndebeles. Our crime is that we are Ndebeles”. Also in the film, Phakisa Nyathi—a historian, asserts that, ‘to find justification and kill with impunity, the fifth brigade accused Ndebele kings, Mzilikazi and Lobengula(1880s) of coming down to Mashonaland to raid Shonas of their cattle and women’. According to Nyathi, *Gukurahundi* was then conceived as pay back time. In the film, Welshman Mabhena, former governor in ZAPU PF government also says, ‘ZANLA cadres were taught to hate Ndebeles during the liberation struggle’. This sentiment is also echoed by a former dissident ‘Thembolenyoka’ who testifies that since ZIPRA forces were trained by former Union Soviet Socialist Republic (USSR) and ZANLA guerrillas were trained by the Chinese, the two differed in their tactical approaches to the war of liberation. Therefore, the differences in military training between ZIPRA and ZANLA is proffered as one that made them to see each other as enemies.

In the narrative one male victim testifies that, ‘It was difficult to identify who was a dissident and who was not. The soldiers would kill people and then they would display them as dissidents. Those were some of their tactics’. These ‘voices’ that are exclusively drawn from the Ndebele people are strategically placed in the film in order to authorise a narrative that will pin down President Robert

Mugabe in particular and all the Shona people in general. In the film, Mugabe is made to justify his political repression of the Matabeleland when he says, 'We have treated them with kid gloves. We will crush them'. In this context, 'them' is referring to ZAPU and its alleged supporters.

However, these assertions are complicated in the official narratives where a cut-up image shows President Robert Mugabe declaring that, 'As long as dissidents come from a particular area, we will send soldiers to that area. As long as a party supports dissidents, we will not rest unless that party is crushed and crushed....' Tapfumaneyi Machakaire—a journalist who is also interviewed and appears in the film believes that, 'nothing was going to stop Mugabe from crushing any form of opposition even if it emanated from Mashonaland, Masvingo or Manicaland'. Machakaire's viewpoint contests Ndlovu's (2010) perspective and that of other scholars who do not view *Gukurahundi* as a manifestation of power politics pitting ZANU against ZAPU.

The peasants who testify in *Gukurahundi: A moment of madness*(2007) can be said to have broken official silence about Matabeleland and Midlands killings. However, in the process they also begin to create a formidable ethnic mythology in which every Shona is tainted by being Shona. This paradox reveals itself as a new kind of political censorship, because the filmmaker does not allow Shona speakers to give their own version of the killings. In the film, unwittingly, the victims who give testimony exercise reverse ethnicity and believe that all Shonas are as bad as they think Mugabe is, as portrayed by Zenzele's documentary film. This form of political censorship in which the discourses of the victims have been entrapped in the very language of violence they decry has often meant that in Matabeleland there is ideological belief that no Shona people suffered. The *Gukurahundi* killings are thus ostensibly reduced to Ndebele versus Shona struggle for hegemony. Such kind of thinking is contestable (Vera, 1993). For example, some Ndebele people spied for the fifth brigade while other Ndebele people killed innocent Shona people and foreign tourists during the civil war. The role of how Super ZAPU worked with the secret South African security units to destabilize Zimbabwe is not acknowledged (CCJP, 1997). The contrast of Zenzele's documentary can be found in a documentary authored by the British Broadcast Corporation.

The documentary film *Panorama* (2004) directed by May and produced by BBC provides a broader understanding of the contradictions that characterise the Matabeleland and Midlands massacres. A product of white narratives about *Gukurahundi*, the documentary argues that although government

used excessive force to quell a potentially explosive situation, some white surviving victims of dissident attacks think that the government was justified. Many whites including the Bilang family who lost the young man—David, tell horrific stories of how some whites were beheaded, women were raped while other whites were forcibly taken away never to return back by the dissidents. A white victim testifies to the difficulties that government soldiers faced as they tried to work with the civilian population in Matabeleland which was very uncooperative. The dilemma was evident. For example, releasing information to government soldiers was like declaring a death sentence on self, and yet withholding vital information about dissident activities received severe punishment or even death. The significance of *Panorama* is that it acknowledges that dissidents killed more than 21 people in Nyamandlovu and that white farmers also were victims. More importantly, some white farmers in the film *Panorama* actually requested guns from the government to protect themselves. These facts are not included in *Gukurahundi: A Moment of Madness*. In other words, in the absence of other contesting narratives on the disturbances in Matabeleland and the Midlands provinces, the audiences are fed with one version. Both Zenzele's version and the official versions cannot entirely be relied on. The versions create polarised ways of understanding the issue because their ideological positions are fixed, and entrenched.

The partiality of *Gukurahundi: A Moment of madness* amounts to political censorship and in the film is also revealed through cut-up images of Joshua Nkomo who is not given 'voice' so that he appears an innocent victim through and through. The Sokwanele Report notes that the silencing of the Shona people in the film creates '...a dangerous perception amongst Zimbabweans outside Matabeleland that part of the responsibility for the troubles in this region rested with a troublesome civilian population'(Sokwanele Report, 2010: 1).

The documentary film *Gukurahundi: A moment of madness*(2007) remains banned in Zimbabwe. This view is supported by the film director, Zenzele Ndebele who said that there was harassment from state agents: I asked Zenzele Ndebele the question:

**Question: What was the reaction of the officials to *Gukurahundi: A moment of Madness*? Have you made any new films and what has been the response from the ordinary people?**

His answer suggested state agents enforced political censorship on behalf of the government:

**Answer:** The government never made any public statement about the documentary but there was harassment from state agents who did not want the documentary to be distributed. Some people who were found with the documentary were either arrested or harassed. I have not yet made any new film but I contributed in the making of the documentary *Robert Mugabe: What happened?* And the film is receiving international publicity. Currently, I am working on two documentaries: *A Neglected people: The story about the San Community in Zimbabwe* and *Disciplining a dissident city: The story about the water shortage in Bulawayo*. (Questionnaire Interview with Ndebele, Z. 13 January 2012, 18:41)

There are several readings that can emerge from Ndebele's response. The first one is that when the state declined to offer an official statement giving reasons that made it to ban Ndebele's documentary from the public domain, it deployed a pernicious form of political censorship in which the state pretended as nothing has happened, and yet secretly used its agents to harass the filmmaker. The same state agents were tasked to arrest or harass people as a way of blocking the film from entering the public domain. The second reading is that the ruling elites in Zimbabwe are prepared to use coercive power in order to instill fear in the minds of the artists who dare challenge their legitimacy as leaders. Coercive power in turn forces artists to adopt self censorship strategies to escape state persecution. The third interpretation is that despite the viciousness to which state deploys political censorship artists will continue to evolve 'escape avenues' that are not readily 'policed' by the state. This is evidenced by the Ndebele's insistence that 'truth' should be told through visual images in spite of the risks and dangers that can be encountered, and this tells how he went ahead to produce the politically inclined documentary *Robert Mugabe: What happened?* despite state control on political themes.

The above example of political censorship is justified by officials who argue that the film's explicit political messages violates section 30 of the Criminal Law Codification and Reform Act in which it is crime to insult or undermine the authority of the President by visually depicting images about *Gukurahundi* (Zimbabwe Journalists, 2010: 1). The sections of the law are ambiguous and vague in describing what is tantamount to 'insulting' or 'undermining' the authority of the President. The semantic indeterminacy of the language in the law allow the officials to construct, a 'legitimate case'

(Stevens, 2000: 16 and Hart, 1993) so that Zenzele Ndebele can be politically ‘silenced’ through intimidation and forced exile while his film was banned from being circulated in the public domain.

Government Authorities also invoked the Censorship and Entertainments Control Act (Cinematography and Publications) Production of Pictures and Statutes to silence the film. For example, Melusi Matshiya, the Home Affairs Secretary, argued in a government gazette published on Friday, August 27 (Zimbabwe Journalists, 2010) that a work of art that uses visual images, words, effigies and paintings on the wall portraying the *Gukurahundi* era should be viewed as a ‘tribal based’ (ibid). When the Board of Censors uses the term ‘tribal based’, it is attempting to counter dissentious ‘voices’ that are viewed as creating dissonance by questioning the politics of *Gukurahundi*.



**Fig 6:** Shot from *Gukurahundi: A moment of madness*(2007)

The above shot shows the skeleton of a victim of Gukurahundi whose flesh was left to rot in the open. It is these disturbing images that bore testimony to the mass killings that took place in Matabeleland. The Zimbabwean government is not ready to openly accept the responsibility, and open up dialogue among the surviving victims, families of the deceased and the perpetrators of violence. Apart from muffling discourses of Gukurahundi, the government is also using denialism as a tactic to wad off accusations of wanton killings in Matabeleland and Midlands.



The banning *Gukurahundi: A moment of madness*(2007) is an extension of state denialism. However, despite the fact that *Gukurahundi: A moment of madness*(2007) is banned in Zimbabwe some audiences have access to it through the internet and social media. Sensing the viciousness with which the Zimbabwean can pounce on filmmakers accused of producing ‘subversive’ information, Hollywood had produced an allegorical film *The Interpreter* way back in 2005 as a way of countering direct political censorship subjected to a political movie if it were to be produced and circulated in Zimbabwe.

### **3.6 The role of metaphoric allegory in the film *The Interpreters*(2005)**

*The Interpreter*(2005) follows a fairly simple plot. In the narrative, Silvia Broome(Nicole Kidman) is an interpreter working at the United Nations in New York. She was raised in the Republic of Matobo, a fictional African country, but has dual citizenship. The UN is considering indicting Edmond Zuwanie(Earl Cameron) president of Matobo, to stand trial in the International Criminal Court(ICC). Initially, a liberator, but over the past 20 years Zuwanie has become corrupt and tyrannical as the government he overthrew, and is now responsible for ethnic cleansing and other atrocities within Matobo. Zuwanie is soon to visit the UN and put forward his own case to General Assembly in an attempt to avoid indictment. A security scare forces the evacuation of the UN building and Silvia returns at night to collect his personal belongings. At that time, she overhears discussion of an assassination plot, and she runs scared from the building when those discussing the plot become aware of her presence. The next day, Silvia recognises words in the meeting where she is interpreting from the phrases she overhead the night before, and reports the incident to UN security.

The target of the assassination plot appears to be Zuwanie himself. The UN security calls in the United States Secret Service who assign Tobin Keller(Sean Penn) and Dot Woods (Catherine Keener) to investigate as well as protect Zuwanie when he arrives. Keller learns that Silvia has, in the past, been involved in the Matoban guerilla group, and her parents and sister were killed by land mines laid by Zuwanie’s men. Although Keller is suspicious of Silvia’s story, the two grow close and Keller ends up protecting her from attacks on her person. Silvia later finds that her brother Simon and his lover Xola were killed. The purported assassin is discovered while Zuwanie is in the middle of his address to the General Assembly, and security personnel rush Zuwanie to a safe room

for his protection. Silvia, anticipating this move, has been hiding in a safe room. She confronts Zuwanie intending to kill him. It is later found out that Zuwanie had arranged the assassination attempt to enhance his credibility, and thus avoid the indictment while also eliminating his political opponents. Keller rushes to the safe room and arrives just in time to prevent Silvia from murdering Zuwanie. Zuwanie is indicted, and Silvia is expelled from USA. She returns home to Matobo soon afterwards.

### **3.6.0 The trope of similitude of oppression in *The Interpreter***

The distortion of the film's message by state critics is apparent in that nowhere in the film is Zimbabwe and also the President of Zimbabwe are mentioned. The plot of the film is allegorical. It is based on the Republic of Matobo, a fictional African country whose president is to stand trial in the International Criminal Court (ICC) for crimes of corruption, tyrannical rule and ethnic cleansing within Matobo. The film's plot is simple but its allegorical quality is unsettling because it does not guarantee stable meanings that the Zimbabwean authorities can police with ease. This is so because allegory can upset official narratives since it embeds in its rhetorical structures the capacity to say one thing while meaning another (Slemon ,1987: 4).

### **3.6.1 The trope of similitude of prosecution in *The Interpreter***

The film *The Interpreter* also irked the Zimbabwean authorities for imagining the scenario of a possible indictment of the president of Zimbabwe at International Criminal Court(ICC)at the Hague. The visual similitude of prosecution is a replay of the sentiments in which Australia and New Zealand were pushing for Mugabe to be indicted by the UN Security Council for trial before ICC for crimes against humanity. In the actual film narrative, Zuwanie is indicted by the UN Security Council for trial before ICC on charges of crimes against humanity.



**Fig 7:** Shot from *The Interpreter*(2005)

The above shot shows president—Zhuwanie standing trial before the International Criminal Court(ICC) in the Hague. In the eyes of Zimbabwean authorities, *The Interpreter* deserved to be politically censored for imagining the ‘unimaginable’—that of hinting the possible prosecution of the Zimbabwean president.

### **3.6.2 The trope of similitude of treachery in *The interpreter***

*The Interpreter* was viewed as potentially dangerous for puncturing the image of trust that the Zimbabwean government had often projected to its people. This was done through images portraying the treachery of political leaders when Zuwanie is depicted as responsible for engaging a Dutch former mercenary to arrange an assassination attempt on him—since, as described in the film, ‘a nearly assassinated president gains credibility and sticks around to enjoy it’( *The Interpreter*, 2005). Similarly, Mugabe hired Ari Ben-Menashe who claimed to be an ex-Israel Secret Service Agent to arrange an assassination attempt which would see Morgan Tsvangirai tried for treason.

### **3.6.3 The trope of similitude of ‘regime change’ in *The interpreter***

One of the most disturbing facts about the *The Interpreter* which forced the Zimbabwean government to impose strict political measures against the film is that its use of ‘dissenting’ voices was tantamount to a call for regime change. For example, the film narrative has a scene where there is a demonstration against Zuwanie at UN. One of the anti-Zuwanie demonstrators is holding a poster with an open-handed symbol of the main opposition party in Zimbabwe: MDC led by Morgan

Tsvagirai who is calling for regime change and promises for freedom, good governance and democracy. It is probably these forms of similitude to the present Zimbabwean political context that resulted in negative responses from the officials.

### **3.6.4 Official responses and political censorship of *The Interpreter*(2005) in Zimbabwe**

The different manifestations of political censorship subjected to the images of *The Interpreter* serves to prove that government control does not have to manifest only in crackdown on filmmakers and attempted annihilation of creativity perceived to be opposed to authority's sense of truth. Making sure that film is not found in film and video stores is an effective strategy to silencing the film, by undercutting circulation of ideas not palatable to power. For example, on 23 September 2003, the Zimdaily.com reported that the President's Office issued an interdict banning the screening of the film *The Interpreter*(2005). The interdict, seen by the Zimdaily (23 September 2003) stated that the film is 'mischievous' and that it is, 'a subtle denigration of our head of state by the Bush administration and CIA'. The interdict further points out that the screening of *The Interpreter*(2005) risks contravening Section 13 (2) (b) as read with sub-section (6) of the Censorship and Entertainments Control Act[Chapter 10:04]. It was also argued in the interdict that screening the film contravenes Public Order and Security Act (POSA) Part 11(16) which outlaws communicating statements, pictures and images deemed to undermine the head of state. To date, *The Interpreter*(2005) remains banned from circulating in Zimbabwe's public domain. This is despite the fact that the film was approved for release and distribution by Zimbabwe's official Censorship Board. This approval was in fact half-hearted because the board made sure that the distribution of the film would not proliferate, and that retail outlets would not have access to the DVDs of the film. Audiences who accessed it have either contacts in South Africa or Europe where DVDs of the film *The Interpreter*(2005) are readily available. The act of allowing the film to be released in principle but not in practice reveals political censorship referred to by Zibareva (2008) as the 'silent' language of hidden censorship. More important is that censorship of the film was justified on the accusation that the film is a 'subtle denigration' of the head of state of Zimbabwe. But as argued above, nowhere in the film is President Mugabe mentioned in name. This over-reading or over interpretation

by state organs suggests that officials are aware of the power of art to produce surplus meanings that they cannot entirely control.

### **3.6.5 Academic Response: *Mahoso***

Negative criticism of film is another strategy used by authorities to politically censor and discredit film. For example, Mahoso(2005)—former chairman of the government’s Media and Information Commission(MIC) dismissively commented that the movie was, ‘typical of US cold war propaganda’(In Spinwatch, <http://www.spinwatch.org/component/content/article/161-africa/1742-cia-behind-nico...>). The censoring that is subjected to the film *The Interpreter*(2005) by Mahoso adopts an anti western tonality which is strategically deployed to rally support from Zimbabweans. In fact, since the formation of Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) in 1999, the government—supported by a clique of intellectuals, has aggressively used the discourses of nationalism to denounce western countries. Although the west can be accused of meddling in Zimbabwe’s politics to effect a ‘regime change’, the government is responsible for a fair share of blame for failing to account for some of its actions. For example, government continues to deny filmmakers chance to chronicle Matabeleland atrocities, and use intellectuals such as Mahoso to attempt to ‘paper over the cracks’ or censor information about the killings. A vitriolic attack on the images of the *The Interpreter*(2005) is one of the ways that government uses to stifle alternative ideas, perspectives and narratives about *Gukurahundi*. Another dimension is that when some Zimbabwean intellectuals comment in their own capacities as custodians of Zimbabwean values, their narrow understanding of the concept of patriotism has muffled constructive criticism. Consequently, the intellectual’s discourses fail to move beyond the confines of official rhetoric and propaganda that is used to brainwash people’s minds.

### **3.6.6 Media Response: *Zvayi***

The official print media including *The Herald*, *The Sunday Mail* and *The Chronicle* also commented that the film was likely to cause despondency and political mayhem in the country. In fact, in an article titled “US takes anti-Zim drive to Hollywood” that appeared in the *The Herald* of Saturday 3, on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of September 2005, Caesar Zvayi accused the film of fomenting the agenda of regime change. He said ‘The Unites States has taken its anti-Zimbabwe campaign to Hollywood with the

release of a film that attempts to set the agenda for Zimbabwe's 'trial' at the United Nations Security Council'. In a different story that appeared in the Zimdaily.com, of 23 Sept 2005, a commentary lambasted the film for displaying a 'subtle denigration of our head of state [President Robert Mugabe] by the Bush administration and the CIA'. President Mugabe is neither mentioned in name in the film, nor the specific nature of the 'denigration' of the presidency spelt out in the Zimdaily.com comments. And yet, these comments were not only unsubstantiated but were made to function as official 'truths' that need not be questioned. Even if the film was made with the desire for regime change in Zimbabwe, the critic failed to establish a direct link partly because the statements were forms of propaganda, and mostly because film operates through metaphors whose meanings cannot be pinned on a single narrative. To this extent, the comments attempt to impose political censorship of the film. The language in the comments invokes statements that are made to appear as authoritative sources of truths.

### **3.6.7 Official response: *Chimutengwende***

Acting as an authoritative voice and official 'mouth-piece', the former acting Minister of Information and Publicity Chen Chimutengwende also described *The Interpreter* as a CIA-backed film, and warned Zimbabweans to be "careful" because "our enemy is very powerful. We should plan to counter Euro-American imperialism. Our enemies have resources and are determined to wage their war on the economic, social and cultural fronts' (Herald, Sat 3-Sept, 2003). There was no attempt by the official to indicate to the reader the specific passages in the film that would pose as a threat to the Zimbabwean sovereignty. In other words, making unsubstantiated statements that are given the force of authoritative texts also amount to a form of political censorship. This kind of censorship is meant to induce fear in the nation, whip up the emotions of the electorate over imagined enemies. These negative commentaries on the film taken together with the alleged reported interdict against the film invoked in terms of Section 16 of Public Order and Security Act (POSA)[Chapter 11:17], politically interfere, censor and in the process attempt to deny Zimbabweans opportunity to watch the film and debate some of the problems of the country that simply refuse to go away. Despite these negative responses the *The Interpreter* is a film that can be read in different ways to reveal different meanings. One such reading can emphasise the power of the rhetorical device of allegory in carrying forms of resistance.

### **3.6.8 Allegorical resistance to the ‘silencing’ and political censorship of *The Interpreter* (2005)**

The description of the plot of the film sketched above suggests that, in the literal sense, the film does not mention Zimbabwe and any political leader in particular. It is only when the film is interpreted as an allegory that it begins to suggest meanings that can be secreted into the contradictions of post-independence Zimbabwe or any African country, for that matter. One way of explaining the frenetic attitudes of the officials who banned the film is to acknowledge that *The Interpreters* denies any single interpretation in favour of polyphonic readings. It is a film about the politics of interpretation and how these can be both applied either selectively or in liberatory ways depending on the ideological flexibility of the audiences’ minds. Allegorical films describe and register dislocations within mastering discourses in order to reveal the ambiguities, uncertainties and semantic instability within discourses of power. The ambiguity inherent in allegory as a figurative speech act suggests that for every opinion or interpretation insisting on enforcing political censorship, there are equally important counter interpretations insisting on undermining these discourses of political censorship authorized by the state and its intellectuals.

It is the suggestive nature of allegory in *The Interpreters* (2005) that encourages ‘incendiary interpretations,’ (Bryce, 2005: 25) by both its detractors and those who enjoyed it. Also, it is likely that the more the authorities in Zimbabwe attempt to restrict, and prohibit the circulation of the film, the more the audience read into it, subversive meanings that rubbish the political censorship imposed on it.

### **3.7 Conclusion.**

In conclusion, this chapter explored manifestations of political censorship in *Cry Freedom*, *Flame*, *Gukurahundi: A Moment of Madness* and *The Interpreter*. It was demonstrated that the content of *Cry Freedom* was diverted from depicting the contradictions in the Zimbabwean society and that this is an embedded form of political censorship. *Flame* was confronted and protested against by agitated ex-combatants. *Gukurahundi: A moment of madness* was banned, together with *The Interpreters*. However, despite banning, *a priori* restraint; subsequent punishment, manner restrictions, these range of censorship attitudes by authorities, the ambiguity in the films’ rhetorical language escape the

editor and helps to embed semiotic disobedience that allows films to transgress on the laws imposed on them to curtail their meanings. These films continue to make their rounds, circulating in underground channels that are not easily patrolled by authorities. In this chapter, I demonstrated the double meanings inherent in any act of reading films, particularly those from and about Zimbabwe that were produced and received under circumstances hostile to freedom of speech. In chapter 4, the study focuses on manifestations of cultural censorship embedded in the film's cultural themes from the perspective of patriarchal frames of references. The films to be analysed are *Mwanasikana*(1995), *Kapfupi*(2009), *Nhasi tave nehama*(1993), *Everyone's Child*(1996) and *Neria*(1991).

## **Chapter 4: Censorship and the Cultural Film in Zimbabwe**

*In its restrictive mode, culture carries the illusion of shared concerns and values in the face of the real and contentious divisions that exist among gender, classes, race and ethnic groups (Jenks, 1993: 9).*

### **4.0 Introduction**

Chapter three showed that political censorship of films through banning and arresting the artists intimidate filmmakers. The fear instilled in filmmakers force most of them not to produce films with open political content. Other filmmakers afraid of persecution end up limiting what they can produce in the images. Self-censorship manifests itself in films through directors who deal with trite and innocuous themes that emphasise a single factor when explaining life. According to Lambe, cultural censorship that begets self-censorship in creative arts such as film can manifest in one or several forms of

“responses to any situation where free expression conflicts with other social or individual goals: to stop the expression from happening (prior restraint); to punish the expression after it happens (subsequent punishment); to define when, where or how the expression can happen (time, place, manner restrictions); to do nothing to stop the expression from occurring (allow), or to actively ensure the expression is allowed to take place” (2008, 490).

This chapter deals with the problem of self-censorship and how it manifests itself in *Mwanasikana*(1995), *Kapfupi*(2009), *Nhasi tave nehama*(1993), *Everyone's Child*(1996) and *Neria*(1991). It will be argued that the use of socially and culturally constructed stereotypes is a form



of censorship that uses language symbols and images that block, restrict, prohibit or censor women and children from choosing best alternatives in life. In analysing the films, the chapter will that gender-based censorship is much broader, subtle and more pervasive than officially organized prohibitions and suppression. Cultural censorship is deeply embedded in a range of social mechanisms and patriarchal structures that mute the voices of women and children, deny validity to their life experiences or purposely misrepresent them so that the social condition of their lives is viewed as natural, and therefore, unchangeable. To complicate my argument sketched above, I advance the alternative view that suggest that despite an attempt by cultural stereotypes to ‘fix’ or ‘freeze’ images of women and children, the production of excessive signification of molothicallu constructed values in the figure of stereotype inadvertently invites the viewer of the film to search those values that the stereoptype has been prevented from manifesting. This sophisticated argument implies that despite a stereotype being constructed as solid, and coherent, actually, stereotype is fractured; the very idea of containing singularity of values reveals the anxiety of the stereotype and its political unconscious (Jameson, 1981) of other competeing images that it seeks to close off and refuse to be in dialogue with. The films in this chapter have been purposefully selected because they deal with women and children who are often described by media as ‘worthy’ victims or stereotypically referred to as ‘soft targets’ (Chari in Vambe, 2008:111).

#### **4.1 Stereotypes as socio-cultural restrictions in Shona-based films**

As prototypes of shared cultural meanings and social values, stereotypes derive their strengths from factors such as: (1) simplicity (2) recognisability, and (3) implicit reference to an assumed consensus about some attribute or complex social relationships (Perkins, 1979). Cultural stereotypes are sweeping generalizations, selective, erroneous, descriptive and judgmental in that they emphasise ‘singularity’ of values that can be used to ‘police’ or inhibit cultural ‘space’, symbols and images from being read through alternative means. Bhabha (1996) notes that stereotypes have a range of form in which are concentrated meanings depicted in a way that assumes uniformity, stability and a single-minded capacity to authorise a single meaning. For example, when women are depicted as prostitutes, witches, lazy, and dirty, this is a negative characterisation. When men are portrayed as assertive, aggressive, hardworking and responsible, there is an assumed understanding that men are progressive in all times. This too, is a stereotype culturally constructed from a single perspective that emphasises uniform values as more important than a diversity of ideas. This basic fact that there are

negative stereotypes and positive stereotypes have been overlooked in film images. Gaidzanwa (1985) argues that whether a stereotype is negative or positive, it is a limited form of characterising reality. A stereotype yields one meaning because it projects one side of social phenomena. The problem with negative and positive stereotypes is that they portray excessively, a single value and mistake it for the totality of the potential meanings of an image. As such, whether negative or positive, a stereotype inhibits critical thought; it attempts to prevent readers, listeners and watchers from imagining the possibilities of alternative meanings being interpreted from the same image. Wolffe states that stereotypes are constructed on the basis of 'excess and inhibition' (1992:706). By 'excess of depiction, Wolffe(1992) understands that a stereotype is described or named using singular values that are projected as forming a totality of the meanings of cultural images. It is from this characterisation that denies the possibilities of imagining plurality of ideas in stereotype creates symbolical conditions meant to 'inhibit' or prevent people from appreciating the diversity of human life. In stereotypes, once one group of people are named and labeled as the '*other*' that belongs to an '*out-group*', the basis cultural prohibitions, political and socio-economic discriminations based on gender, class, race, and ethnicity are justified. Stereotypes are therefore pernicious forms of censorship that can be encouraged by officials when they channelize what artists ought to think and create about.

As already argued in the previous chapters, film is a symbolical medium. Its modes of signifying reality favours the fracturing of the very notion of stereotype as a secure and stable cultural space of the mythical, mystical and mystification. Bhabha's (1996) idea of stereotype as '*suture*' is an important theoretical tool that informs this chapter, so as to assist in exposing the ambivalence constructed in the figure of a stereotype. Stereotype can claim purity of identity based on the recognition '*at any one time, [of] a secure*' point of identification (Bhabha, 1996: 40) a stereotype is not static. Stereotype's way to knowledge has, as its horizon, the desire to control meanings. This power to control is enacted by the stereotype through 'recognition and disavowal of racial/cultural/historical differences' (ibid, 41). Stereotype recognises differences by investing certain meanings, but not others, in the images. By implying a denial of other meanings, stereotype rejects or 'disavows' difference, which in filmic images would bring out complexities of reading and interpretation. The ideological tremours of socio-cultural stereotypes build up '*walls*' and '*frames*' that can prevent aims to prevent people who are negatively represented from exploring other

possibilities in life. As a site of dreams, images, fantasies, myths, obsessions, a stereotype is enclosed in a system of synchronic essentialism and knowledge of language signifiers.

The following analysis will show how cultural stereotypes and Hollywood gaze can limit alternative ways of reading the roles that women and men play in society and culture. The films *Mwanasikana*(1995) , *Kapfupi*(2009) , *Nhasi tave nahama*(1993), *Neria*(1991) and *Everyone's Child*(1996) depict how the social and cultural institute of patriarchy has influenced the construction of cultural stereotypes and frames of reference that censor different ways of understanding the roles that are played by men, women and children in Zimbabwe. Cohen & Kennedy (2007) define patriarch as a form of oppression that elevates men to positions of power and authority. Through patriarch, women remain subject to forms of domination from husbands, sons and male kinsmen that are legitimized by cultural values, images, signs and symbols and/or underpinned by economic dependency. For Moto(2009), gender refers to the construction of cultural, political and culturally differentiated roles imposed on the biological identities of maleness and femaleness. Gender also entails ingrained social ideas and notions built around what men and women should do, and how they *ought* to behave and interact in particular ways that are viewed as mutually exclusive of each other. The deeply rooted nature of traditional stereotyped roles and images of women is a source of culturally sanctioned values that censor, and attempt to impose a limit on how men and women should conduct social struggles.

## **4.2 *Mwanasikana*(1995): Patriarchy and the politics of cultural inhibition**

Whenever cultural critics refer to the negative effects of patriarch, they are considering how the system constructs 'unchangeable' signs, symbols and images that promote the interests of men and boys while women and the girl-child remains on the sidelines. On the socio- cultural level, girls and boys undergo discriminatory processes often perpetuated by institutions of socialisation such the family, school, church and the media. Language, as a cultural tool for meaning-making, socializes boys to be inquiring, adventurous, to subdue, conquer or at the very least understand nature while girls are expected to be obedient, malleable, traditional preservers of nature. Some women can

themselves become the chief agents of this socialisation which confers inequality on their kind' (Tamale & Oloka-Onyango, 2000).

*Mwasikana*(1995) is a simple story told from the point of view of Tariro—a girl child who suffers considerably under the throes of patriarchal oppression. Tariro is a hardworking and promising young girl doing her grade seven but she is told by her father that she should forget about continuing with her education. The film *Mwanasikana*(1995) deploys verbal and audio-visual language[s] of communication to reproduce as well as question gender stereotyped images that operate to limit or obfuscate chances for a girl-child of acquiring better education. The reason given is that learned women are a problem to their husbands. Tariro's father, VaJumbe, puts it emphatically when he says that: *Iyi ndiyo temu yako yekupedzisira. Vakadzi vakanyanyo dzidza vanozoneisa varume*'. (This is your last term at school. Educated women are a bother to their husbands). Here, a restrictive frame informed by 'static' cultural assumptions that learned women are a problem, is sanctioned by patriarchy to contain Tariro's ambitions to proceed with education so that she can prepare herself for a better future.

In this film, instead of depicting women's roles as complementary to those of men, the women are viewed as a liability. This is intended to undermine women's confidence. It also guarantees for men, some control on women's bodies and sexuality for the benefit of patriarchy. For example, in the film, VaJumbe 'fore-closes' his daughter's chances of using education as a tool to explore different pathways in life by insisting that the daughter should get married. VaJumbe views educated women as problematic in that they are able to take care of themselves and to think and decide for themselves. Educated women can critique the basis of their oppression. However, according to Bhabha an image of an educated women, is problematic for patriarchy because that image, '...disavows difference' (1996:40) and positive change in women. Difference in women is feared as it can allow women to challenge the very foundation of patriarchy since educated women are likely to demand freedom and equality from their male spouses. Marriage is proposed as the best option for women because it allows men 'space' to control of the progress of women by making them submissive *objects* confined to matters of the bedroom and family affairs.

Women's bodies are valuable for men not simply as a source of sexual pleasure; the bodies of women carry the 'young' patriarchs that after being born are supposed to extend the rule of men over

women. This discourse of hegemonic masculinity coming as it were from Tariro's father, aims to reproduce itself and extend its tentacles from Tariro's home environment to its intended destination—marriage, which is also another environment 'policed' or monitored by a man. Also, the cultural 'unconscious' in the act of wanting Tariro to enter a premature marriage is that it will bestow on her a lower class consciousness. As a socially and culturally constructed stereotype, people who belong to lower classes are identified through their lack of education, knowledge and sophistication. In this regards, ascribing women culturally inferior identities is meant to prohibit the full actualization of potential in women to change their discriminated lives.

During colonialism in Zimbabwe (1890-1980), the ideology that the former colonisers imparted and 'normalized' through a colonial education system is that the majority of black people in Zimbabwe were 'dull', 'lazy' and 'unintelligent'. Africans were not expected to be competent for the 'so-called' vibrant education system. This is why the colonisers imposed a 'bottle-neck' education system that was meant to select or discriminate against a majority of blacks so that a greater number of them would be 'fixed' for all times in positions of perpetual socio-economic and cultural slavitude. In *Mwanasikana(1995)*, Tariro's father stops and places sanctions on his daughter's education, and this allows him unfortunately, to replay the cultural, racial and colonial 'grand narrative' that stereotypically narrowed, blocked and curtailed the chances of black people in general, and black women in particular, to succeed in education and by extension, on the job market.

Perkins (1979), Ngoshi(2010) and Naidoo(2010) re/conceptualise the concept of 'womanhood' and emphasizes the multiple and ever shifting roles of women and gender discourses that permeate social life. This implies that there can be no immortalised structures shaping human relations and attitudes or absolute values that should not be contested. Patriarchal culture carries the illusion of shared concerns and values in the face of real and contentious divisions that exist among different classes, gender, race and ethnic groups. In other words, culture as social practice, is fluid and constantly being created, contested, negotiated and re-configured specifically within the context of mass-mediated world exemplified by film. In the film *Mwanasikana(1995)*, a female teacher challenges and castigates Tariro's father for stopping a girl child from going to school because, in his view, she is destined for marriage. The teacher goes further to illustrate her point by citing herself as an example of what women can do in a bid to explore possibilities in life. At this point in the film

narrative, the female teacher represents a culture of discontinuity; her 'voice' constitutes the 'speaking body' (Muponde, 2005:37), a positionality that can be used by Tariro to break 'walls' of silence set against her by her father. Tariro's father follows the traditional cultural script in which women are important because they reproduce the lineage. He views her first born Precious as an achiever in life because she was married after completing her grade seven.

Without feeling guilt or a sense of remorse about terminating Precious' hopes for better education, the father boasts that, '*Precious mwana kwaye. Akapedza grade seven yake, ndokuroorwa, kutaura kuno akagara zvakanaka. Mapasuru arikutumira. Ndizvo zvinoitwa nemwana akabva pamusha unorira huku*' (Precious is a good child. She finished her grade seven, she is married and as I am speaking, she is enjoying her marriage. She is sending groceries to us. This is what a well groomed child should do). What is being framed or contained is that women cannot distinguish themselves, socially and intellectually using their mental faculties. In other words, what is limited or prevented from full sight in this negative stereotypical representation of women is a possible understanding of women as people with capacity to think for themselves. Instead, women are oppressed by the belief anchored in tradition in which a girl child can be equated to a commercial product that is sold or bought in order to bring some profits to her place of origin as well as extend the clan name through procreation. Through *maternalisation* of the female body, patriarchal system creates rules that force women to become mothers and through collusion, reward them for motherhood and punish those women who do not conform (Kroeze, 2007). It is not wrong for women to become mothers; what is wrong is to prescribing motherhood for women, as the only vocation that women should aspire for.

In the words of Kristeva (1982) patriarchy has framed the body of a woman as the abject *object* that can be acted upon, and whose fate is decided by a male figure-head. Through filmic negative depiction, a female character is often elevated to the status of a fetish object, an overvalued symbol which covers over the threat it might induce by encouraging excessive scopophilic contemplation. In this case, the chances of a female character to succeed in a world dominated by men can be undermined, prevented from being realised, defamed, diminished or purposely misrepresented in order to silence her and thereby, maintain the existing social order. These are also forms of cultural censorship that patriarchy has hedged around the women. Veit-Wild and Naguschewski have identified epithets that confirm the presence of the language of stereotyping when women are

described as: ‘dirty bodies’, ‘tainted bodies’, ‘bodies to be violated’, ‘queered bodies’ and ‘abject bodies’(2005: xv-xix). An array of these negative descriptions affects the way women are perceived in real life situations as well as how they can be read as images flighted through media channels such as film, television and newspapers.

In *Mwanasikana*(1995), Tariro’s father reaffirms some hardened Shona social attitudes that tell society that a girl-child should not be allowed to go further than primary education. Such a point of view resonates with a system of shared beliefs among a group of Shona people who view themselves as the custodians of African tradition in the face of an alien Western tradition that promotes equal rights between men and women. And this includes the right to have access to education for both the boy and the girl child. By revealing these negative attitudes towards women, the director of *Mwanasikana*(1995)could be credited for forcing the Zimbabwean society to wake up to this cultural challenge that diminishes the status of women even when the country boasts of having carried out a liberation struggle that was meant to remove different forms of oppression. Put differently, to the extent that in 1995, when *Mwanasikana* was produced, Zimbabwe was already fifteen years into independence, the film is used as a critique of the content and values underpinning Zimbabwean independence that did not significantly change the cultural attitudes of people towards the girl child. If understood in this way, the director can then be considered creative because he/she has used the figures of stereotyped female characters in order to raise important issues in the Zimbabwean society. In other words, what initially started as a form of self-censorship can be interpreted by the audience as a way to undermine the censorial powers.

Indigenous cultures of Zimbabwe are also depicted as imposing limiting spaces and blocking positive options for women. One such method through which this is achieved is to describe women as existing in situations in which fathers force their daughters to marry a man against the daughter’s will. A girl-child can be betrothed to a husband whilst she is still a baby. Women can be labeled as prostitutes or promiscuous without extending the labels to men who are also accomplices in the anti-social activities of prostitution. This kind of unfair treatment of women emerges from the way patriarchy gives premium to the boy child who is given powers to dominate without having to account for his actions. Forcing a girl child to get married is not without its negative repercussions. For instance, in the film *Mwanasikana*(1995), when Precious is divorced by her husband, Precious

comes back to his father's home with her pitiable belongings. When she arrives at home, her parents can tell that all is not well. They ask her: '*Ko kwakanaka here kubva watouya nemabhegi ane midziyo?*' (Is everything alright? For, we are seeing that you have come with bags, pots and all your belongings). Precious' father is particularly worried because he usually boasts about how Precious looks after the whole family. It is ironic that the father expects Precious to fend for the family and yet the father terminated his daughter's education prematurely thereby diminishing her chances of succeeding in life.

Soliloquizing on Precious's predicament VaJumbe, says: '*Precious apedza masvondo ari pamusha. Haana kana waarikutaura naye. Aakunge ane mamhepo*'. (Precious has spent many weeks here. She is no longer talking to anyone. She is like a person possessed by an evil spirit). The power to create myths about the reality of social conditions of women is traditionally embodied in the 'static' discourses of patriarchy. Wolffe(1992) contends that a stereotype can be equated to a myth or a lie as stereotypes lock the capacity for objective and analytic judgments. For example, in *Mwanasikana(1995)*, the reality of Precious' unhappy marriage is attributed to mythical and mystical evil forces, and yet the glaring truth is that she cannot make it in marriage because her husband thinks that she is uneducated. An evaluation proffered by Precious' husband is important in the film's narrative as it points to the '...ruptures, gaps, contradictions and points of resistance...' (Penley, 1988:5) evident within the apparently seamless patriarchal fabric symbolised by Precious' father. Also, the meta-discourses espoused through Precious' husband calls for the agent need to educate the girl child so that she can stand her ground in matters that affect her life. In *Mwanasikana(1995)*, roles played by female characters are narrowed as these roles only focus attention on the emotional landscape of female characters such as a love affairs and marriage. Evidently, this is done against the backdrop of careering options such as education. Consequently, the cultural 'space' articulated through the female characters of Tariro and Precious in the film *Mwanasikana(1995)* underpin the masculinist and phallogentric gendering of social roles crafted to suit male characters.

The idea of education is elaborated through music lyrics in *Mwanasikana(1995)*, '*Our daughters need education to secure their future*'. This reality is fundamental as it is a source of social knowledge and an interpretation of the cultural values that undergird the underdevelopment of



women's potential. In *Mwanasikana*(1995), Precious and her friend Linda—now a growth-point prostitute, hold a discussion citing examples of their friends who have succeeded in life. In the narrative, Linda symbolises the freedom of women to act out of the norms and values prescribed by the patriarchal system. For her, the power to challenge the 'master script' of domination imposed on her ilk by traditional structures, earns her the negative stereotype of being considered as a 'sexual pervert, a deviant, a pathology to community health, and the polluted one who should not deserve community respect. These descriptions are symbolical and discursive markers of how language socializes women to belief in their fallibility. The language itself is a cognitive road block to women; it is overdetermined by censoring and censorship values that undermine women's beingness-in-the-world as shapers of their destinies.

However, even when Linda does not seek to hide her anti-social behaviour of prostitution, she does not think Precious should follow suit. Instead, Linda advises Precious to seek employment in the shop owned by Mudiwa(The loved one). Mudiwa is a lover boy always chasing after young girls. The predatory nature of Mudiwa is portrayed in the film when the camera motion catches him appreciating the Precious's buttocks when Previous is sorting out goods in the shop. This *masculine gaze* expressed through Mudiwa is a gender stereotype as it reduces Precious to an *object* of desire that should excite sexual pleasure or the pleasure of voyeurism for the male audiences. Furthermore, Mudiwa also dramatizes his hegemonic masculinity when he attempts to rape Precious in his shop. Rape is sexualized aggression encrypted within the male discourses of conquest of the female body. Without showing a dint of shame, Mudiwa says to Precious: '*Precious, ngatimbodyai nyika rutivi*'. (Precious lets enjoy ourselves—meaning lets make-love). When Precious rebuffs his advances, she is told that she will not receive her wage. Mudiwa's sexual advances to Precious are symbolic of the *sexploitation* some employed women should not have to put up with in places of work, but are forced to compromise their respect out of fear of falling out of favour with their bosses.

The vulnerability that women like Precious experience under the control of men like Mudiwa pointst to the fact that if women want to liberate themselves, they should thrive to be owners of means of production so that they will not pander to the whims of men bent on abusing their bodies. The message of the film is also that women should brace for a long struggle against patriarchal values that have demoted women to being second class citizens. Part of the struggle can begin by

defining their own 'space' within the cultural geography in communities and families the women live in. This can be done by, '...interrogating the spatial dimensions of power relations between the sexes [as embodied in]...power and domination of the social, political and economic space' (Van Eaden, 2006:41). In the film *Mwanasikana*(1995), Linda adopts a fatalistic course of action like prostitution, and in the process confirms the male construction of the female body as diseased, of inferior nature and therefore expendable.

In *Mwanasikana*(1995) Mudiwa and VaJumbe connived that as soon as Tariro finishes her grade seven, she will become Mudiwa's wife to reciprocate beer services rendered to his father by Mudiwa. Mudiwa does not mince his words when he asserts that: '*Ini ndiri kutofano bvisa roora kuburikidza nechikwereti chehwahwa chamurikutora*'. *VaJumbe, takaitirana chibvumirano. Tarirai chikwereti chenyu chinovika ku850 dollars*'. ('I am paying my bride price through the credit that you have accrued in this shop. VaJumbe, we made an agreement. Look at your credit now amounting to 850 dollars'). The commercialisation and commodification of women bodies reveals the highest form of moral, social and cultural degradation. In this negative characterisation, women are portrayed as embodiments of cultural values that are marketed as a commercial product ready to be bought and sold. Embedded in depictions of women as commercialisable entities is the fact that such portrayals work as forms of censoring the reader or audience not to think of alternative lives that women can live outside the depraved identities suggest for women by the male driven market forces of capitalism that places value on material consumerism. In the context of *Mwanasikana*(1995), the intrinsic cultural value of Tariro as a human being is negotiated and compromised between VaJumbe and Mudiwa. In other words, Tariro's human value is equated to the market ideals of cost and demand (McQuail, 1994).

Surfacing in various ways in the Zimbabwean traditional culture, the commercialisation and commodification of women is meant to stifle their career options. This commodification explains why some young women were used as a retributive price to be given to the family of the deceased when a man kills a person he is not related to. Also the height of moral degradation is when married women were used as a betting price by a man trying out his fortunes with playing cards. All these forms of negative stereotypes give a picture that emphasises one side of women's capacities and underplay *other* important dimensions such as the quest for mental liberation. Negative stereotypes,

thus become a hindrance, a form of censorship when they work to deprive women who are so described, and diminish the thinking capacity of the readers or audiences for whom they are intended, from imagining the necessity for change through encouraging dynamic images of modern womanhood.

#### **4.2.0 The revisionist sensibility within *Mwanasikana*(1995)**

The revisionist sensibility advanced towards the end of the film *Mwanasikana* suggests that images of women can assume positive qualities. At the end of the film Precious is advocating for the education of the girl child as the first major step towards liberation of women. She enunciates her vision clearly to his father when she says that:

‘ *Baba naAmayi ndizvo zvamaida. Dai ndakadzidza handaidadirwa nemurume ini. Ndakanzwa zvekuda kuroodza kwamurikuda kuita Tariro. Siyai Tariro apedze chikoro, baba.* ( Father and mother, this is what you wanted. If I was educated, my husband would not have thrown me out of the house. I overheard you planning the marriage of Tariro. Leave Tariro to finish her education, Father).

In response to the demands forwarded by Precious, his father declared that:

‘*Tariro uchaenda kuchikoro kusvika paunoda. Precious uchaenda kunight school*’. ( Tariro, you shall go to school till you reach a stage that satisfies you. Precious, you shall go to the night school).

VaJumbe has been forced to reverse his decisions by her own daughters. Here the film challenges the stereotype of women as dispensable objects that the film initially constructed. VaJumbe’s turn around attitude is not genuine. He affects understanding the plight of his daughters in order to save the patriarchal system from embarrassment that it had suffered from Precious’ attacks. The dramatic effect in the exchange between father and daughter above reveals the artificiality of a stereotype. Symbolically representing the trials and tribulations of girl children, the film *Mwanasikana*(1995) has succeeded considerably to show how some parents in Zimbabwe may not prioritise the concerns of a girl child as compared to what the same parents can do if it comes to the plight of boy child. However, Precious’ outburst introduces a revisionist sensibility portrayed in the film to suggest that oppressive values can be contested. To this extent, *Mwanasikana* subverts the domineering cultural discourses that allow parents and society to discriminate against the the girl child.

However, in focusing only on the girl child, the film seems to suggest that all the material interests of an African and Shona boy child are taken care for. The myth that this perception in the film creates is that the boy child is an overall achiever in aspects to do with education. This kind of film depiction of gender struggles can mask the reality that there are also some boys who drop out of school because their parents would have failed to pay school fees. Also, in the film, the decision to make Tariro continue with her education is voiced by his father. This affirmation of womenhood by male characters re-enforce a myth that without decisions from the father, women cannot think for themselves about lives' possibilities not influenced or shaped by men. In other words, even when the film gives some 'voice' of resistance to Precious, the fact that the final decision lays with the father as the family figure-head, constrict, narrows and limit women participation in decision-making processes.

As Butler (2008) so trenchantly puts, most female heroines in film embody aspects of empowerment rather than an end to patriarchal power structures, equality rather than difference. To the extent that the director has not sufficiently interrogated this aspect in the film, the director has also attempted to censor and limit the meaning-making process of the genre of film that uses verbal and audio-visual elements to affirm as well as question each other's modes of representing reality.

The revisionist sensibility grudgingly accorded some creative space in the film *Mwanasikana* is not fully convincing. It fails to help the women characters to explain and then confront the economic roots of women's suffering. The film director squandered a rare moment where he/she could have introduced a wide range of female characters responding to the same issue differently. For example, the narrative could have made use of the 'voice' of a resource person—possibly a female character, in teaching the community about the rights of a girl child including the right to have access to education. Instead, what is evident in the film is that the partial resistance which comes from Precious is done within the limits of the ideological constellations of power structures dictated by patriarchal norms and values.

Thus, the power that patriarchy can have on the mental resources of the film-maker forces the language of *Mwanasikana(1995)* to bend backwards away, from comprehensively challenging the suffocating discourses that limit the ambitions of a girl child. However, the mere fact that *Mwanasikana(1995)* reveals the limits of cultural representations and expressions that reduce

women to objects destined to quench men's appetite for sex, is commendable. The 'voice' invested in the character of Precious attempts, at least to re/define the subjective realm of human activities marked by the ontology of self-expression and particularity. In other words, the director of the film's attempt at providing 'voice' to the female characters is half-hearted. One expected that since film is an 'ideological window' to the world, the metaphor of representing women should not only relate to the metaphoric 'truth' of the image but should also encompass the conditions of its construction and its social effects. The ambivalent images of women do not adequately question the cultural template that patriarchy uses to circumscribe what women should or not do in film and in life. The timidity of the film director, of *Mwanasikana*(1995) to promote an active voice of the woman can actually help men continue to feel superior to women and *naturalise* a situation where men can dole out cultural instructions on women. In Zimbabwe, the social effects and the cultural power invested in the images of the film *Mwanasikana*(1995) can inform national gender policies that can work for or against the oppressed. That is why it is necessary for film directors to always think and produce a film in which comprehensive strategies for women's liberation from oppression can be realized.

If film images are left hanging, and their values remain unquestioned when they are negative, this situation reinforces cultural censorship that, in turn, manifests in replicating images that are harmful to women. One can see unreformed images of women and men in another cultural film *Kapfupi*(2009). The film's ideological thrust demeans women; its philosophical underpinning is to discourage social harmony between men and women. The film encourages cultural stigmas, and stereotypes that are constructed by patriarchal traditions to stall the progress of women. The language of the film, *Kapfupi*(2009) manifests stereotypes of images of women that are constructed as emotionally weak while male characters are viewed as witty, bold and circumspect. This too, is a dangerous form of cultural censorship and its nature and effects on women and society are explored below.

### **4.3 *Kapfupi*(2009) Marginalising women to the emotional landscape**

While in *Mwanasikana*(1995), cultural stereotypes are played out at level of denying the girl child access to education, in the film *Kapfupi*(2009) cultural stereotypes manifest themselves through the way the girl child handles the social issue of love. In the film, *Kapfupi*(2009) Marabha is a domineering and arrogant young man who does not think that her sister needs someone who can love

her. Actually, the over-protective stance that Marabha reflects makes him force her sister's boyfriend—Kapfupi to drink urine because he caught him talking to his sister. Through this shot, the film exhibits the spectacle of excessive masculinity that privileges through the male body, qualities of toughness, hardness and being in control. Nixon (1997) argues that these codings eroticise the male body as the centre of power while women's bodies are viewed as an ideological site on which masculine power is exercised. The oppressive tendency of power is reflected through Marabha's tough statements addressed to Precious—his sister when he says that: '*Iwe Precious urikuenda kupi haugone kutamba wega. Mapreti hauna kugeza, sadza hauna kubika...*' (Precious, where are you going? Can't you play alone? You have not washed dishes, you have not cooked sadza...) Already, as a young man Marabha is groomed to issue commands as what fathers are expected to do by society and culture. Marabha's speech reproduces traditional beliefs in which it is wrongly believed by men and some women that all household chores are the responsibility of women.

The opposite of this view is that men are providers in the family, and therefore, should be privileged to do more enterprising jobs. Two issues are central in the film, *Kapfupi*(2009); first, one sees how in the film, gender roles are created by men for women to execute to the satisfaction of men. This is a form of cultural censorship because what women can or should do is already prescribed in male-centred discourses. These cultural discourses work hard to blind women, some men and society to the reality that cultural roles at home and at work places are not natural; they are social constructions and as such no individual sex is destined to be oppressed by the structures put in place by men and some women for the benefit of most men. Secondly, the film raises the question related to the extent to which, 'rather than representation of some idealized form of African femininity subject to male dominance, [how] a film frame should represent possibilities for women to question patriarchal values that hinder women advancement' (Murphy, 2000).

Essentialist claims about the roles that men and women *ought* to perform in society should be regarded as *master narratives* of patriarchy that try to conceal the reality that culture is dynamic. The ambivalence of culture provides people with space to decide their own destinies without following a predetermined course. In the film *Kapfupi*(2009), the absence of a mother figure in Kapfupi's family is problematic. The problem arises when Kapfupi and his brother Bonjisi are failing to take care of their ailing father. Actually, Bonjisi is angry about his father's inability to walk without being

supported when he shouts that, '*Baba simbayiwoka. Dai pasina kuti makaramba amai zyunhu zvingadai zviru naniso. Iyezvino mavakuita kunge makaroora isu.* (Father be strong. If you had not divorced our mother things should have been in order right now. Right now it is as if you have married us) At this point, the films' narrative seems to give merit to the qualities of motherhood, but motherhood is only recalled when men fail to carry out their responsibility. In other words, Bonjisi's utterance reveals the hidden ways in which male discourse venerates women only when they accept subordinate social positions. The film text fails to rise above stereotypical reference to women as nurturers of humankind. This way, the film recalls its masculine role of socialising women's sensibilities into domesticity. The film narrative remains silent as to why mother was divorced. Nurturing in itself may not be a problem but the idea that it should be associated only with women and not men is what makes it a gender stereotyped image. If the women's space is narrowly marked out as the domestic sphere where women should tend the sickly husbands, then women's positive agency is taken away from them. To narrow the physical space where women can perform social functions that are not duties is in fact to censor the boundary that women should aspire to occupy. It is to limit, prescribe and to prevent women from realising their aspirations elsewhere, because in the film, there is no indication that the mother is not very happy where she is. Divorce can expand rather than narrow women agency and this is in fact the unintended net effect of the meaning of Bonjisi's complaint against his father in particular and patriarchy in general. In the absence of mother, both father and patriarchy are diseased. Men have no power of their own, not authorised by women. Yet society has created the perception that a woman who is divorced has no power. These are discourses performing guerrilla warfare on each other. Bonjisi unwittingly unmasks the attempt to censor women's agency that is enacted by patriarchal dictates.

The theme of nurturing in the film *Kapfupi*(2009) is further extended through a woman whose job is to cook and sell *sadza*(Thick porridge) at a shop owned by Jah Bless. One of the central issues is that whenever women are depicted in the film as earning a salary, they are relegated to menial jobs that are a reproduction of those jobs that women are expected to do at home. In fact, domestication in itself is a patriarchal stereotype that socializes and constricts women into thinking that they cannot act outside the confines of the home environment. In the film, Bonjisi and Kapfupi hatch out a plan to evade paying money for the food they have eaten. Their trickster antics are clearly reflected in these words: '*Aaah, so. Amai munobhowa sitereki. Ko chii ichi chamaita. Tarisai bvudzi iri riri*

*musadza*'.(Aah, what is this? Mother, you are boredom. What is this that you have done? Look at these strands of hair in the food). The woman is not given enough time to explain her side of the story. Rather, the manager [who is a man] quickly takes the two boys to the director's office where it is decided that the women must be fired. The 'voice' of the female employee is muted as it is not allowed to proffer its side of the story.

In yet another scenario, Marabha lies to a girl that he stays in the low density suburbs in order to win her love. It is common but not necessarily acceptable in the Shona culture and idioms to lie to a woman so that one's proposal of love is taken seriously, '*Rume resinganyepi hariroori*'. (A man who does not lie will not marry a woman). To confirm the practical application of the idiom, in *Kapfupi*(2009), Marabha says to the girl: '*In ndinogara kuG West Mahalape kunogara mabhozida ane salt. Uye ndine train yangu inofamba mutara nemagonyeti akawanda....*'(I stay in G West Mahalape where the rich stay. I have my own train and I also possess big trucks....') The way the girl is easily convinced can give an impression that women do not take their time to analyse situations. They are overwhelmed by the emotional impact of love so that their rationality is deluded. This kind of mentality is informed by the way women are socialized to feel that they are the underdogs. Johnston argues that through the mainstream cinema, 'a woman represents not herself' (1973: 25-6) but that she is an extension of patriarchy so deeply embedded in traditional values. Fathers as implementers of those values are not questioned about their decisions on the girl child.

Although in the film *Kapfupi*(2009), female characters are accorded a broader frame within which to exercise their freedom, that space is heavily policed by male characters. For example, Marabha threatens to beat her girl friend Precious if he sees her with Kapfupi. Furthermore, Precious' ways of exchanging boyfriends confirms the negative label of women as loose and dangerous. Moreover, Precious' lack of vision makes her narrative fail to transcend the exploitative frame that is imposed on her kind by the discourse of patriarchy (Rwafa, 2011: 48).

This above interpretation of Precious' conduct in the film suggests that hers is a narrative of loss of self-control; that Precious has become a vector in her own exploitation and therefore that she deserves to be censured by society for bringing its values into dispute. This conventional reading of the film can be interpreted as another form of censoring women's behavior. It is possible to complicate an interpretation of Precious's moral behaviour and suggest that it is precisely the



cultural instability in a woman's emotional life that patriarchy is not comfortable with because women can then use their bodies in ways that men may not be able to control. In the language of postcolonial theory, Vambe(2004) asserts that any conduct that destabilises the patriarchal life style ordered around narrow ideological values that serve men the most should be taken as deconstructive. If Precious' promiscuity is viewed from this 'fresh' perspective, it means that it can yield meanings that undermine the *status quo*. In other words, traditional Shona patriarchy is strict with young women who are virgins partly because it is an expected humane conduct for women, because controlling women sexuality before marriage guarantees more heard of cattle for men when the girl is married as a virgin. In all this language that enjoins women to remain virgins until they are married, men can frolic with as many women as possible. And this is unfortunately viewed as a sign of manliness.

'Precious' lack of clear vision in *Kapfupi(2009)* could actually be interpreted as a desire by women to decide on the kinds of men that the girls want for themselves. This interpretation of Precious' character can be considered as more liberal and concedes that Precious' behavior can subvert the values that men impose on women. However, it can be argued that the director of *Kapfupi(2009)* is guilty of not developing the character of Precious so that through the prism of one woman, the audience is able to experience a wide range of women's agency. In short, *Kapfupi(2009)* is prevented from saying certain social realities about women. It is self-censored by the director who could not countenance or imagine putting on Television in the living rooms, a woman who refused to have her romantic life dictated upon by men. It also seems that the director of *Kapfupi(2009)* who does not control the means of disseminating the contents of his film through the Zimbabwe Television Station(ZTV) had to buckle and water down the character of Precious in an act of self-censorship in order to allow the film to show on the national television.

In the conception of the film, Precious's carefree play with different men is meant to destabilise men's perceptions of morally upright behavior for women. The irony is that Precious's freedom to experience love with more than one man actually makes her gain a sense of self control. Authorities do not always have to invoke legal statutes such as POSA to control subversive images. In *Kapfupi(2009)*, the use of stereotypes as a mode of censoring ideas performs the cultural function of prohibiting and limiting what women can do in society. To the extent that cultural stereotypes are

embedded in the ideas that film-makers may unwittingly reproduced, those film-makers become unwilling vectors in enforcing censorship. The censoring of women is accomplished using different cultural stereotypes, all intended to suggest a limit on what women can aspire to do. Thus, while the central character in *Kapfupi*(2009) is restricted and sidelined to matters of love, the central female character in the film *Nhasi tave nehama*(1993) is accused of being the carrier of HIV and AIDS. The cultural stigma associated with HIV and AIDS blocks or censors the capacity of spouses and even communities from confronting the reality of HIV/AIDS with a vision of preventing the disease from spreading around.

#### **4.4 *Nhasi tave nehama* (1993): Interrogating gender limitations in the era of HIV/AIDS**

*Nhasi Tave Nehama*(1993) is a film framed around the problem of HIV/AIDS pandemic. At the centre of story is Shupikai who is married to Rusere. The couple has got two daughters, and a third one has just died of an illness related to HIV/AIDS. Despite the reality of AIDS afflicting the couple, Rusere still insists of having more children: '*Ko hatichaite here vamwe vana?*(Are we not going to have other children?) Shupikai is quite aware of the dangers of having more children when it is confirmed that the couple is infected by HIV/AIDS. She tells Rusere that it is no longer safe to have more babies when she replies: '*Mwana wedu akafa neAIDS*'. (Our child has died of AIDS). Rusere feels that as father his authority should not be questioned. He expects Shupikai to be a docile women who should simply follow orders: '*Unoziva here kuti uri kutaura nemurume wako?*' (Do you know that you are speaking to your husband?). In this exchange, gender powered inequalities are revealed. First, Shupikai's position is a plausible one, but naturalised forms of thinking are made to prevail against her sound judgment. Cultural censorship here, takes the form of confirming men's little knowledge about AIDS as the natural and uncontested knowledge. Second, Shupikai's wise judgment is made to appear as if she is out of depth in terms of knowing that it is still possible for people with HIV to have healthy babies, provided they take necessary medication. Again, patriarchal modes of censorship makes Shupikai appear ignorant, since Shupikai is presented as one who does not know that medical research has developed to a point where parents with HIV infection can still have a baby free of the disease. Here, the film reveals that censoring women's ideas work through affirmed male discourse that is used to invalidate women's thinking.

If Shupikai is meant to be the film director's narrative voice, then that voice is compromised because the film director has not created a broad range of characters that could manifest different ways of understanding how HIV affects married couples. This lack of knowledge is ascribed to the women yet, it was the male controlled Zimbabwe government that hid HIV and AIDS cases in the 1980s under the pretext that spreading information about the presence of HIV and AIDS in Zimbabwe would scare away investors (Vambe, 2003). Preventing people to have knowledge about a death and life defining disease such as HIV and AIDS to get to ordinary people is not only censorship; it is a national tragedy implied in not wanting to know one's HIV and AIDS status. The syndrome of burying one's head in the sand in the face of hostile forces can be described as "flawed agency" because it is self-defeating. There is therefore collusion of censoring the voice of black women by African traditional cultural ideas on matters of birth control and the black government's stance. In the film, national ignorance on how HIV and AIDS affect people is not the monopoly of the state only. Ordinary man like Rusere who coerce their wives who are already compromised to have babies reveal the basic fact that lack of education limits the options that people might develop to deal with a health crisis. MacFadden(1992) observes that HV/AIDS physical impact on the individual take the form of mouth ulcers, TB and weight loss, but "the symptoms of the disease in women take the forms of persistent vaginal thrush and genital ulcers, and these have helped to reinforce the wrong perception that HIV/AIDS is a woman's disease"(McFadden, 1992: 159). The lack of this knowledge about HIV and AIDS that is withheld by authorities is tragic and this is the main scourge within African societies. The subtly nature of cultural censorship here is also the implied underpinning narrative that HIV is a woman's disease.

For Gaidzainwa(1985) the descriptions of women as docile popularised in male discourses have been institutionalised in the Zimbabwean society and culture so that an attempt by women to break away from the bondage is viewed as a threat. Men scapegoat women on the issue of HIV and AIDS. In *Nhasi tave nehama*(1993) Shupikai advices Rusere to stop drinking beer because beer will compromise his health. Instead of listening to the sound advice his wife is giving, Rusere blames Shupikai for having caused the death of their child: '*Iwe ndiwe wakazvara mwana akafa saka ndiwe une AIDS*'. (You are the one who bore a dead child so you are the one with AIDS). Rusere's speech is symptomatic of the belief found among some Zimbabwean men who have been socialised to think that women are carriers of diseases. A woman becomes a metaphor of disaster, and the language that

describes her condition is framed in discourses meant to force women to think that their lives are already morally depleted and that women need men's guidance. Much as labeling women as carriers of disease reflects the attitudes of some men towards female sexuality, Grossberg et al are quite aware of the cultural politics of representing HIV/AIDS when they assert that:

“the question of AIDS is also ‘an extremely important terrain of struggle and contestation’ in which the realities, now and in the future, sexual politics, desire and pleasure, who lives and dies, are bound up in metaphor and representation. What cultural studies must do, and has [sic] the capacity to do, is to articulate insights the constitutive and political nature of representation itself, about its complexities, about the effects of language, about textuality as a site of life and death”(1992: 1).

HIV/AIDS may not easily manifests physically on the bodies of those who carry it, not until its last phase when HIV becomes AIDS. Interpreting symptoms of HIV and AIDS is a contested terrain over the creation and ownership of meaning, and attribution of identities. Since HIV and AIDS symptoms are not always obvious, it is a challenge for film directors to handle the theme. The politics of film representation HIV and AIDS reveal its ambiguities and underpinning social contradictions. Vambe locates the magnitude of the problem of HIV and AIDS in

‘...cultural identities embedded in notions of African sexuality. The latter is shaped by cultural beliefs, values and notions of ‘maleness’, and ‘femaleness’, manhood’ and womanhood’, especially as determined within a colonial [and post colonial] system that “invents” ideas of African customary law” (2003, 473).

In the film, *Nhasi tave nehama*(1993), Rusere denies the existence of HIV and AIDS in his home, his body and nation. In contrast, Shupikai beliefs that it is possible to live positively with the disease. She socialises with other people who have been affected by HIV/AIDS. When she visits her friend who also has the disease she receives messages of hope: ‘*Munofanira kushanda pamwechete kwete kupomerana mhosva. Chero upi zvake munhu anogona kubatwa neutachiona hweHIV/AIDS. Vamwe vakadzi vanobva vatiza varume vavo. Kukurukura kunoyamura*’. (You should work together rather than blaming each other. Any person can be infected by HIV/AIDS. Some women run away from their husbands.

The conversation between Shupikai and her friend is provided in the film, by the director as an indication that *problems* associated with AIDS cannot be solved if couples engage in a ‘blame game’. When the infected engage in dialogue they can come out with credible solutions to the

problem. At the first level of interpretation, the film ascribes women with positive agents, where they more than men in the film, debate HIV and arrive at scientifically sound solutions of how to control HIV. However, in the film, this knowledge possessed by women is undermined by the fact that it is other women, who portray some women as cowards. The lingering idea that the woman is a weaker sex is suggested in the line “*Vamwe vakadzi vanobva vatiza varume vavo.*” The choice of women as people who are unreliable, who cannot confront a problem, but who run away from men who are sick is not accidental; it reveals the stereotype that the film director and the Shona society has when describing women. It is common knowledge that more men run away from women and children when confronted with HIV and AIDS. Other men even compound their situation by targeting young girls who are virgins in the hope that sleeping with these girls can cure them (Vambe, 2003). And yet in the film, it is a woman who is depicted as faint-hearted when in other scenes in the film it is Shupikai and not Rusere who show a rational approach to the problem of HIV and AIDS in their family. The ideological ambivalence of the director is rooted in the unarticulated belief that HIV and AIDS is a woman’s disease. Such characterisation of women as ‘dirty’ and ‘diseased’ are forms of censoring and censoring women through discourses of patriarchal representations. The language that portrays women negatively is calculated to silence women; it imposes cultural, psychological and intellectual prohibitions on what women should think about in regard to their lives. These male discourses are censorious.

In *Nhasi Tave nehama*(1993)Shupikai and other women discuss ways of keeping their health safe. However, at home Rusere is very dismissive of any advice that his wife gives him regarding the idea of *living positively* with HIV/AIDS: ‘*Saka clinic ndiyo yave kundiudza zvekuita mumba mangu. AIDS chirwere chavakadzi nemahure. Ini handinei nazvo*’. (So the clinic is now the one telling me what to do in this house. AIDS is a women’s disease and prostitutes. I have nothing to do with the disease). In gender discourses, a *hure* or prostitute exist in unmarked territories. She has transcended the boundaries controlled by men usually defined by categories such as ‘wife’ and ‘daughter’ (Chitauru et al, 1994). For Rusere, it follows that a women referred to as *hure* is considered independent and stereotypically described as ‘dangerous’. The attitudes and psyche that arrest the image of *hure* is male defined, controlled or sanctioned. Thus, in Zimbabwe, the word *hure* is often spoken with a woman in mind but not a man. However, HIV/AIDS has become part of Zimbabwean culture, and because of the fluidity of the language of describing HIV and AIDS

women can also contest discourses of women oppression and challenge power relations between men and women. For example, in Zimbabwe increased numbers of women have taken up the role of looking after the family in cases where the husband is seriously ill or has died from diseases related to HIV/AIDS. It is possible to argue that the film director is using the film to show how men have generated culturally steeped images and vocabulary that implicates women as the cause of HIV. If this line of argument is correct, then one can conclude that the film director is actually criticizing men for creating a language that dismisses women's contributions in the debates on HIV and AIDS. However, the film director has maintained sufficient distance from Rusere's utterances so as to allow the audience to think that the desire to censor women is not the film director's, but that of men like Rusere. This has been done in the film by introducing other male voices that contradict Rusere's entrenched views.

It is sobering to notice that *Nhasi tave Nehama*(1993) is a self-reflexive film that can up-end or oppose the stereotyping of women and men. The life of Baba Munyaradzi is provided in the film as a counter-narrative to male perceptions shared by Rusere which are that women only are responsible for ruining African families because of women's assumed promiscuity. In the film Baba Munyaradzi is prepared to discuss the issue of HIV/AIDS with his wife without constructing prejudices against women. The synchronic discourses by Baba Munyaradzi urging partners to trust each other suggest a different conceptualisation of HIV and AIDS. Baba Munyaradzi is of the opinion that '*Mukadzi nemurume vakasave nekuvimbika, muchato unobva waparara*'. (If a married woman and man are not faithful to each other, the marriage will be destroyed). This statement from the film *Nhasi tave nehama*(1993) depicts Baba Manyaradzi as one of the few men in the Shona society and culture that have moved beyond the constricting and prohibiting boundaries of patriarchy that define gender roles in negative terms. In other words, for positive behaviour to occur in the face of HIV/AIDS men and women should be faithful to one another. Even the traditional healer who is revered for his knowledge in traditional medicines confesses that AIDS is well beyond his ability to cure infected patients when he says that: ‘

*Kana ini pano handigone kurapa AIDS. Ukaona munhu anoti anogona kuirapa murevi wenhema. Ndinogona kukupai mishonga yekurapa zvirwere zvinototoro mikana yekuti munhu ane AIDS chete*'. (As I stand here I cannot cure AIDS. If you hear someone saying that he/she can cure the disease he/she is telling lies. I can only administer medicine that can cure opportunistic diseases that afflict someone with AIDS'.

The traditional healer, being male, demystifies and challenges some traditional healers in Zimbabwe who claim that they can cure HIV/AIDS. By extension, the traditional healer also exposes the mental weaknesses of men such as Rusere who are still in denial about the existence and destructive nature of AIDS. *Nhasi Tave Nehama*(1993) uses Baba Munyaradzi and the traditional healer as counterpoints to wily men who use their knowledge in traditional medicine to control women. Through these two males, the film director succeeds in undermining a persistent relic of patriarchal values that scapegoat women for everything that goes wrong in a family. To this extend, the film confronts the stereotypes that some men have created in order to censor the voices of women. This revelation is one of the ways in which a film debating cultural issues brings out the political dimension not only of cultural censorship and its effects on women, but also how film images challenge the images that they construct so as to clear ground for better understanding of relations between sexes in the age of HIV and AIDS.

Further, in the film narrative, when Shupikai runs away from Rusere in search of peace in the rural areas, she is confronted with another challenge. In the rural area, she finds out that her neighbour—Admore, is dying alone with AIDS. Together with other women, Shupikai attends to household chores as well as help Admore to seek medical attention. Women show their determination to fight HIV/AIDS through the following piece of song:

*Isu madzimai emuZimbabwe takamirira zvakawanda/We, the women of Zimbabwe represent so many things/Kurema kwazvo kunoda madzimai/ Whatever burden needs women/Hazvina mhosva nyangwe zvorema takamirira zvakawanda /Even if there are so many difficulties, we stand for so many things.*

Through these lyrics African women reject to be named using constrictive and ‘singular’ identities. In both times of pleasure and pain women are prepared to confront reality in the complexities. The patriarchal frames that refer and attempt to confine women to the sphere of domesticity are subverted. The song gives women multiple ‘voices’ and identities’ to describe their various duties that they can assume in society and culture. Although these duties are not outlined specifically in the above song, however words such as ‘...*tinomirira zvakawanda*’ (‘...we stand for so many things’) metaphorically depicts that women can stand as mothers, wives, workers, trained professionals and national leaders.

These multiple identities or cultural 'selves' pronounced through the above song have the potential to disrupt the stabilized images authorised by men in social discourses whose classical economy of language and representations support and promote negative portrayals of women. The plenitude of cultural roles that the women folk are capable of performing serve to point to the fact that cultural identities are unstable and that women have multiple points of identification or 'suture', from which they can use as 'speaking positions'(Ngoshi and Zhou, 2010:47). These identities and positions are always in a flux. The moral capital of women's identities derives from the fact that women serve humanity and not individuals. Lyrics such as '*Kurema kwazvo kunoda madzimai. Hazvina mhosva nyangwe zvorema takamirira zvakawanda*' in the film operate as the subversive intertext within the overall discourse of gender struggles. As de Toro(1995) aptly puts it, commenting in a similar situation, the above piece of song functions as an *ideologeme*. An *ideologeme* is the common function which links a concrete meaning of song to the structure of film within the intertextual or discursive space of a cultural narrative. In *Nhasi Tave Nehama*(1993) lyrical utterances of women are situated in texts of 'protests' and they focus on deconstructing 'fixed' patriarchal values regarding women progress and social advancement. To this extent, the film deconstructs the negative images that it initially projected.

The dialectics of song in film and film in the song narrated through song in *Nhasi tave nehama*(1993) provides multiple ways of curving out the struggles of women in Zimbabwe. The struggle endured by female characters in trying to change the behavior of their male counterparts for positive change, is symbolised in the happy ending of the film. In this ending, Rusere and Shupikai are brought together as a family poised to work towards self-sustenance despite their condition as people living with HIV/AIDS. It is the narrative of women that assert life over death that is made to triumph in the film. Traditional male centred values and their censoring capacities have been undermined. In short, in the film *Nhasi tave nehama*(1993) the issue of cultural censorship identified and then debunked and challenged using women's voices. To endow women with ability to transcend traditionally ascribed roles is a political statement; it reveals that in life as in film, women can subvert ideas created to censor or limit their voices.

The director of the film initially depicted, negative images of women and men so as to create more imaginative space from which to revise the agency of these people. When the film is interpreted in



this way, the director of the film can be said to have deliberately shored up silencing and censoring of women's voices in order to allow the plot of the film to thicken, unfold and then manifest how these negative images are later on subverted. Credit is therefore due to the director of *Nhasi Tave Nehama*(1993) for complicating the depiction of women and some men rather than rely on gender stereotyped language. There are some problems of representing HIV and AIDS in the film that have not been adequately resolved in *Nhasi Tave Nehama*. Firstly, the film could have depicted a broad range of differentiated women characters who respond to HIV and AIDS differently, a situation that could have allowed the viewer of the film to experience different levels of cultural censorship and how women struggle against the restrictive patriarchal structures. Secondly, the viewer comes out of the experience of watching the film with little knowledge of *how*, *when* and *why* the moral and spiritual transformation of Rusere from a rude husband to a loving and caring takes place. The knowledge of how people's minds change in the context of HIV and AIDS is suppressed. Ironically, that knowledge is censored, and yet so important to infected audiences in order to empower themselves and those people who have not yet fallen victim to HIV and AIDS. Fourthly, *Nhasi Tave Nehama* (1993) gives the impression that what it has been narrating is reality because of the verisimilitude of image and person in visual cultures. This is a serious problem in other contexts similar to the Zimbabwean one, where authors have used HIV and AIDS to signify something else other than the disease itself. For example, when analysing the representation of HIV and AIDS in Shona literature Vambe shows that,

“Authors have used HIV/AIDS as a metaphor for the corruption and betrayal of the masses in post-independence Zimbabwe, even though HIV and AIDS is “so real and concrete for readers, [that] turning it into an emblem of anything else is difficult” (2003, 474).

The visuality of film images can censor people from asking questions behind the constructions screened on cinema. *Nhasi tave Nehama*(1993) is a schizophrenic film narrative. On one hand, it signals an important shift from describing women as promiscuous and carriers of HIV and AIDS to significantly making the statement that those affected and those as yet to be affected must move away from the blame game. People must search for strategies to survive the scourge and the film has made it patently clear that men and women can 'domesticate' HIV and AIDS if there is mutual trust between them. The question of seeking medical attention in the event of contracting HIV AIDS is depicted as necessary.

However, the film impresses a feel good attitude in audience who possesses the knowledge that one has HIV and AIDS. This is simply underestimating the necessity of accessing quality cultural knowledge about the contexts in which HIV and AIDS thrive. The issue of poverty and how it worsens the problem of HIV and AIDS is either deliberately suppressed in the film or excluded because the author's knowledge of understanding the extent of the problem fails to measure to the magnitude of the problem. Consequently, HIV and AIDS have been depicted as a moral issue, requiring a moral solution. This thinking unfortunately echoes the discourses of patriarchy that describe HIV and AIDS as women's diseases. In short, self-censorship is a difficult malady to detect because even well-known film directors who have the best intentions in discussing HIV and AIDS on screen, can reinforce stereotypes, especially when the directors do not create alternative linguistic imagery to counter the images in the language that negatively stereotype men and women living with HIV and AIDS. The problem of self-censorship induced by the overarching reliance on male wisdom is dramatised in the film, *Neria*. In the film *Neria(1991)* the ambiguities of self-censorship are amplified in the film director's attempt to grapple with how customary laws of inheritance and modern laws marginalise women who should benefit after the death of their spouses.

#### **4.5 *Neria(1991):Exploring constrictions in the African Customary Law of Inheritance***

Simply described, the film *Neria(1991)* is a narrative that explicitly challenges patriarchal modes of oppressing women engendered by the traditional practice of inheritance. The first scene of the film *Neria(1991)* shows Neria—the female protagonist, building and painting her house together with her husband, Patrick. The two are happily married; they are hard workers and they put their plans together whenever they want to achieve something for the family. In contra-distinction, Patrick's elder brother Phineas is a drunk who does not take care of his family. Phineas is an embodiment of traditional values so narrow that they will not allow women to make their own decisions about the welfare of the family. Phineas' ideological 'narrowness' is reflected when he is having a conversation with Patrick about the family bull that Patrick is being requested to buy. Phineas says that: '*Why do you always want to seek advice from Neria. You must make up your mind without consulting her*'. Phineas thinks that his brother is 'weak' and 'unmanly' because Patrick consults with Neria first before making a family decision. In his simplistic and prejudiced way, Phineas wants

to reproduce traditional authoritarian values that have made men be able to determine, censor and define the extent of women's involvement in social life. Unfortunately, as depicted in *Neria*, Phineas underestimates the marriage bond that exists between Patrick and Neria.

Indeed, Phineas is not alone in this attitude towards Patrick and Neria. Feeble men such as Phineas who fear women's power to create new avenues of thought that are not influenced by men confirm the psychological attitudes to cultural censorship, which according to Lambe is based on the philosophy that

People with strongly held beliefs are less likely to be convinced by counter-arguments or persuasive messages than those who are uncertain in their beliefs. Similarly, those who are resolute about their attitudes are more likely to act in a manner compatible with their beliefs, where those with less stable views have more malleable behavior. (Lambe, 2008: 488).

In *Neria*, Phineas holds inflexible ideas about the roles that men and women should play in society. He then uses this lack of flexibility and cultural intolerance on his part as a leverage to censor women's views and attempt to totally suppress those ideas from women that are not 'compatible' with his narrow and chauvinistic beliefs.

However, in executing cultural censorship on young, productive and reproductive women, Phineas is not alone. In the film narrative, Neria's mother-in-law thinks that career women like Neria; with money, material goods and the potential to decide what they want, are 'insubordinate', 'troublesome', and 'unconventional' in their behaviour (Gaidzanwa, 1985:98). The mother-in-law clearly shows that she is intolerant of Neria's actions when she says: *'It's very difficult when she is here. She is not just doing her duties. I'm going to fix her'*. As a site of conflicting ideologies, the mother-in-law extends the spectacle of masculinity that eroticises the male body as well as affirms it as the locus of feminine control. Lambe's study on censorship attitudes and cultural tolerance reveal that in some cases, "women are more willing to censor than are men" (2008: 493). Neria's mother-in-law willingly endorses the view that women are inferior to men. Her desire to want to further isolate and marginalise Neria can also be understood as a compensatory attitude since in her own life, the mother-in-law, had not experienced free expression, so, neither would she feel compelled to want to extend "civil liberties protections to others, particularly those whom [she does not] like"(ibid, 485) or agree with. The mother-in-law's response to the assertive attitudes of modern women such as Neria's free expression is to sanction prior restraint as a form of cultural censorship.

The mother-in-law imagines imposing subsequent punishment which is a severe form of cultural censorship that disproves of human behavior enacted by others.

Modleski(1991) and Hanke(1992) contend that hegemonic masculinities re-actively adapt and redesign themselves to the extent of implicating women who turn into cultural vectors for censoring attitudes that contribute in subjugating other women. The mother-in-law seeks to control Neria. This process of one woman '*fixing*' another actually promotes the domination of Neria by Phineas. In the Shona literature, competition among women and between wives and mothers-in-law to influence men and for material benefit is well documented (Gaidzanwa, 1985). This 'rat-race syndrome' (1985: 90) restricts, prohibits and censors possibilities in life that the women-kind can explore. Also, the syndrome entraps women within the 'vicious cycle' of hegemonic masculinity that can allow women to compete dangerously among themselves so that a male figure is traditionally expected to prevail over the conflict and offer solutions. More often than not, those solutions are crafted in ways that do not undercut the basis of patriarchal norms and values that favour male dominance over women.

In the film *Neria*, Phineas uses the rural setting—supposedly the home of traditional values, to question Patrick:

Phineas: '*Since when did you start to be controlled by Neria*'?

Patrick replies: '*There is a new world out there Phineas. But you refuse to see it. Neria also earns some money and sometimes more than me*'.

For Patrick, if Neria contributes money for the upkeep, then there is no reason she should not come up with her independent decisions about how the family is run. This kind of approach subverts the cultural and traditional roles of women described as stuck in discourses of the bedroom and procreation. Patrick belongs to a new generation of men with liberal ideas that allow women important forms of self actualization.

As found out by Lambe, "liberal subjects are generally less willing to censor" (2008 493) than are conservative men such as Phineas. For example, in a 'Bar discussion' scene in the film, Phineas insists that giving women independence is dangerous. He accuses Patrick when he says that you put, '*too much faith in women. My friend has just died. I'm sure he must have told his wife about a 'will' reflecting how his property is to be distributed in case he dies*'. He was killed by his wife'. Phineas's

concern is not simply what he sees as the erosion of male power, but that the erosion is enabled and promoted by liberal man such as Patrick. Phineas's ultimate desire anticipates his eventual control of Patrick and Neria's property should Patrick die first, and this necrophilic attitude is never hidden at all by Phineas. This cultural attitude has its master narrative in some obscurantist Shona customs that condone the silencing of the voice of women at home and at work. In other words, Phineas is giving voice to a traditional philosophical view built on the suppression and censorship of women's views. Put differently, in the film *Neria*, Phineas represents what Lambe (quoting Altermeyer, 2008:496) describes as

“right-wing authoritarianism ...submissive to what [it] perceive[s] as legitimate authority aggressive against targeted persons perceived to violate expectations of those authority figures, and conventional in terms of their own adherence to social norms”.

In other words, cultural censorship of women's potentialities does not always have to be imposed by the ruling classes within a new political state. That same state political infrastructure is built on and sustained by the values within the African patriarchal tradition and customary social set-up that is constructed in ways that inherently 'de-voice' women. Self-censorship that manifests as observances of cultural ideas that are given approval by the socio-economic and cultural populism is a pernicious form of censorship because it has been practiced for many centuries over which it was considered normal, natural and incontestable. It accepts the view that women are an extension of men's domestic wealth that includes cattle and goats. Cultural censorship that is lodged in people's attitudes and spiritual values is brutal; it justifies oppression of women [and even of some men] in the name of preserving customs.

Thus, cultural censorship has developed its own internal dynamics with supporting institutional vocabulary, values that assign punishment to women who deviate, and reward to those women who conform to and do not interrogate the unequal ways in which men and women are placed socially in life. Also, cultural censorship of women's potentialities embedded in customary practices has serious psychological damage on women who suffer from it and on men who benefit by it. As Lambe puts it, in terms of appreciating attitudes towards censorship

The latitude of acceptance includes all beliefs the person finds reasonable; the latitude of rejection comprises all unacceptable beliefs; the latitude of non-commitment contains those beliefs about which a person feels neutral. In terms of attitudes about censorship, there are

likely to be people who would be willing for the government to allow or protect expression, but would rarely endorse prior restraint or subsequent punishment. (Lambe, 2008: 491).

In the film *Neria*, the mother-in-law appropriates all forms of attitudes towards censoring other women and selectively uses them when it is necessary to control women whom she considers wayward because of their individuality. It is ironic that the same mother-in-law, who previously was chastising Neria for not being dependant on men, authorises a song based on a folktale that defends a woman who is being abused in a marital relationship. The song, *Dhari Mukaranga* recalls a hard working wife who brought much wealth and fortune in the home. Instead of applauding his wife's efforts, Dhari Mukaranga, the man, proceeds to marry a second wife. In the film, the mother-in-law captures the unrewarding life of a hard working woman, highlighting how men abuse those women who love them, and while loving those women who can abuse men. To capture the gravity of the social contradictions within which African women find themselves, the mother-in-law who has become the story teller in the film, breaks into song:

Story-teller: *Wakanganwa nhamo yako iya yemugota/You have forgotten your problem of bachelor-hood.*

Chorus: *Dhari mukaranga /Dhari Mukaranga.*

Story-teller: *Ndini ndakakubvisa nhamo yemugota/I'm the one who brought you out of bachelor-hood.*

Chorus: *Dhari Mukaranga/Dhari Mukaranga.*

Story-teller: *Tiri vaviri takarima munda wedu/Together we started our family.*

Chorus: *Dhari Mukaranga/Dhari Mukaranga.*

Story-teller: *Nhasi watora mumwe mukadzi/Today we taken another wife.*

The above fragment of song satirises the foolishness of the husband—Dhari Mukaranga, who marries another wife after going through difficult times with his first wife to bring up the family. The song is also a critique of the traditional values promoted by Phineas that undermine the efforts of Neria who is working hard as a career woman. Furthermore, the above song scoffs at the mother-in-law for viewing Neria as a problem who possess independent ideas about how she runs her family. If one was being convinced that the mother-in-law has been totally absorbed by the male discourses of dominance, here, one can see how embedded and dynamic intertextuality is in questioning classical realism's reliance on typification as a yardstick to measure human agency. The carnivalising spirit of

the songs mocks men, old women, young women and leaves none spared. As a meta-discourse, the song can reflect the awful reality that

“A woman stands in patriarchal culture as signifier for the male other, bound by a symbolic order in which man can live out fantasies ...by imposing them on the silent image of a woman still tied to her ‘place’ as bearer of meaning, not a maker of meaning”(Mulvey, 1988:58).

The ‘silent image’ of a woman in patriarchal meta-discourses may appear to conform to the fantasies of her husband; the silenced voice of a married woman may even entice another woman to be married by the same man. However, as Gaidzanwa(1985) argues, culture changes and it is no longer merely ‘locked’ in or dictated upon by those traditional modes of thought that restrict and censor ‘difference’ and heterogeneity in perception and action. ‘Difference’ is that raw and powerful connection from which personal power is forged. Women have been socialised either to ignore their ‘differences’, or to view them as causes for separation and suspicion rather than as forces for change. By using the mother-in-law who until the song narrative is introduced in the film, was tormenting Neria, to rebuke traditional male authorised culture, the film director reveals the reflex nature of film. Narrative changes and negative social roles are potentially overthrown. Put differently, the song is the most potent political rhetorical device that mother-in-law uses to ironises her position in life as a woman who works on behalf of men to dominate other women. By extension, mother-in-law questions the culturally embedded censoring discourses that brought her up to think that whatever men do is correct and beyond censure. This is the turning round of the film’s narrative where the previously oppressed begin to interrogate the sources of their oppression.

In the film *Neria*(1991), Patrick is very proud of the creativity and cultural value system that informs the social conduct of his wife when he says: ‘*You know, I’m a lucky man. How many men have wives who work so hard and still look so young*’. This situates the film, *Neria* (1991) in the frame of a counter-discourse to the stereotypical reference of women as always dependent on men. However, Patrick does not live to see the elaboration of this counter-discursive narrative in which women begin to subvert men. After the tragic death of Patrick in a car accident, Neria is prepared to face Patrick’s hostile relatives. Neria composes herself in preparation for the fight to protect what she believed she had worked for, with Patrick. For Neria, hers is not an isolated fight; it is every woman’s struggle for justice and women empowerment. Patrick’s death marks the beginning of an

open struggle in which Phineas wants to take by force, Neria's property and then subjugate her, as a second wife in a polygamous marriage. Neria's control over her family is at stake.

In *Neria*, the camera in motion catches Phineas stealing money of the deceased and hiding the bank book in his pocket. Phineas's callousness is further revealed when he openly suggests that he is using customary law to disinherit Neria. While the mourners get to Patrick's rural home, they find Patrick's paternal relatives scrambling for his property.



**Fig 7:** Shot from *Neria*(1991)

The above shot shows Neria in black clothes, seated in the middle as relatives of her husband are making a decision that Neria should be inherited by Phineas—an elder brother to the deceased. Inheritance is one form of censorship that stifles women from choosing the best options in life. This abuse of customary law of inheritance is elaborately and creatively captured in the Shona novel, *Magora Panyama*, (1999) ('vultures on the carcass'), where it is the male relatives who literally fight to own the property left by their dead brother. In most parts of Zimbabwe, traditional laws still influence how the property of the deceased husband is shared among the relatives. Women are allowed to own simple paraphernalia as their property, and lack certain entitlements to big properties such as land and a house. In the Shona novel *Magora Panyama*(1999) by Chitsike, 'Indigenous African customary law is suspiciously viewed as predatory when it is used by ignorant, narrow-minded, cunning and unscrupulous people or 'vultures' to dispossess innocent people of their wealth'(Vambe & Mpfariseni, 2011: 100).



In the film *Neria* the ‘stabilised’ and ‘settled’ narratives of property ownership defined by old customary laws is depicted as being under attack. It is withering away and being transformed in response to changing social, economic and legal conditions found in society and culture. In other words, the identity of Neria as ‘widowed’ that is situated and formed within the dominant discourses of cultural change have come to be protected by modern law. In one scene, in the film narrative of *Neria*, Phineas is forced to attempt at convincing Neria that the two can co-habit as husband and wife as dictated by the traditional and customary laws of inheritance. Phineas does not hide his intentions: *‘I want to talk to you Neria. I know its too early. You can always lean on me. The family needs a man to hold it intact’*. Phineas’ remarks and assumptions that Neria can *‘lean on him’* and that the *‘The family needs a man...’* exemplify the supra-discourses of patriarchy that attempt to repress and undermine the idea that a woman cannot do without the help of a male figure-head. Phineas is shameless and this is further revealed when he tells his wife that he is obliged to take Neria as his second if he is to inherit his brother’s house, car and money in the bank.

When Phineas is challenged by his wife to leave Neria alone as she can look after herself and the children, he pounces on her and beats her shouting: *‘won’t it be right to own a house in town, to drive a car!’* Phineas beats women as a way of silencing and censoring their views that contest his belief system. He claims to represent traditional values that should inform him to have respect on Neria and her property and family. And yet, as suggested by Lambe, conservative men such as Phineas will relax and modify culture, “in terms of their own adherence to social norms,”(Lambe, 2008, 496) when the reality suits their own selfish ends. It is through Phineas’ actions that the film, *Neria* depicts the rapacity and predatory nature of the African extended family. This portrayal of the greed of relatives exhibited by Phineas reveals the ‘fissures’, ‘gaps’ and ‘ruptures’ within the traditional values often positively represented as the ‘best option’ for Africans whose lives have been corrupted and torn apart by the vagaries of modernity.

Expressed in another way, the cultural contradictions reflected through the character of Phineas points to the vulnerability of African traditions brought face-to-face with the realities and demands of modern life with its emphasis on property acquisition and consumerism (McQuail, 1994). The ideology of property acquisition is very much evident through Phineas who brought Mhlauzi’s truck to collect all the property from Neria’s home. In the film, Neria discusses with his brother Jethro

criticising tradition for allowing people like Phineas to take property that he has not worked for and made it his. African society is also in for criticism because it sanctions and approves of Phineas' actions. The exchange between Neria and her brother Jethro is important because it reveals how Africans chose to understand and interpret African cultural traditions differently, emphasising the fact that there is no single African traditional culture that Africans can agree on.

Neria laments: "*When father died, uncle took good care of us. Why is Phineas doing that to me?*"

Jethro replies: "*Nowadays, there are people who are twisting tradition to suit their own interests*".

This brief exchange shows that not all men behave like Phineas who not only wants to benefit from undermining the rights of women; the exchange between brother and sister exposes the machinations of cultural censorship that traditional Shona society has relied on to take away women's initiative to decide on their lives. More important, that these cultural censoring discourses are discussed, and have their claims disputed means that the film is registering how social values are transforming.

In *Neria* when cultural traditions are rendered 'twistable' and 'changeable' most of the time this process disadvantages women because it is a process initiated by men with vested interests. Traditions are socially constructed, and people tend to normalise what they learn from traditions believing that: 'this is the way the world is', as opposed to 'this is the way that we have learned that the world is' (Malleus, 2000: 7). In the film *Neria*, modern legal courts are depicted as fair. Neria makes recourse to these courts in order to regain lost properties. It is here also, that the audience experiences the resurgence of Neria's agency. She is prepared to contest traditions and the cultures that authorize the expropriation of property by family members. The legal battle for ownership of the family property is part of that contest. In collaboration with Neria, uncle Jethro criticises and demystifies the traditional African legal system based on customary law. Through song, Jethro reveals the weaknesses of customary law that render this law to be prone to manipulation by unscrupulous individuals bent on advancing their selfish interests:

*Kamusambo kaye kekuti chako ndechangu / That habit is what is yours is mine/Pakuzoti paye wako ndewangu /To say that my wife is also yours/Ho-o! Unoda kugara nhaka/You want to inherit my property/Kuita mucheka dzafa/To reap where you have not sown*

This song strongly condemns the traditional practice of inheritance. It is evident from the song that a pseudo-communalistic ethic in African tradition and patriarchy censors and restricts individuals from being creative (Jenks, 1993). In addition, the communal mode of existence envisioned in the philosophy of ‘what is mine is also yours’ hides from view the fact that there are people like Phineas who can exploit the ‘cracks’, and ‘fissures’ in that system of communalism to advance selfish interests. Phineas is also cruel; he resorts to the tactics of intimidating and scaring off Neria by invoking the authority of ancestors and spirits: ‘*You have no respect for ancestors. You curse the whole village by your disrespectful actions*’.

In Zimbabwe, the spiritual world of the ancestors is viewed as ‘sacred’ although not entirely able to control human behaviour. Consequently, some men who feel that their power is being eroded can resort to the ‘sacredness’ of the world of ancestors to intimidate, restrict and prohibit their wives from raising independent ideas because these men argue that raising questions invites the wrath of ancestors. Evidently, the so-called ‘settled’ discourses of tradition are manipulatable; they are used to marginalise those poised for change by labeling them as ‘the undesirable ‘Others’, (Muchemwa, 2005: 195) that deserve to be expelled from the ancestry house.

In the film *Neria*, when Neria visits Muchecha—a lawyer, she is reassuringly told that in the legal sphere there is no situation that is impossible and that, ‘*There are laws that protect widows like you*’. The lawyer also emphasises that the house is not only for Neria’s personal use but also for the children to freely use without being prejudiced. Socialised and restricted into thinking that women cannot run a home without a husband, Neria queries: ‘*Do you think that I can do it all by myself*’. Such a question is expected from women acculturated to thinking that there is no life after the death of their spouses (Gaidzanwa, 1985). However, as the song from uncle Jethro reassures, what Neria needs to do is to be strong-willed and be vigilant about traditional forces represented by Phineas that that would like to destroy her family and forcibly take away her property. The lyrics from Jethro are quite encouraging to Neria:

*Neria /Neria/Usawore moyoka Neria, Mwari anewe /Don’t get disheartened, God is there to protect you/Kufirwa nemurume hanzvadzi zvinoda kushinga/Because your husband died sister, you need to be strong/Mwari aneweka Neria /God is with you Neria/Neria*

*Neria/Upenyuimhindu-pindu/Life changes/Ngwarira mhopo dzenyika Be careful about evil peopleShinga moyo shinga /Be strong, be strong/Mwari anewe God is with*

you/*Vanhu kadzi vanobatwa senhapwa* /Women are treated as slaves/*Kugara senherera*/Living like orphans/*Usawore moyoka hanzvadzi*/Don't get disheartened sister/*Mwari aneweka Neria*/God is with you Neria

A pertinent point brought out by the above song is that in some versions of Shona traditions, women are still treated as slaves. They carry out all domestic chores, look after the children and sexually entertain their husbands, and yet they are viewed as the underdogs. Through filmic representations the victimized woman appears as a metaphor for the nation under dictatorship, and male sexual power is perceived as a manifestation of political power along the continuum of patriarchal authority. The insistence in the song that life changes, suggests that approaches to dealing with these life changes should also be transformed. With this recognition, censoring discourses can also be questioned, complicated and brought into crisis. The censorship values are subject to criticism, and it is this aspect that makes the film *Neria*, progress in terms of how gendered relations are laid bare and interrogated.

#### **4.5.0 The Court Sessions: Dramatizing a clash between Modern Law and Traditional Customary Law**

The apex of *Neria's* (1991) narrative is brought out by a court drama that pits the plaintive Neria—against the defendant, Phineas. In a cross-examination encounter, Phineas is asked by the lawyer why he sees himself fit to take custody of his brother's family as well as inherit his property. His response is that: (1) he is entitled to inherit his brother's property because he is a blood relative; (2) he fears that Neria would end up taking everything to a new her husband if she gets married again; (3) it was quite 'natural' as tradition dictates that he should look after his brother's family; (4) children are complaining that they are not having enough food, and that Neria is now finding it difficult to raise school fees for the children; (5) as a traditional man he has no problem looking after his brother's family since he has a shop and cattle that he can use as source of income; (6) and that he thinks Neria is emotionally disturbed to a point where she can abuse the children so he sees it fit to protect children from Neria's occasional emotional out-bursts.

The cultural humus in Phineas' submission is grounded in a worn-out traditional system that is desperately attempts to provide rationale humanity that has no other multiple worlds containing complex challenges. It is outdated, but ironically, its modernity is its capacity to be recalled in the

‘present’ in order to police the cultural boundaries of what African womanhood should aspire to be. This exploitative version of African tradition survives by projecting its values as natural. It resents other narratives that question its own truths. It inhibits imagining other potential and democratic practices that Africa had and can have in the future. The tradition knows itself through a valorization of values that are projected as forming the totality of African cultural meanings (Wolffe, 1992). The language describing Neria as emotionally disturbed justifies, and re-enforces the traditionally ingrained stereotypes of women as ‘tender and emotionally weak’ (Brooks-Gunn & Matthews, 1979: 19-20).

In a stereotype as formalised cultural censorship, ‘naturalisation’ is favourable for its capability to normalise an exploitative process while attempt to contain social change. A version of African customary law favored by Phineas threatens to foreclose critical debate on changing African identities. It tries to ‘arrest’ culturally possible ideas on changing values from which new human agency can be realised. The version obscures reality and hopes to achieve the silencing or censoring of new ideas by invoking a language of cultural purity and vacuous spiritual authenticity.

In the film *Neria*, the traditionalising discourse from Phineas is mocked. For example, in another scene, as the court adjoins a group of women reassure Neria through song:

*Neria rambawakashinga /Neria be strong and stead fast/Dzamara wasvika kumagumo/Till you reach to the end of the case/Neria rambawakashinga/Neria be strong and stead fast/Dzamara wasvika kumagumo/Till you reach to the end of the case*

In presenting a scene where only women are seen encouraging a fellow woman, the filmic narrative of *Neria*(1991) is attempting to supply cultural scaffolds based on the view of African sisterhood. It seems as if women realize that they are weakened by men when women allow themselves to be set against each other. To this extent, the film *Neria* tends to be moving away from the stereotype of a ‘weak’ woman and of women as socially disorganised. This new agency is meant to undermine patriarchal aspirations that would seek to silence the voice of women. An idea of a civic organisation created to defend women’s rights is in the making in *Neria*. This organization is significant in fighting collective censorship of women’s rights. Speaking with a collective voice, it would be difficult to censor women’s views. The triumph of this ‘feminist’ narrative that seeks to oppose the institutionalisation of silencing of women is made possible in the modern courts where some more enlightened African men pass judgment that undercut Phineas’ authoritarian and totalitarian

traditionalist views on inheritance of property of a deceased relative who is survived by a wife and children.

In passing the judgment, the modern court charges Phineas with a criminal offence of harassing a widow, expropriating the estate of the deceased without consent from the wife and negatively affect the emotional feelings of the children. The custody of the children remains with Neria, and Phineas was told to retain back all the properties that he had forcefully taken from Neria's house. At the rural home, Neria refused to choose a husband that will look after her, and instead, selected his son as one who will look after her. *Ambuya*, speaking as the voice of traditional women, finally acknowledges that cultural practices must be adjusted to the changing times, and finally sides with her daughter-in-law. Her transition from being a hard core supporter of the traditional customary law of inheritance, to one woman that appreciates modern values that bestows independence on women to choose their destinies reflects the shifting and 'contestable' nature of traditions and cultures as they battle to legitimise themselves within the public domain where other radicalising discourses are taking centre stage. To this extent, *Neria* succeeds in undermining culturally constructed censorship attitudes embedded in obscurantist attitudes found in certain traditionalising discourses authorised by patriarchy.

In *Neria* the loss of women's rights are embedded in the unwritten African customary law. This law is unstable and can be interpreted in abusive ways. It seems therefore, that for years the African patriarchy has used customary law to censor, prevent, inhibit and even determine the careers that women could assume in a traditional setting. Because these traditional and fragmentary laws were pitted against the humanity of black women, through *Neria* it has been shown that a pre-condition for unshackling women from the violence of this law was to confront its assumption in a more superior and modern court. In other words, censorship of women's views is embedded in their everyday cultural practices that they have received from past generations. At the same time, cultural censorship of women can be destroyed when women begin to wield superior knowledge of how they are oppressed and also when they acquire knowledge related to what they need to do to undermine these forms of culturally engrained censorship practices.

### **4.5.1 Re-imposing new forms of censorship through Modern Law in *Neria***

Modern law has not worked in even ways for most African women who found themselves in a situation similar that of *Neria*. In other words, it seems the film has accorded or suggested that modern law possesses extra-ordinary powers to undermine culturally based censorship of women ideas. Modern law is not necessarily the ultimate expression of ‘the height of democracy’, where ‘faultless’ decisions are passed. Modern laws can also be manipulated by those with power and money to defeat the course of justice. Where law becomes the ‘politics of interpreting legal statutes’ (Bellies, 2008: 40) and ‘open-textured’ (Hart, 1983: 49) is when its language of reference is viewed as contestable. There are contradictions and ambiguities in modern law in its relation to how it can help women to regain their human rights that have not been resolved in *Neria*. Modern law could encourage vulture-like tendencies if an inflexible observance of the letter of modern law does not leave room for the extended family to benefit the wealth of a deceased relative (Vambe and Mpfariseni, 2011). What this implies is that in trying to present modern law as the best alternative that troubled people should turn to, the film narrative has tended to construct stereotypes that can censor how ordinary people should question the founding principles of modern law and the application of its statutes to practical situations. In other words, the power of modern law to ‘silence’ people when it purports to be impartial, democratic and objective can hide from view the inherent ‘cracks’ and ‘fissures’ within its statutes that make it prone to manipulation by those with money and power. Despite the possibilities that modern law can also be manipulated to disadvantage poor people, in the Film *Neria* modern law has been ascribed positive values.

In short then, *Neria*(1991) reflected how stereotypes constructed within the African traditional practice of inheritance can inhibit the social development of women. The film also created the space of the modern court as one where forms of traditionally culturally sanctioned censorship of women rights, ideas and perspectives on life are reversed. In the next section, focus is on the film *Everyone’s Child*(1996) that shows how members of society can abrogate their collective duty of looking after orphans. *Everyone’s Child*(1996) directed by Tsitsi Dangarembga returns to the theme of *othering* people living with AIDS. The film foregrounds the pernicious effects embodied in the damaging cultural stereotypes constructed around the issue of HIV/AIDS.

#### **4.6 *Everyone's Child* (1996): A critique on collective responsibility**

In Zimbabwe, children dubbed by media as 'worthy victims'(Chari, 2008:111) have attracted immense sympathetic debate about how they are described and treated by members of society. The film *Everyone's Child* (1996) directed by Tsitsi Dangarembga captures the story of four children that are forced to taste the harsh realities of the world of adulthood when their parents die of HIV/AIDS. The first scene of the film *Everyone's Child* (1999) introduces Tamari—the central character of the film, meeting in the bush with her lover Thabiso. Graced by the pristine and sensuous nature of the African forest, the two have great plans about their love relationship. However, at home, Tamari's mother is critically ill because of HIV/AIDS, and this reality changes Tamari from an innocent young girl to a hardened adult who must shoulder all the responsibilities of motherhood. Tamari, forgoes the pleasures of teenage-hood as she has to play mother to her younger siblings and to make sure that her ailing mother is in shape. Her behavior dovetails with the stereotype in which women must sacrifice their own lives in order to serve other lives. Thus, stereotypically, women are socialized into discourses of motherhood that require them to be 'tender', 'sympathetic', 'nurturing', 'affectionate' while being 'emotional' at the same time(Kornblum & Julian, 1992:288). This construction of women's emotions is rudely questioned in Dangarembga's novel, *Nervous Conditions* (1988), which begins with Tambudzai, declaring that she did not feel sad that her brother Nhamo had died. What is implied in this novel that could be of relevance in analyzing *Everyone's Child* is that emotions, are culturally constructed although society projects them as natural.

The existential dimension taken by some members of society has tended to associate HIV/AIDS with irresponsible behaviour such as having multiple sexual partners. Sociological accounts have put more emphasis on factors such as poverty, lack of education about the disease, and lack of adequate funds from state and individual/private institutions to help combat the problem (Grover, 1992:239). In *Everyone's Child*, a constellation of social attitudes grow around the illness of Tamari's mother. Most women in the narrative feel they do not have sufficient knowledge to handle a person afflicted by HIV/AIDS. Other women fear being associated with a person that society had labeled as 'promiscuous' and therefore, is supposed to suffer for her misguided behaviour. The nucleus family unit has helped to shrink what the extended family could provide. Lack of financial resources limit spaces to intervene and help women working on issues of HIV and AIDS as care givers. When



Tamari's mother died, uncle Ozias is reluctant to take up the responsibility of looking after the family.

At the funeral, women sing implying that it is men who should take up the challenge to look after the family of the diseased. However, the lyrical rendition of the song in the film, is clear about who God is and what can be expected of him:

*Leader: Mwana wedu wadaidzwa ukadaira/Our child has been called and responded/Chorus: Nababa wadaidzwa ukadaira /By our father, she has been called and responded/Leader: Mwana wedu wadaidzwa ukadaira/Our child has been called and responded/Chorus: Nababa wadaidzwa ukadaira/By father our father, she has been called and responded*

'Nababa' expresses the struggle of women in masculine terms that support a male gaze (Denzin, 1995) to the narrative of the film *'Everyone's Child' (1999)*. This title has been manipulated by pseudo-custodians of African tradition to show that a father can exact serious judgment on the women folk whenever he deems it fit. In feminist theological studies, the constrictive blocks to attributing the 'image of God' to women are: (1) the failure to find femininity in God; (2) the insistence that a woman is a derivative from and hence secondary to men; (3) the assumption that a woman is characterised by passivity; and (4) the tendency to identify a woman with bodily-ness as opposed to a transcendental mind (Loades, 1984).

Ozias is unscrupulous in his methods of disinheritting his brother's property. He expropriates a family bull that belongs to Tamari's family arguing that it was supposed to be sold in order to raise money to pay debts accumulated by Tamari's father. Ozias then uses the bull to plough his fields and other people's fields to raise his personal income. To further reveal and underscore Ozias' selfishness, the film depicts him forcefully taking the plough that belongs to Tamari's family. Itai bitterly complains to Ozias that *'We are left with nothing. You have given nothing and taken everything. We'll manage'*. Claims that Ozias makes to respect the sanctity of traditional values on inheritance, are revealed as a sham. Itai is forced to get a job in Harare in a high-rise office block that encapsulates the image of financial prosperity promised by global capitalism (Fisher, 2010). His hope soon ends as the receptionist curtly tells him that he should have an Honours Degree in Finance if he is to secure employment with a finance company.

In *Everyone's Child*, through the camera's tracking movements, Itai is introduced to the run down suburban backstreet life hosting a gang of youths searching murky dustbins for food. The juxtaposition of the city's financial area with its slums serves to challenge positive stereotypes about Harare as a place of gold, milk and honey. Such sweeping statements about Harare attempts to cover up the reality that Harare is also a place of crime, grime, corruption and bribery, of social inequalities and of strive where those thrown onto the 'margins' like Itai are forced to live a life of scavenging for scraps of food in dusty bins. As Itai tries to make ends meet in the brutalising environment of Harare, he comes across a hostile gang that at first harassed him but later, befriended him and appropriated him as a member. At this point, the 'urban perils' (Fisher, 2010: 117) strand of the narrative begins to develop into the 'crime does not pay' (ibid) motif, with Itai being swiftly dragged into a life of glue-sniffing and petty crime. The 'crime does not pay' motif especially surfaces in the film *'Everyone's Child'* when Itai and his peers ambush and rob a businesswoman.

While the rest of the gang, streetwise as it were, make a successful getaway, Itai runs straight into the hands of a police officer, explicitly paying the price for his actions. In essence, the didacticism of such city scenes partialises the discourse of ambivalence in the film that should depict how some people can use their creativity to succeed in crime or fraud thereby outwitting police strategies of combating crime. Some may even attempt to bribe the police in order to get away with crime. If the film narrative had reflected such dynamics, it would have, to a considerable degree shown that the cityscape cannot be described in 'fixed' or 'stabilised' narratives. It is neither utopian nor a dystopian space but instead an ambivalent 'space' marked by complex social realities.

As Itai and the gang make their way through the apparently affluent streets of central Harare, intimidating passers by and begging money, a song that accompanies their movement drives home the film's pedagogical message stressing the need to help the eponymous character—Itai. The tragic narrative of Itai is consistently explored till to the end to reflect that life can be violent to those that cannot defend themselves. For example, Itai is symbolically rejected by Harare, and his journey back to his rural home is also bleak. When he reaches home he is told by his sister, Tamari, events that led to his young brother's death Nhamo in the inferno caused by a burning candle. At this point, *Everyone's Child*(1999) doggedly pursues the motif of 'victimage' as regards to Itai and his family to show that orphans need community protection.

However, a collective sensibility hinted by the word ‘community’ censors or restricts the idea that one of the distinctive identity of the spirit of collectivity is the ontological nature of its ‘fractured self’(Chow, 1993). This implies that a collective vision encapsulated in the film ‘*Everyone’s Child*’ is not as homogenous as it wants audiences to believe. Contemporary societies and communities are made up of people from different classes, gender and ethnic groups with different perspectives of what constitute a people’s struggle. Hall indicates that ‘ordinary peoples’ narratives of collective struggle are by themselves characterized by internal contradictions that tend to incapacitate people’s efforts from within (1994: 460). Also, to stall Itai’s life in discourses of ‘victimage’ is to block the reality that the cultural identities of children are, ‘...always work in progress, subject to constant and often unconscious re/negotiation with changing encounters with other ways of seeing, doing and being’(Nyamnjoh, 2008: 38). What this points out is that the tragic experiences of Itai could be used to explore his existential strength to face difficulties in life that will nourish his vision about the challenges of life.

The significance of Itai’s narrative is that it questions the forms of self-censorship on the previous directors of the films discussed above, in which it was invariably the life of a girl child or woman that was depicted. Boy children had received very little imaginative space and this tended to fuel the mythology that boy children have not suffered as much if not more than girl children in some cases. When directors centralise one sex in their films they have an important and worth intention to highlight the life of that character. But when suffering begins to be projected as an exclusive preserve of women and girl children, then that film is guilty of imposing censorship on the creative imagination that favors diversity over sameness. It is to the credit of Dangarembga, the director of *Everyone’s child* that both men and women, boy child and girl child are afforded considerable imaginative space for the critic to explore.

#### **4.6.0 Tamari and the narrative of ‘sexploitation’**

In the film narrative, Tamari is an embodiment of pain and of ‘sexploitation’ that economically disadvantaged women are bound to suffer. Her encounter with the shopkeeper testifies how some men use vulture-like tactics to pounce on unsuspecting young girls. With the cunningness of a fox, the shopkeeper tells Tamari that: ‘*With the right man you can be happy. I don’t want you to be sad Tamari. Select a dress that you want there. At night I’ll make a surprise for you*’. Young as she is,

Tamari is unaware that a 'gift' of a dress is a cultural as well as an economic symbol that goes with strings attached to it. Referring to the etymology of the term 'gift', Derrida pointed out its ambiguity as always implying elements of harm (Kohler, 2005).

Men are viewed as the 'givers' of gifts while women are viewed as the 'receivers' of gifts. The harm caused by the gift is that it bestows on men the power to demand sexual favours from women in order to reciprocate the action of giving.



**Fig 8:** Shot from *Everyone's Child*(1996)

The above shows Tamari begging for food from the shop-keeper as she cannot fend for the family. She is taken advantage of and sexually abused. Instead of the community members to blame the shop-keeper who is abusing the vulnerable and defence-less, they accuse Tamari of leading a promiscuous life. The community's members are limited in their understanding of the problems that are afflicting Tamari's family.

During the conversation with the shopkeeper, when Tamari replies that, '*Please I'll do what you say, I'll come during the night*' , she is uttering these words from the position of powerlessness; a position that depicts Tamari being strung and bound by her own words as well as the power of money and material resources from the shopkeeper. In the process, Tamari fails to evolve plausible means of surviving without sacrificing her sexuality and dignity. As a metaphor of 'the impossible' (Kohler, 2005:37) the gift alienates Tamari from being a producer into a passive consumer. By extension, the gift inflicts harm in that it can whet the appetite of the receiver and actually turns a

person into a perpetual receiver or beggar limited or restricted in his/her capacity to become the sole producer of gifts.

Evidently, in the film narrative Tamari's impoverished condition has turned her into a continual receiver of gifts from the shopkeeper. For example, after her younger sister is sent home by the headmaster for failure to pay school fees, Tamari is given twenty dollars by the shopkeeper for her sister's school fees. In the film, camera motion tracks her movement from the shop to her home with a group of boys following behind shouting that she is a prostitute. Even the village women concur with the boys when one of them says: *'There she is taking up diseases. Prostitutes should go to Harare. You want to take away our husbands'*.

Tamari replies back: *'I never saw you when my mother was ill'*.

From the speech by the village women, the word 'prostitute' is used to refer to a woman who has gone beyond 'unmarked territories'. A prostitute has deviated from the, '...imagined woman of rural tradition, who should be 'pure' and 'innocent' in order to give pleasure to the man' (Muponde, 2005: 25). The village women are limited in their definition of a prostitute. The women's understanding of how female identities fail to reveal that their own views are inhabited by the disabling values informed by patriarchal images that associate women but not a man, with prostitution. Expressed in a different way, the village women cannot imagine that it is their husbands who should be reprimanded or even be sued in the courts of law for using their economic power to abuse young girls such as Tamari.

As a meta-narrative, the word 'prostitute' can confirm as true and unassailable, the fixed cultural beliefs that women can never stand on their own; they need a male figure-head to support them or otherwise they are doomed to a life of moral degradation. Such a viewpoint underestimates the realism that culture is dynamic and that the same values embodied in people's myths, beliefs, fantasies, norms and prejudices are not static (Rwafa, 2008). In their dynamism, the values in culture can assert the need for a new way of thinking. However, there is also the possibility of cultural implantation in which the film narrative of *Everyone's Child* can be used to suppress 'other' certain meanings in the process of consolidating preferred values. The preferred values promoted through *'Everyone's Child'* are meant to show that orphans can be a subject of ridicule and abuse if community fails to take the responsibility of looking after them. This didactic motif is confirmed

when the shopkeeper is shown violently pushing Tamari on the shop floor. He rapes her shouting obscenities: *'You take my money, you bitch'*.

In yet another disturbing scene in the film, the shopkeeper drives to Tamari's home at night and forces her into the car so that the two will visit a local pub where the musician Leonard Zhakata is performing. Inside the car, Tamari is forced to drink liquor and smoke cigarettes. Through his song *'Mugove'*, Zhakata criticises people like the shopkeeper with financial power who use it to abuse and exploit those without money and material resources. Zhakata's lyrics are captivating:

*Kana paine pamakandichengetera baba/If there is something that you have reserved for me  
God/Ndinokumbirawo mugove wangu ndichiri kurarama tenzi/I request for my blessings while I'm  
still alive God/Tarirai ndosakadzwa sechipfeko nevane mari ndisina changuwo/Look, I'm being  
abused like a piece of cloth with those with money without what I can call  
mine/Ndinongodzvinirwa, ndinongoshandiswa nhando, ndingofondotswa./I'm oppressed,  
exploited and over-worked*

Zhakata's song metaphorically decries a condition of exploitation and suppression of the powerless in the Zimbabwean society and culture. Tamari exemplifies those without power to defend themselves; she suffers 'sexploitation' under the hands of the local shopkeeper; she is labeled by community members a 'prostitute' and she lost her beloved mother and brother. The film uses the rhetorical device of the song as an intertextual narrative that criticises societal hypocrisy.

However, the film narrative contains the principle of self reflexivity. The film director introduces a tone of radical feminism when Tamari violently resists an attempt by the shopkeeper to snatch her away from her boy-friend Thabiso. Actually, in a bar scene Tamari aims a vicious kick at the shopkeeper's genitals that makes him recoil in pain. At this point, *Everyone's Child* desists from 'naturalizing' the single identity of being on the margins that children as 'victims' are normally consigned to (Nyamnjoh, 2008). Dangarembga deliberately complicates Tamari's characterisation. This kind of approach introduces a fresh breath from the stifling discourses of patriarchy that tended to view children as perpetual victims instead of viewing them as agents of social change.

At the funeral of Nhamo, Ozias laments that: *'It has taken the death of Nhamo for me to realize that these are my children. Also everyone's children'*. The question that the film seems to raise relates to whether or not one has to die for the community to realise that orphans need help. Also within this

question lies the unflinching criticism of modern society that has abrogated its collective duty of looking after the vulnerable in life. Tamari's resilience and inner desire for the family to survive in the face of adversity constructs a supra-narrative of 'true love and the triumph of human spirit in the face of tragedy' (Media for development trust, 2010: 12). Also, at a higher level, *Everyone's Child* is a rebuttal of the films discussed in this chapter in which the dominant trope assigned to women and girl children was realised through a narrative of loss. In this respect, *Everyone's Child* challenges other film-makers to evolve new imagery and symbols that can allow them to side-step the issue of self-censorship.

The imaginative discourse of *Everyone's Child* fulfils the r/evolutionary element of 'Third Cinema' by questioning the African philosophy of 'ubuntuism', which advocates for the sense of African purity, authenticity or indigenous characteristics from what has generally been considered perverse foreign influences (Zacks, 1999). In addition, a question that *Everyone's Child* seems to posit is related to the assumption built in the notions that take for granted ideas and the spirit of togetherness or 'ubuntuism' as if this idea is automatically found, grafted onto and manifested by everybody in the communities. The film suggests that one important aspect implicated in the language of cultural development is how to raise the collective communal consciousness that can enable the same communities to build capacity in order to re/define their priorities clearly, and act upon those priorities. *Everyone's Child* authorises a language of anti-essentialisms that criticise theories which assume that at all times women fight to defend each other. In other words, *Everyone's Child* succeeds in revealing the 'fractal' and 'fractured' nature of the social identity of African womanhood. The film also undermines the theories that promote an uncritical view of women as 'sisters' because these views can inhibit viewers from experiencing the class, race and gender conflicts among women in Africa.

To have revealed that women are a differentiated social class is to remove cultural and theoretical encrustations of censorship that dominant discourses impose on film viewers to render them unable to dissect social reality in a dialectical manner. Despite these important rejoinders, *Everyone's Child* is also blighted by the fact that it was authorised by donors in so far as they participated in its production through funding.

#### **4.6.1 *Everyone's Child*(1996): A Donor-funded film and the politics of patronage**

The primary thrust of the film-making initiative funded by Western donors in Zimbabwe is message rather than profit. As a result the 'rights-based approach to development' (Hungwe, 2005:88) emphasised by donors make them select themes that conform to their interests and methods of advocating development. Control by donors of film scripting and production is a form of censorship that can restrict the way filmmakers tell their stories through film images. The pedagogically oriented documentaries and feature films that deal with human rights are frequently criticised by African cultural critics as instruments of western intervention and control (Mahoso, 2000).

For example, Tsitsi Dangarembga—the Director of *Everyone's Child* has raised critical questions about the 'gate keeping' role of donors who favour some directors over others and some stories over others. As she puts, film requires adequate funding and those without money are debarred from making films of their own choices (Dangarembga, 1999). Her experiences as a first-time director were gruesome, and she protested: '*Everyone's Child* is not the film I wanted to make. I didn't want to make another AIDS film on Africa. I was not empowered to make a narrative that I wanted to make' (Hungwe, 2005: 91).

Film critics in Zimbabwe have also expressed their misgivings about the lack of a vibrant film industry in Zimbabwe which is people-driven in its ideological orientation. When one critic Nyasha Mboti was asked to share his views on the capacity of independent film-makers to authorize their own narratives without undue influence from the donors who funded these film projects, Mboti was unequivocal:

**Question: What is your opinion on independent filmmaking in Zimbabwe?**

**Answer:** There are lots of filmmakers working independently in Zimbabwean, mainly Harare but also other smaller cities. It is a pity that there is no existing database by which to base our assumption. But I believe that as long as filmmaking is still the expensive and specialist practice as it is at present, there will be no genuine Zimbabwean film industry, independent or otherwise. There is, as yet, no popular, people-driven film in Zimbabwe. For that to happen, something has to blow up—



something that democratizes and opens up space where cameras become less fetishised and editing is an everyday art: then we can begin to speak of popular filmmaking in Zimbabwe.

The two Zimbabwean film Industry indabas, held in 2010 at Alliance Francaise and 2011 at the ZIFTESSA film School respectively to chart the way forward for the local industry, gave one on idea about how big and vibrant the industry was. Basically, there is a lot of very raw potential nationally—which is still to translate into genuine returns. I think I might have noticed that a good number of the local industry stakeholders seem to see themselves as headed nowhere else but up, until they are eventually recognised by, and are working in, Hollywood one day. This vision would be fine if it weren't so vertical and linear. There is little of a genuinely lateral vision which sees them organically grow sideways through tapping into everyday Zimbabwean stories. It is, in my opinion, the cheaply-made movies that I saw on the streets of Harare, Masvingo and other cities that I think are the future. Maybe I'm wrong and maybe I am reading too much into the example of the Nigerian film industry, but I'm certain there is a movement to popularise and democratise the film industry value-chain in Zimbabwe. (Questionnaire Interview with Nyasha Mboti, 29 January 2012 16: 46)

From Mboti's response, film-makers have not received enough training. The critic raises though obliquely the fact that donor funding 'directs' film-makers. Hence, the assumption from Mboti, that there are no people-driven film in Zimbabwe. Independent filmmaking and donor-funded film agenda have achieved considerable results by breaking taboos especially on the rights of women, HIV/AIDS and political repression. However, Dangarembga further comments that only certain kinds of taboos are broken (ibid). Taboos that would empower people of colour remain unchallenged.

To express it differently, the 'grand narrative' on Africa has cast the continent and its people as a problem. The dominance of Western donors in financing projects in Zimbabwe blocks or inhibits the development of alternative Zimbabwean film narratives. In a nutshell, the patronizing attitude that donors adopt is in itself a form of cultural censorship in which local filmmakers are forced to promote foreign values that may not proffer solutions to problems faced by local people in Zimbabwe. Dangarembga's conflictual relationship with donors reveals that she is conscious of the capacity of these donors to implant their own meanings on films that are premiered as Zimbabwean

when their agendas are in fact sponsored. It is a mark of her spiritual resilience to point out the complicit relation of donors in the problem of censoring of the African film.

Cultural censorship that begets self-censorship is a consequence of many factors; government's heavy-handedness forces film-makers to recoil and focus on trite subjects; self-censorship by film directors who either do not command sufficient training and then result in producing films with characters that do not reflect diverse subjectivities; traditional obscurantist values from Africa's past have successfully infiltrated the minds of most Zimbabwean film directors and persuaded some filmmakers that unreformed tradition values still provide a cache of 'useful' stereotypical images through which to send moral messages to viewers; and donors whose position as financial *matadas* can dictate on weak directors what kind of films the donors can financially support.

#### **4.7 Use of shona Language: A liberation or a 'constriction'?**

It is then arguable that it is not a matter of inadequate vocabulary from Shona and English languages that create the condition of cultural and self censorship in Zimbabwean films. The factors described above in conjunction with the ideological level of understanding the complexity of African lived experiences of film directors, can be blamed on the existence of cultural and self-censorship in Zimbabwe. In the shona films scrutinised above, if the shona language had been used with the intention of reflecting male dominance over female characters, the same language produced an excess of meanings that began to interrogate essentialised ways of perceiving gender roles. For example, the visual and verbal rendition of the film *Kapfupi(2009)* provides much entertainment, but the way Shona words are deployed to drive the theme of 'love' is less plausible when compared with how the same language used words differently to express meaning in *Mwanasikana(1995)* and *Nhasi tave nehama(1993)*. Furthermore, the script writer of the film *Kapfupi(2009)* uses Shona words to frame female characters in ways that do not confront the source of women exploitation while in *Mwanasikana(1995)* and *Nhasi tave nehama(1993)*, Shona words are used productively and effectively used to advance discourses of women's emancipation. In all the films, with the exception of *Neria(1991)* and *Everyone's Child(1996)* that use both Shona and English words, the selective way promoted by the use of *only* Shona words has the negative effect of excluding audiences who do not speak nor understand the language. To this extent, the use of *only* Shona words in films become

a barrier that prevents cultural meanings from reaching out to those audiences that cannot understand the gender struggles depicted through the films in Shona language.

Ben Mahaka(2012), himself a film-maker proposes a Zimbabwean film that can use multiple languages. When pressed on whether or not he prefers one language over another, Mahaka affirmed the need to adopt a broad approach that favours hybridity over linguistic particularism:

**Question: Why do you prefer to create your films in the language[s] as well as genre that you use in your films?**

**Answer:** I work with what I speak and hear—ranging from the all-English speaking blacks to hybrid ShonglishNdeb spoken in the Midlands. The authenticity of characters is often rooted in the honesty of their speech and body language. (Questionnaire Interview with Ben Mahaka, B. 12 April, 2012 15:40)

However, there are limitations that can be placed upon characters that can use Shona, Ndebele and English when films in one language have to translate in another language. Mahaka cites the “cost of language-versioning” a term that means the cost of translation as a form of economic censorship that can be imposed on film-making. On this score, Mahaka(2012) expresses his opinion:

**Question: What limitations can a filmmaker working either or Shona, Ndebele and English language[s] encounter?**

**Answer:** Indigenous language films are limited by the cost of language-versioning, but for the primary audience the characters are more accessible. I see more opportunities in favouring indigenous languages (even in the case of ‘A’ school characters speaking their indigenized English. (Questionnaire Interview with Ben Mahaka, B. 12 April, 2012 15:40)

Mahaka suggests that a vibrant film that can undercut forms of censorship might emerge from using and exploiting the richness of indigenous languages in the same film. This approach can eradicate censorship that arises from technical problems but may not necessarily and creatively question the material and authoritarian ideologies behind censorship strategies that are caused by embedded belief systems. In other words, while the question of whether using Shona or English language in the

Zimbabwean film has been responded to in this chapter in the affirmative, it has also been shown that censorship of film can be exercised in the languages that people use, because the values of censoring narratives can inhabit and dwell in the rhetorical forms used in the composition of the film itself. This aspect will be discussed in the next chapter, to determine to what extent the forms that films take, (eg documentary, feature and short film) help censorship to flourish or how these genres can enable the film-makers to question forms of film censorship.

## 4.8 Conclusion

This chapter explored five films namely; *Mwanasikana(1995)*, *Kapfupi(2009)*, *Nhasi tave nehama(1993)*, *Neria(1991)* and *Everyone's Child(1996)*. These films have that stereotype is a source of culturally constructed and sanctioned form of censorship. Stereotypes are built on the basis of valorizing a single idea and projecting that idea as if it is the only truth. As stereotypes are limited, constrict ideas and aim to prohibit women from voicing their ideas. Stereotypes whether positive or negative undermine reflect on film-maker's inability to imagine a plurality of responses emanating from characters actions in different contexts. The films analysed revealed that cultural stereotypes rooted in the traditional thought, restrict, constrict and prohibit women from exploring alternatives in life. The film narrative of *Mwanasikana(1995)* depicts how some communities in Zimbabwe still view the girl child as the underdog who should not compete on an equal basis with the boy child. This mentality stems from patriarchal influences that cannot be comfortable with the idea of empowering women through education. However, it has been argued that an attempt by patriarchy to put a constrictive frame around women advancement actually incites/invites audiences to question the basis of the power of the negative stereotype. It was further argued that prioritizing the girl child only for marriage is a violation of human rights as individuals. Projecting the figure of the women or the girl child as the Africans who have suffered most in real life as in distorted images in film is also a form of censorship that attempts to undermine viewers' capacity to question how the men and the boy child are also stereotyped.

However, the revisionist sensibility of *Mwanasikana(1995)* in which the girl child is accorded chance to pursue education gives a breath of fresh air to the stifling discourses of patriarchy. The film *Kapfupi(2009)* presents female and male characters with limited alternatives when facing life challenges. The female character is stereotypically depicted as a dolly-bird to be paraded in the

streets without a clear vision of how she can transform her life for the better. Her life is peripherised or confined to the emotional matters of love. She was depicted as a prize that men can fight for to prove their masculinity when competing to win over the same girl. The film *Nhasi tave nehama(1993)* portrays the difficulties encountered by families afflicted by HIV/AIDS. The difficulties are compounded by male characters that use their power as fathers to deny the reality of AIDS by viewing it as a woman's disease. Male authority censors alternative ways of understanding HIV/AIDS. Male discourses also create methods of ameliorating the effects of the disease so that the disease is associated with women even though men are the main culprits in the spread of HIV and AIDS *Nhasi tave nehama(1993)* is a self-reflex film that makes it clear that AIDS is a problem that should not be blamed on women or men because the scape-goating syndrome only worsens the problem.

HIV and AIDS is a disease that knows no age, gender, class or race. The vision that is provided to the female characters in *Nhasi tave nehama(1993)* is quite redeeming for its ability to fracture male-dominated discourses that underestimate the capacity of women to effect social change in their communities. The film *Neria(1991)* is centred around the problem of inheritance engendered by African customary law. The developmental flair of the film *Neria(1991)* manifests as a counter-narrative to the stereotypical reference to women as second class citizens in Zimbabwe. In addition, the dialectical nature in the language of *Neria's(1991)* representations is found in its central character's action of challenging and contradicting the stable and settled narratives of traditional practice of inheriting property under customary law. The film tended to favour modern laws as progressive spaces that protect widows from being abused by the relatives of the deceased husband.

*Everyone's Child(1996)* approached the problem of cultural censorship and self censorship from a fairly critical perspective. In the film there was a reversal of prominence accorded to male and female characters. By and large, Tamari and Itai have been shown as disadvantaged in a society that has lost its moral bearings regarding the communal mandate to look after the weak, the poor and the orphans. The film demythologized what was beginning to appear like a willed as well as an unwitting form of self-censorship in which women and girl children were 'naturally' marked by directors as fictional baits around which film plots was constructed. Dangarembga has come out in the open declaring her position that she is aware that donors coerce film directors to make certain

films in exchange for film funding, a practice that robs originality from the directors, but also one that reinforces versions of cultural censorship that manifest as self-censorship.

*Everyone's Child* is a film that also censures some communities that have abrogated their moral duty of protecting orphans. Three major points that have emerged from the analysis of cultural censorship in four Shona films and one film in the English language deserve to be reiterated. First, although political banning and arresting of film-makers can cause film directors to impose self-censorship, African tradition systems associated with the customary laws and certain cultural observations continue to deactivate the production of innovative films with innovative themes, conflicts and plots. Cultural censorship is embedded in many African cultural values from which directors and film-makers draw their themes and film styles. Most of these cultural influences have a draw back influence on positive films; cultural standpoints force film-makers to create characters who are stereotypes because they are defined by a single value. The proliferation of stereotyped characters – whether these characters were positive or negative prevent, inhibit and prohibit average film viewers from imagining the possibilities of alternative lifestyles for characters other than those proffered on the screen. Secondly, there has been an incremental understanding among film directors of the possibilities of evolving characters with diverse subjectivities with which to undercut censorship of film meanings encouraged by one dimensional character. This is despite the fact that cultural censorship that begets self-censorship is a consequence of many factors such as government's heavy-handed-ness that forces film-makers to recoil and focus on trite subjects; self-censorship by film directors who either do not command sufficient training resulted in the production of films with characters that do not reflect diverse subjectivities; traditional obscurantist values from Africa's past have successfully infiltrated the minds of most Zimbabwean film directors and persuaded some film makers that unreformed tradition values still provide a cache of 'useful' stereotypical images through which to send moral messages to viewers. Thirdly, it is, therefore, not the limitation of the vocabulary (verbal and visual) of the Shona and English languages that is responsible for the phenomenon of cultural censorship that begets self-censorship among film directors. This point is important because in chapter five I continue exploring the theme of language censorship in Zimbabwean films in Shona and English languages. The shift and emphasis of chapter five is on the relationship between film genre and censorship. Chapter five is going to focus on the

short film genre and the textual analysis will be on *Asylum*(2007), *Tariro*(2007), *The Whisper*(2006) and *Akakodzera Ndiani*(2008).

## **Chapter 5**

### **The language of Censorship and the Zimbabwean Short Film Genre**

*The structural limitation of a short film is locked in trying to pack too much into the short length of the film with the scope of the narrative too wide and unwieldy to be told convincingly or confidently' (Feneley, 2010: 56).*

#### **5.0 Introduction**

Chapter four showed how patriarchy constructs stereotypes that restrict, constrict or even prohibit women and children from exploring the best alternatives in life. It was argued that the film-maker's ability to challenge and deconstruct cultural stereotypes is what sets him/her apart from those film-makers that consciously deploy stereotypes, not to promote debate, but to use 'tried and tested' formulas so that their products will sell on the market. Chapter five explores the Zimbabwean short films to find out the discourses of censorship locked in the: (1) fragmented nature of short film, (2) economics of production of the short film, (3) language[s] of re/presentation in the short film, (4) and critical views of audiences of the short film. To uncover the buried narratives of censorship or prohibition in the short film genre, this chapter will critically analyse the texts of the films *Asylum*(2007), *Tariro*(2007), *The Whisper*(2006) and *Akakodzera Ndiani?* (2008). The short film is a relatively new genre in Zimbabwe, emerging as it were, from socio-political and economic crises of the 1990s(Mhiripiri 2010). This has, in a way, made the Zimbabwean short film to evolve its own peculiar language conventions that can either aid or censor the audiences in understanding the issues being screened. At the same time, if the formal qualities of short film are taken as creative experimentation then it is possible to argue that the 'content of the form' of the short film can subvert censorship institutionalised in the word, and cultural values officially projected as the only truths in life.

#### **5.1 Short film defined**

To understand the nature of the short film in Zimbabwe, the entry point is to view it as a 'genre' commanding its own peculiar language of representation and ideological ambiguities. Madsen understands the term 'genre' as '...located not in an abstract set of textual characteristics but in the discourse; genre is viewed as a rhetorical construction, a way of discussing texts within both itself and within the critical community (1992: 14). The expression 'critical community' (ibid) implies that the interpretation of a short film as a genre depends on the cultural conditions of its reception. Diffrient (2008) views a short film as one capable of telling a story in one act, two acts, three acts or more. The author goes on to argue that the rules limiting the form of a short film, definitions of what it is or can be; constantly shift as well as being questioned. The fragmented nature of a short film has the capacity to challenge the conventional space-time continuum, thereby leaving audiences to think over or try to bring together the scattered pieces of information with no coherent centre. Feneley asserts that, '...the best short films are often those that explore nothing more than a single moment, event, idea, emotion or feeling and prove the maxim that simple is strong, and that in some cases, 'less is more'(2010: 56). A contrasting explanation of the power of the short film is proffered by Halligan(2008) who relates a short film to the classical economy of poetry, news bulletin and compact narratives of reportage features while a feature film can historically and generically be associated with the novel, theatre and folk traditions. The section below briefly explains the aesthetic and ideological possibilities of the Zimbabwean short film.

## **5.2 Aesthetic and ideological possibilities of Zimbabwean Short Films**

Since the establishment of the Short Film Project (SFP) in Zimbabwe in the 1990's, the short film has grown remarkably and aesthetically to become a genre, '...of convenience, and perhaps choice too, for both budding and established Zimbabwean film-makers (Mhiripiri, 2010:92). The short film is described as a 'genre of convenience' (ibid) as it a medium that can circumvent problems of financing feature length films. The style of representation adopted by most Zimbabwean short films largely tap from the folk tradition rich in the use of metaphoric language, ritual narratives, satire, song , dance, and legend. For instance, the short film *Kare Kare Zvako(2004)* directed by Tsitsi Dangarembga evokes song, mournful tones, fractured mythos and the folkloric elements of storytelling to condemn the betrayal and greed of a cannibalistic husband who murders his wife and feeds on her. Also, the folkloric and oral elements in the short film *Kare Kare Zvako(2004)* are satirical in



that they attack the greediness and corruptible minds of some contemporary Zimbabweans who go out of their way to destroy their families for the sake of money and material goods. In some cases, the Zimbabwean short films defy the use of simple linear plots although the settings are usually home environments. The concerns are mostly social and cultural.

In depicting the cosmopolitan Zimbabwean society, the ‘fractal’ and ‘architecture of complexity’ (Everett, 2005:159) shown by short film reveals that urban space is no longer shaped by linear mappings of modernity, but posited as both entirely random, and yet at the same time, structured by complexity, simultaneity, and violent encounters. For example, the short film *Cousin Brother* (2005) directed by Ben Mahaka depicts the contradictions of social status and class struggle marked by violent encounters created by competition for material acquisition. In some short films, there is a yearning to ‘return to the source’ (Zegeye and Vambe, 2009:2) as a sign of protest against the corruption and adulteration of traditional African ways of life by the city life. For instance, Marian Kunonga’s *Zvinhu Zvacho Izvi* (2003) bemoans the moral decadence of the city life in which a Christian woman in church uniform viciously fights a middle-aged neighbour that she found in the bed with her son. The binary of rural versus urban structure still found in some Zimbabwean short film can restrict or censor the possibility of imagining cultural hybridity, multiplicity, open-endedness and problematic ‘conclusions’ (Everret, 2005:159) that the aspect of cosmopolitanism promotes.

The short films that take ‘silence’ as a narrative style can have the ability to penetrate the psychological and emotional complexity of characters, their inner consciousness, spiritual and intellectual spaces arising out of troubled life experiences. However, although the language of ‘silence’ says ‘more than what it is’, (Howe, 2004:178) in its metaphoricity, ‘silence’ has the potential to block meanings from reaching the intended audiences. This is because ‘silence’ is a figure of language that creates ambiguity in which less competent interpreters can find it difficult to decipher the subtle and diverse meanings the concept of ‘silence’ evokes. Similarly, short films that stylistically include too much sounds, rhythms and tones to tease out different emotional feelings within the audiences can actually block or censor their meaning potential. Typical examples of such films are: *Love is* (2008), *Eva Adaptor* (2008), *Trapped* (2007) and *Asylum* (2007). Below is an analysis of how the ‘fractured or fragmented’ nature of a short film encourages jumps and elisions

that can undermine the development and expansion of its storyline as well as hinder the opening up of clear communicative channels for the benefit of the audiences. At the same, the jumps, gaps and fissures can encourage a polysemic interpretation of the film in ways that undermine attempts at censoring film messages.

### **5.3 ‘Shortness’ of short film as restriction or form of genre censorship**

Film critics Boggs (2001), Howe (2004) and Halligan (2008) have come to associate the ‘shortness’ of a short film with complexity, ambiguity and non-linearity. This evaluation on the short film can be contrasted to Mhiripiri’s (2010) rather simplistic view which is that in Zimbabwe, the short film has largely been a product of ‘last resort’ (91) in a country where the desired full-length film was particularly difficult during the prolonged Zimbabwean socio-political and economic crisis that started in the 1990s. That the short film was a ‘last resort’ born out of socio-political and economic crisis can provide pointers towards understanding the nature of some factors that militate against film development in Zimbabwe. Indeed, in Zimbabwe the constrictive character of short films is also due to the fact that the production largely remains underground, depending on low-budget, and can be non-profitable. The term ‘underground’ suggests that in Zimbabwe producing a short film is a ‘guerrilla’ activity in which filmmakers use discrete ways to escape state control of their products.

The short film making in Zimbabwe has fallen in the hands of Non Governmental Organisations and Western financiers. Some NGOs hide their agenda of demeaning black Africans through what has come to be known as the ‘developmental film’. In other words, the financing of small film projects by Western donors and Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs) in Zimbabwe has tended to constrict or censor the short film genre by re-circling the same themes centred on hunger, famine, poverty, HIV/AIDS pandemic and political instability, and thereby failing to tell alternative stories about Africans. In fact, as Fisher argues,

‘...the donor-funded films produced from the 1990s onwards demonstrate clear lines of continuity—both in terms of production practices and narrative content—with the colonial films produced by the British, in particular, the developmental films produced through the Central African Unit (CAFU), in which filmic narratives were written and produced for the sole purpose of disseminating prescribed social messages’ (2010: 112).

The short films produced by individuals or the ‘independent’ film-makers can be prevented from creating ‘spaces’ for overt political themes. The films would rather confine themselves to socio-cultural conflicts. However, the act of avoiding political themes is in itself political. It is political insofar as it signals the ‘lack’ of voice of a film-maker regarding politics which is a result of self-censorship born out of fear to openly challenge the political *status quo* in Zimbabwe. In other words, while the Zimbabwean short films are narratively and thematically disengaged from their political contexts of production, their very silence on these issues provides pointers to the wider circulation of questions of official and self censorship in Zimbabwe. In cases where the authorial ‘voice’ of a film-maker is mediated through the verbal and audio-visual languages of a short film, the ‘fragmented’ nature of a short film can have the capacity to disallow a comprehensive exploration to life experiences (Raskin, 2006).

Ideally, even a 3 or 4 minute short film should leave the viewer a feeling that the film is somehow inexhaustible, so that watching it again would be an immensely enriching experience. Some forms of censorship in the Zimbabwean short film can manifest through what Lambe(2008) describes as time, place and manner restrictions. This is when a filmmaker chooses when, where and how the expression is allowed to happen within the film narrative. This act of selecting and organizing material within the truncated frame of a short film points to the presence of ‘embodied’ or ‘internalised’ forms of censorship. Hyden White puts it more lucidly by asserting that, ‘Every narrative, however seemingly ‘full’ is constructed on the basis of a set of events that might have been included but were left out; this is true of imaginary narratives as it is of realistic ones’ (1987:10). In addition, the self conscious act of removing scenes and language expressions that are likely to be criticised or unnecessarily lengthy in the story-line can compromise a film. This is compounded by the ‘low-budget’ material conditions of a short film’s production as well as the ideological limitations of the film director. These qualities that describe the short films apply to the analysis of *Asylum*(2007), *Tariro*(2007, *Akakodzera Ndiani?*(2008) and *The Whisper* (2006).

#### **5.4 *Asylum*(2007) and the Censorship language of ‘Silence’**

*Asylum* is a short film written and directed by Rumbi Katedza. The film is dedicated to the innocent victims of political violence instigated by the government of Omar Al Bashir in the Sudanese Darfur region. The government soldiers working in collaboration with an Arab militia group called the

'Janjaweed' murdered people, raped women and pillaged most parts of southern Sudan. Steynberg(2010) estimates that as many as 300 000 men, women and children died; up to 2,6 million people were displaced and over 200 000 Darfur refugees escaped to Chad while others would travel as far as Ethiopia. Katedza's short film uses silence, sounds and visuals to capture the mood of torture, death and psychological trauma that victims of political violence in Darfur experienced. Those victims that manage to escape in order to seek refugee in foreign lands such as Britain, America and France were faced with the problem of being alienated as they were described as 'foreigners'. These victims of political violence suffered loneliness, psychological dislocations and haunting memories of the death of family members and close relatives. All such mental disorientations are embodied in the female character whose 'silence' and visionary mappings evokes the mood of seriousness with which the Darfur genocide should be remembered. The focus of this section is to make a critical analysis on the texts of 'silence' in order to uncover the buried narratives of censorship imposed by the director in her bid to expose to the world the mental trauma that a victim of political violence experiences.

#### **5.4.0 Engaging the sound of 'silence' in the film *Asylum*(2007)**

'Silence' is a form of language. According to Grierson in Giannetti(1982) the era of silent cinema was reflecting technological backwardness in cinematography. However, in this digitalised world, the use of 'silence' as a rhetorical device serves certain ideological purposes. Mungoshi's novel '*Kunyarara Hakusi Kutaura?* (1986) suggests that silence is a form of communicating some critical ideas that haunt the memory of individuals or collective members of the community. In the film *Asylum* the language of silence manifests in different ways. The short film features a female protagonist who finds herself torn apart by the problems that she encounter in a country that is not her own. Camera motion locates this female character lingering and thinking over her next move at a railway station. The trope of a railway station is supposed to symbolise the arrival of hope and the beginning of new life.

Shadowy trains move at a terrific speed, and this correspond with images of violence that are relayed within the central character's mind. Sharp screams and sound torture her inwardly. The character drops her belongings intending to throw herself in front of a fast moving train. The narrative of 'silence' becomes a metaphor-a heteronomy of meaning construction (Degenaar, 2008) that the

director deploys to capture the de-humanising effect of torture felt by victims of violence. While prohibiting the audience's experience of raw violence manifesting within the film, the director demonstrates through the central character that violence meted out on the victims will have far-reaching effects through-out their lives. Revealing the toxic effect of trauma caused by encounters with violence, Ngoshi and Zhou, point out that it reflects the, 'neurotic disorders of a population', and the 'metaphysical fractures of a nation' (2010: 45).

In *Asylum* such 'fractures' and 'ruptures' are depicted as the central character sees visions of a dead family member being carried away from a cell by two armed forces. The corpse is thrown into a pit piling up with dead bodies. On experiences as if they are actually happening, the female character screams and shivers uncontrollably. When she finally succeeds to go to a passport check point, she is received by a rude white man who signals vehemently at her to give first preference to white people. Through the white officer's actions, the director reveals the racial discriminations at play in some foreign nations which is an extension of several levels of discriminations that the black woman suffered in Sudan.

These levels of discriminations are identified by Steynberg (2010) when he asserts that in Sudan, a black woman in the Darfur region was killed because she was viewed as the 'undesirable' body that bore sons who were resisting government forces. The black woman was killed as a way of de-populating the country in order to ease competition on natural resources. Also, the black woman was targeted because she belonged to the predominately black group of Southern Sudan that was viewed as 'second class' citizens that should not compete for men with Arab women of the North.

In her short film, Katedza has expunged these crucial facts of history of genocide that could have given credence to her narrative. Instead, she uses 'silence' to sound out the opinion of the audience about the political violence that people in the Darfur region experienced. Had Katedza included details of context, recognisable characters with verbal narratives, this could have helped critical viewers to create meaningful linkages in the storyline. The film is 'absent' and difficult for average viewers to decipher the intended meanings. This abstract nature of the film induces self-censorship. The pacing of film shots is quick, and one shot is congested with many issues making elaboration of single narratives near impossible. To say this is not to suggest that ordinary viewers are not capable of interpreting abstract art. In fact, it can be argued that the turgidity of the film and the controlling

character of ‘silence’ as a narrative style can be taken as a metonym reflecting political disorder that abounds in most African nations.

#### **5.4.1 *Asylum*(2007) and Metonymic Representations**

*Asylum* is a narrative that metonymically represents the political problems that still afflict some parts of Africa. The female character is a metaphor of suffering masses caused by dictatorial leaders that force defenseless people to move out of their countries to seek refuge in foreign lands. *Asylum*(2007) does not prescribe suggestions or hint as to what can be done to African leaders that willfully murder people to advance selfish political interests. The discourses of ‘silence’ permeate the director’s sensibility. On the surface analysis, the casual use of the language of silence muffled the director’s authorial ‘voice’ to the extent of not bringing what she expects should be done with African leaders who disregard people’s views on matters of development. In other words, the narrative of ‘silence’ –if seen with the spectacles of power politics—means defeat, acquiescence or fear to take a position. Also, the embodied silence within the director’s language[s] of representation cannot imagine that some of the countries where victims of the Darfur crisis were turning to, indirectly promoted genocide by delaying in taking strong measures against the government of Al Bashir (Stenyberg, 2010).

However, on a deeper level of interpretation, the language of silent cinema is meant to provoke critical audiences to think outside the box imposed by words/verbal narratives. In other words, silence signifies multiple meanings, where silence in the film performs the function of subverting the inherent inclination of film language to exclude, suppress and gloss over potential meanings. When silence prevents film from imposing monolithic narratives, it creates counter-discourses that begin to contest or even de-construct the premises from which the language of censorship is constructed.

#### **5.4.2 *Asylum*(2007) and the diversionary ‘politics’ of silence**

It is important to identify different layers of meanings of ‘silence’ to find the extent to which Katedza censored herself by not speaking out through her narrative, the difficulties that victims of political violence in, and from Zimbabwe faced. The film *Asylum* was produced in 2007 when political violence in Zimbabwe was at its peak as political parties were trying to garner support in preparation to the controversial 2008 elections. Many ordinary people were beaten, tortured, killed,

and the lucky ones escaped to neighbouring countries such South Africa, Botswana and Namibia. By using the Darfur to comment on Zimbabwean politics, Katedza defamiliarises reality. This way, she creates distance between herself and what was happening on Zimbabwe. It allows her to critique authorities from a distance, and escape persecution. Katedza deftly uses allegory as a linguistic rhetorical device to force the audience to draw their own conclusions about the ubiquity and scourge of violence not only in Darfur, but in many parts of Africa. Katedza's use of silence can thus be taken as an effective tool to dodge direct confrontation with authorities and possible censorship that in other situations can mean annihilation of filmmakers.

Stylistically, the film refuses to privilege verbal language over other forms of language[s] such as sound, colour, visions and visuality. These are difficult to censor. However, the over reliance on silence does prevent less competent film audiences from understanding the narratives of *Asylum* unlike a situation where-by the director had interspaced silence with verbal codes and signs. Apart from preventing less competent audiences to grasp the gist of the film's story, complex language conventions can act as self-censorship. One critic of film in Zimbabwe says that self-censorship that is caused by the use of opaque forms of representation can accomplish a dual mission; alienating the very audience that it intends to address or inducing in the very audience a desire to know more. Ben Mahaka emphasizes the former when he explains the role of film language in self-imposed restrictions:

**Question: What role can lack of film vocabulary (language, visual images, sound) play in self-imposed restrictions?**

**Answer:** I think the filmmaker's inability to properly gauge audience's film vocabulary often leads to misguided self-censorship. Many filmmakers work from the premise that only the educated few can decipher complex, layered themes in films, so they dump down the visuals and emotional content. (Questionnaire Interview with Ben Mahaka, B. 12 April, 2012 15:40)

Mahaka suggests that self-censorship can be self inflicted in that it can alienate certain sections of the audience. In Katedza's film, the act of producing a film about the Darfur region at a time when Zimbabweans were flocking to neighbouring countries as economic and political refugees could, in

the minds of most Zimbabwean audience confirm how Katedza failed to attack the systematic pain inflicted on Zimbabwe. Shifting the film's narrative plot to Darfur could also be viewed as escapism, and thus qualify as an act of self censorship on the part of the director.

These forms ideological 'closures' within the imaginative discourses of Katedza's short film can divert the audiences attention, and cause them to wish away the urge to critically engage the main opposition parties and Zimbabwean government about the atrocities that were carried out on innocent people during the period that the short film was produced. It can be suggested that the internalised restrictions that Katedza imposes on herself may have been a result of fear to confront—through her short film, the powers that be about the political persecutions of ordinary people. In addition, the ideological tremours of 'silence' within *Asylum* have not given space to the depiction of xenophobic violence that was meted out on some Zimbabwean refugees who escaped to South Africa and Botswana. Another 'silence' imposed on the narrative of the film concerns the nature of the film's characterisation. While it is important to use the central figure of a woman in order to free the locked narratives of political violence, the film is prohibited from telling the stories of men, children and old people who were also victims of political violence in Durfur. This act of not showing the different levels of political violence that men, children and the old people suffered in Durfur can be a diversionary antic in which the director adopted to show that women bore most the brunt of political violence. If elements of self-censorship are evidenced within the director's stylistic strategies of diversion, it is also manifested in the 'fragmented' nature of Katedza's short film.

### **5.4.3 *Asylum*(2007) and Narratives of Fragmentation**

The film *Asylum* uses fragmented imaginative discourses. Stylistically, the film thrives on chaos, scrambled metaphors and paranoia. This stylistic rendition is a feature of postmodern narratives in which reflexivity points to the complexity and ambiguity of life experiences. In its use of the language of fragmentation, *Asylum* depicts that it exists in the twilight zone of its own, obeying its on language conventions, and dominated by the existential power to define 'self' in the face of political contradictions that its central character faces(Howe, 2004). However, as a symbol showing the depth of suffering of displaced victims of political violence, *Asylum* fails to provide a comprehensive picture of the factors that forced the victim to be in the circumstances that she finds herself in. *Asylum's* emotional appeal depends much on a single character thereby censoring the



possibility of exploring a variety of life experiences emerging from different characters. To put it differently, *Asylum*'s use of jumps and elisions leave huge 'gaps' that even competent film interpreters may find difficult to fill in. Such technical shortcomings are a result of narratives that are rushed to prove a point without a thorough search for convincing details. *Asylum* could have used many film shots of individualised experiences, visions and sounds to appeal most to the psychological and affective domains of its viewers (Feneley, 2010). Such an interpretive perspective would be a form of succumbing to the unconvincing argument that a short film is either an underdeveloped or undeveloped film method. I argued that the short film is complete in its shortness. This means that the short film *Asylum* can undermine the embedded meanings of its narratives of political allegory. Short films differ because some consciously use verbal, visual, colour, sound to express their messages. In the following section, the study explores how a short film presented in the mode of documentary that claim the truths of its facticity and authenticity, can still oppress 'other', important narratives from coming out.

### **5.5 *Tariro*(2004): The 'Unbroken' spirit of hope**

Unlike the film *Asylum* whose focus is on violence, the documentary film *Tariro*(2004) uses non-fictional characters who narrate their stories about the challenges posed by HIV/AIDS pandemic. The central character of the short film *Tariro* is Tecla Tambandini who is HIV positive. She stays in Epworth together with her family. Using the authentic voice of the narrator whose power to convince derives from the 'authority of presence' (Chennells, 2009:40). Tecla chronicles events that led her to become HIV positive. Tecla's discourses of 'truths' expose the prohibitive and constrictive influences in her narrative that are a result of: (1) 'fixed' cultural beliefs on female sexuality, (2) fantasies and myths about HIV/AIDS, and (3) the fictions created about representing factual information through a documentary film.

#### **5.5.0 *Tariro*(2004) and the trope of Hegemonic Masculinity**

Tecla is a victim of hegemonic masculinity in which her body is sexually violated by a man who dumped her and her baby. She contracted HIV/AIDS after she was raped, and she bitterly recalls events that led her to be raped:

*Ini ndakaitwa 'sexually abused' ndiri 12 years. Ndakanga ndichishanda pamba pevamwe vavakidzani vedu. Izvo ndakange ndisingazive kuti vabereki vangu vakange vatondiroodza pamhuri yevavakidzani ava. Ndakabatwa chibharo nemwana wepo. Ndakaenda kuchipatara ndikabatwa HIV. [I was sexually abused at the age of 12. I had been working at my neighbour's home stead. During that time, I didn't know that my parents had already betrothed me to the son of my neighbours. I was raped by this son of our neighbours. I went to the hospital to be tested for HIV/AIDS, and I found out that I had contracted the disease] (Tariro: 2004).*

The authority invested in African culture and tradition is the source of Tecla's troubles. In Zimbabwe, it is a common belief among some Shona people that a girl child may not need to be educated since her ultimate destiny is marriage. While in marriage, she is expected to bear children for the family of her in-laws without ever imagining pursuing a career or search for a job. What this belief succeeds in doing is that it narrows or censors possibilities of a girl child to better herself by pursuing a career of her own choice. In the film, Tecla's chances of having a brighter future are diminished after she drops out of school at the age of twelve. Tecla was also unknowingly betrothed to a man who later raped her, and infected her with HIV/AIDS.

Thus, hegemonic masculinity exercised on Tecla's body is that she was viewed as the 'objectified other' (Green, 2010: 344) that should be betrothed. She was also raped to prove that her body is sexually 'consumable'. The trope of sexualising the female body is male sanctioned. This trope creates different strands of cultural stereotypes that undermine the positive images that should be associated with women in society. For example, the documentary film *Tariro* can have the capacity to incite voyeuristic tendencies in male audiences in which the female body is viewed as an 'object' for sexual pleasure than what the same body can offer for positive development. Again, the very act of featuring Tecla as a victim of male sexual power, demonstrates the ideological entrapments of the 'male gaze' in which those who do the gazing [male audiences] have power and ownership [as males] over the ones upon whom the gazing is cast (Green, 2010 and Denzini, 1995). A 'male gaze' is a constriction inasmuch as it undervalues or exaggerates the potential of one who is doing the

gazing and one who is gazed upon. Censorship is thus embedded in the proscriptive perceptions of or fantasies about a women's body.

In the film narrative, the 'male gaze' onto Tecla's body has deleterious effects in that it resulted in a rape case, and Tecla being infection with HIV/AIDS. What is even more painful is that the child that was born out of that crime of rape died in her infancy. In mournful tones, Tecla narrates her ordeal:

*'Ndarepwa nemurume uye ndakabata nhumbu ndokuzvara mwana musikana akabva afa achiri kacheche. Pandakasvika makore 16 ndakange ndave kuziva chokwadi chaicho chekuti ndakanga ndave HIV posetivhi. Asi pakutanga ndaingotenderera muzvipatara zvakawanda ndine 'denial' yekuti ndaive ndane utachiwana we HIV'. [After I was raped by that man, I fell pregnant and I bore a baby girl who died while still an infant. By the time I reached the age of 16, I already knew my HIV status. However, in the beginning I just visited many hospitals while denying that I carry the virus that causes AIDS](Tariro: 2004).*

When Tecla says that she spent a long time in 'denial' that she carries the virus that causes AIDS, she is re-playing the politics of interpreting AIDS in which individuals can restrict or even prevent themselves from accessing knowledge about the disease. Refusing to know one's status regarding HIV and AIDS is a form of self immolation akin to self censorship. Denial therefore becomes a form of self-censorship that, at first, Tecla imposed on herself. The negative effects of that denial is that it delayed Tecla from seeking medical advice early as well as have an earlier access to Anti-Retroviral Viral (ARV) drugs to slow down the virus from replicating itself. Another form of self-censorship implicit in Tecla's narrative is that she remains silent about how her family and her neighbours handled the rape case.

In normal circumstances, the rape case was supposed to have been reported to the police so that the man would be arrested, stand trial, and be convicted for a criminal offence. Even when Tecla joins the Girl Child Network, she does not disclose through her narrative how the organization handled her case of sexual abuse. Audiences are left wondering as to the fate of the man who raped Tecla. Like all organizations that advocate for human rights, the Girl Child Network is known to pursue

cases of child sexual abuse so tenaciously that it would not have simply swept Tecla's case under the carpet. Evidently, there must be an informing ideology that muffled the 'voice' of Tecla to the extent of not speaking out through the courts about how she was sexually abused.

In the narrative it is implied that it is Tecla's parents who insisted that she should not report the case to the police so that she would not put to shame her family pride since the man who raped her was a neighbour. In film, visual images and words are 'slippery' and 'evasive' such that they cannot succumb to a single interpretation because meanings are constituted within and as well as outside representation (Vambe and Rwafa, 2009). In the name of preserving African culture and tradition, many cases to do sexual abuse have been concealed from public scrutiny. This way, many victims of sexual abuse have lost out in critical cases in which offenders were supposed to be prosecuted. In some cases, victims end up being accused of having enticed a man into committing the crime of rape. In other words, the communities whose values are informed by obscurantist belief systems also participate in silencing the voice of the female victim of rape. This mode of censorship embedded in 'revered' cultural values is a form of spiritual rape. Community's collective guilt is depicted in *Tariro* as a form of culturally sanctioned censorship. What is pernicious about this form of censorship is that it has been 'naturalised' by a community that claims to speak on behalf of the likes of Tecla. This embedded form of censorship is not only difficult to detect but also difficult to expurgate.

### **5.5.1 Tecla: De-constructing myths about HIV/AIDS**

In the film *Tariro*, when Tecla was raped, some members of her family started to shy away from her thinking that they will eventually be infected by the virus that causes AIDS. In fact, in one of his confessions, Tecla's brother says that:

*'Taifunga kuti ukagara nemunhu akaita saTecla waizongoerekana wabatwa neutachiwana we HIV. Asi takazoona kuti handizvo zvinoitika, kunyanya kana uchichengetedza utsanana unodiwa kana uchigara nemunhu ane chirwere ichi'.* [We thought that we were going to be infected by the virus that causes AIDS. But we later realized that this is not the case, especially if one follows health guidelines to be observed when one is staying together with a person infected by HIV/AIDS]

In spite of the confessions proffered by Tecla's brother about the stigma he once held against his sister, a large number of people in Zimbabwe still think living and sharing goods with infected people will make them contract the diseases. It is also these people who think that supporting people with HIV/AIDS is a futile exercise since infected people are more vulnerable to death than people that are HIV negative. However, in their restricted ways of conceptualising HIV, some people can fail to evolve creative methods of ameliorating the effects of AIDS pandemic. In other words, insofar as having HIV and AIDS causes shame and stigma that silences those infected, a vicious cycle of self-censorship or internalised prohibitions are imposed on a subject that could openly be debated about. Cultural censorship inhibits dialogue since it is sustained by a culture of silence. Thus, Tecla's struggle against cultural stigmas and its censored knowledge regarding HIV/AIDS may reflect her inner desire to live but ironically produce forms of spiritual death. Tecla's existential power to go against the cultural 'grain' is not put to test, and her capacity to live positively with the disease that could have helped to rekindle the hope of living with HIV/AIDS is not elaborated on. Applauding the effort put by the Girl Child Network, Tecla has this to say:

*'VeGirl Child Network vakadzidzisa kuti munhu ari kurarama neutachiwana weHIV anogona kuita mabasa akasiyana ekuzviriritira. Kuva neHIV hazvirevi kuti unobva watove munhu anogara achiitirwa mabasa nevamwe vanhu.'* [People from Girl Child Network taught me that if you are infected by the HIV, it is also possible to do many types of jobs. To have the HIV virus does not mean that one automatically becomes a person who depend on others all the time] (Tariro, 2004).

To prove that she can still work for herself, Tecla is followed by camera motion going to the market to buy some vegetables and other products of market gardening that she intends to re-sell at her own market stand. While at the market, she talks about the advantages women can gain by generating their own income. One major advantage that Tecla mentions is that if women economically empower themselves, they will not necessarily have to depend on men for matters that require some financial input. Moreover, women would have succeeded in challenging the terms of the law on Matrimonial Clauses Act in which women were exploited by men under the pretext that 'lobola' or 'roora [bride price] was paid to make a woman subservient to a man (Gaidzanwa, 1985). Also, through economic empowerment, women would free themselves from the condition of 'dependency

syndrome'. To further demonstrate her capacity to work, Tecla is employed by the Girl Child Network as a teacher who goes around the country spreading important messages about HIV/AIDS.

Here, one sees the development of positive consciousness on Tecla's part. In other words, Tariro succeeds in undermining individual stereotypes previously manifested through self-censorship. In one of the teaching session, Tecla is caught by the camera as she emphasises the need for people to be extra cautious in sexual relationships:

*'Vana imi muchiri kukura musamhanyirire zvepabonde. Zivai kuti AIDS inowanikwa munzvimbo dzakasiyana-siyana. Muzvikoro, mumabasa, mumamisha, nemumaguta... Kurarama nenutrition yakakwana ndizvo zvinodiwa. Uye vana imi munofanirwa kunotestiwa kuti murarame muchiziva pamumire chaipo'.* [You young people who are still growing up should not rush to be involved in sexual relationships. You must know that AIDS can be contracted on different spheres of life. In the schools, at work places, in the rural areas, in towns...To have good nutrition is what is needed. Also, you children, you are supposed to be tested for HIV/AIDS so that you live your lives knowing about your status](Tariro, 2004).

Tecla's narrative is a relief in that she does not recoil into her cocoon in order to hide her HIV status. In fact, the very act of speaking out against cultural constraints that stifle the 'voice' of women with HIV, is a challenge to a majority of people who would have died in silence fearing that if they disclosed their HIV status, members of society would criticise them.

The documentary film genre is capable of self-reflexivity. This quality in the short film allows or reveals how characters move from positions of passivity to become subjects of their own lives. Also a critical point is that the genre of short film is a liminal space where no single narrative is allowed to settle down, but that multiple identities interrogate each other as characters perform. These positive features of a documentary short film are further complicated in the depiction of the ambiguous relationship between facts and fictive elements in the film, *Tariro*.

### **5.5.2 *Tariro*(2004) and the Fictions of Factual Representations**

Solanas and Getino(1997: 46) assert that the documentanry narrative is '...perhaps the basis of revolutionary filmmaking'. By implication the two authors give premium to the documentary's capacity to engage with discourses of the 'here' and 'now' in which the poetics of transforming

reality calls for human urgency. The value attached to narrativity in the representation of real events arises out of a desire to have real events display the coherence, integrity, fullness, and closure of an image of life that is and can only be imaginary(White, 1987). However, as Gray(1991) argues, although a documentary film - such as *Tariro* - deals with factual information, real places, people and events, the question of obtaining hundred percent objectivity is not tenable. This is because documentary narratives deal with selected facts that are organised in a coherent pattern, and this very act can challenge the presumed, ‘...naturalness, singularity and purity’, (Gray, 1991: 170) of the documentary genre.

When this insight is applied to an interpretation of the film,*Tariro*, it is revealed that there is a conscious plan to empower Tecla—the central character, by commissioning her ‘voice’ to say out things that give hope to those with HIV/AIDS. However, in the film there are no counter-voices that condemn those who willfully transmit the disease. The absence of such counter-narratives, restrict and censor alternative and differentiated lived experiences or diverse ‘truths’ that should have given Katedza’s documentary much credence if they were incorporated. In *Tariro*, the director of the film should have given chance to Tecla’s parents to testify about why and how they drove Tecla to be infected with HIV/AIDS. Censorship of ‘truths’ in the documentary film can also be influenced by factors such as place, time, nature of audience, technical aspects of camera angles, motion, editing and the ideological goals of the filmmaker. In the case of the film *Tariro* the conditions of documentary reception and its cinematographic conditions of production construct different layers of ‘truths’ such that the idea of documentary ‘facticity’ is presented as if it is not beyond cultural contestation. In fact, the diverse strategies that a documentary form can adopt and harness are ways the reality/fiction binary of documentary narratives is constructed. Wayne (2001) points out that the openness to diverse documentary strategies shades into the possibility of using the imagery and language conventions usually associated with fiction and mass culture generally.

However, since *Tariro* is a documentary film which delves into the realities of HIV/AIDS, its lack of ‘action’ usually associated with feature films does affect the way its messages are received, especially by the youths who are still sexually active and adventurous. For example, the mere fact that the documentary is about HIV/AIDS can count as a restriction for some audiences that have a feeling that the theme of HIV/AIDS is now belaboured to the extent of creating boredom. Also,

when *Tariro* was produced it seems that its ideology was rooted in sending didactic messages that were meant to make people re-think their sexual behaviour in era of HIV/AIDS. The view that women are the ones that suffer the most from HIV may be true owing to the dangers associated with biological reproduction (Mcfadden, 1992). However, men also are victims of HIV/AIDS. When such details are left out, the film communicates two controversial messages. The first is a stereotype that suggests that HIV/AIDS is a women's disease. The second distortion is that audiences' curiosity is censored when it is suggested that sex—forced or consensual, is the only method through which HIV/AIDS are transmitted from man to woman. Women have to struggle against the ingrained or 'fixed' cultural and traditional beliefs that view female sexuality as the source of HIV/AIDS.

However, in *Tariro* to only re/present images of a woman as a victim is to attempt to prohibit audiences from imagining that most errant women have also brought HIV/AIDS to unsuspecting men. The omission of images of men as victims on the documentary's screen space is censorial, as it is fictitious. The fictive element in these narratives of exclusion and 'closure' is anchored within the beliefs that do not recognise that men are also vulnerable to HIV/AIDS. In a nut shell, the restrictions imposed on *Tariro*'s narratives of disaster and the re-kindling of Tecla's hope, injects *aporia* or sense of contradictions (White, 1978) residing at the heart of what has come to be known as languages of 'truths' and facticity in documentary narratives. The documentary narrative can falsely create an image as simulacra of reality which it is entirely not. The sense of natural live patterns projected in the verifiable details of place, known people and locales can make audiences mistake a cultural creation for a real life experiences outside the frame of the film. This similitude of verbal and audio-visual elements can mislead and impose inhibitions of uncritical audiences who might take 'constructed' reality for granted.

These prohibitions important by genre as a particular form of film language continue to manifest in another film, *Akakodzera Ndiani?* The following section continues to identify and make an analysis of the verbal and audio-visual language[s] of the film *Akakodzera Ndiani*(2008) centred on narratives of women freedom and the ultimate goal of women empowerment. My aim is to expose for scrutiny the subtle forms of censorship that are embedded within the short film's narrotological and ideological structures.



## **5.6 *Akakodzera Ndiani?* (2008): Disclosing ‘strictures’ in the Cultural practice of marriage**

The short film *Akakodzera Ndiani?*(2008) is centred on the debate on cultural conflict. In the film, Timi is the central character. Timi comes back from America and introduces to his parents Susan, a white woman whom Timi intends to marry. As the film drama unfolds, it becomes clear to Timi’s parents that Susan lives in a world of her own, with its mores and ethos different from those that brought Timi’s mother to the stage of ‘womanhood’. The controversy that is sparked by Susan’s refusal to conform to African notions of ‘womanhood’ is the basis of cultural restrictions and prohibitions that this section intends to critically examine.

### **5.6.0 Susan: Clashes on notions of ‘Womanhood’**

The first scene of *Akakodzera Ndiani?* (2008) introduces Timi’s mother cleaning the table and arranging house-hold property as women are expected to do by the African tradition. She hears the sound of the car outside, and after some few minutes Timi enters the house together with Susan, a white woman. Timi introduces Susan to his parents: ‘Mom and Pa, this is Susan. She is your *muroora*’. Susan embraces both Timi’s mother and father, and utters her greetings. Her way of greeting bears all the markings of foreignness that contradicts the African ways of extending greetings to would-be-in –laws in which a woman is expected to kneel down, and then extend the right hand for a greeting.

When Timi’s mother posited the rhetorical question, ‘*Timi murungaka uyu?*’ she was indirectly telling her son that she was not expecting him to bring a white woman who is not conversant with African traditions. However, the expectation that Susan would stoop low to show that she is a woman is used in the film to reveal the restrictive nature of some African customs that take it for granted that women are/should be subservient to men or those who symbolise masculine power such as Timi’s mother. In the film, the traditional notion of ‘womanhood’ is judged by relatives, and not by what the woman thinks is right. In the context of African tradition, ‘womanhood’ has come to be associated with, ‘...purity, piety, submissiveness and domesticity’ (Naidoo, 2010: 60). At the dinner table, Susan does not hide her ignorance about the Zimbabwean staple diet when she fails to eat

*sadza* and stew. As a woman Susan is expected to wash dishes immediately after a meal, and Timi's mother is very emphatic about it when she says: '*Susan come and help me in the kitchen*'.

Traditionally and culturally in Zimbabwe, a kitchen is viewed as a women's place. The discourses that describe a kitchen and its paraphernalia found in the kitchen are associated with cooking consumables, and therefore, defined as feminine. In contrast, a man's tools are known to be used to do work that will bring money or wealth to the family. In the film narrative, Timi's mother proves that she is a 'real' domesticated African woman by working up in the wee hours of the morning to do some chores. By the time Susan joins her in the lounge, she has already finished most of the work. Susan does not feel any remorse about her lateness in waking up; instead, she lights up her cigarette and sucks in deeply before commenting that: '*I heard that you guys have good cigarettes in Zimbabwe*'. She sinks into the sofa and takes the remote control, focusing it onto the screen, and queries, '*What's on TV?*' Her behaviour and mannerisms irks the would-be mother-in-law who spoke to Susan in harsh tones: '*Ndinoda muroora anoshanda ini. Kwete kungoti, 'What's on TV? What's on TV?'*' [I want a daughter-in-law who works. Instead of just saying, 'What's on TV? What's on TV?'].

Susan does not understand the part delivered in the vernacular Shona language. Apart from its censoring effect, Shona language is satirically used here to chide at what is conceived as the 'laziness' of the white woman who just sits when most of the work is done by the would-be mother-in-law. A white woman has space and time to research new knowledge as well as explore avenues that will enrich her career prospects. Evidently, there is a clash of interests in what is called '*kushanda*' [labour]. For Timi's mother '*kushanda*' means toiling around doing some household chores, whereas for Susan, a Western woman, '*kushanda*' may mean spending some hours searching for information on the internet. Woodward and Mastin(2005)—proponents of the concept of 'black womanhood', would view the kind of 'womanhood' practiced by Susan as warped and atrophied. But Woodward and Mastin(2005) also criticise the prescriptive and stereotypic nature of the concept of 'black womanhood' that implies that black women are mere caregivers and sacrificial lambs. Implicitly, *Akakodzera Ndiani?*, challenges the 'settled', 'stabilised' and 'essentialised' (Plaisance, 2009:40) values exhibited through the characterization of Susan and the would-be mother-in-law.

In the film, Timi is confronted by his mother who expects Susan to do some house-hold chores:

*'Timi ndakati ndinoda muroora anoshanda: kukorobha mumba, kutsvaira panze, kusuka ndiro nekuitawo zvimwe zvinodiwa kuitwa mumba'*. [Timi I told you that I want a daughter-in-law who works: scrubbing the floor, sweeping the ground around the house, washing dishes and other things that need to be done in the house]

The aesthetic sensibilities of Timi's mother are rooted in the concept of physical labour, and for Susan not to appreciate the essence of physical labour, is interpreted as a sign of laziness. It is possible to suggest that what the director of the film is hinting at is that to have extremes in interpreting both European and African cultures is dangerous; there is need to create harmonising discourses that will not limit or censor people from exploring the fundamentals of each of the cultures being dramatised on the screen. However, in what can be described as the climactic moments of the clash between Susan and Timi's mother, Susan is told point blank that:

*'You know, you are very lazy. You are supposed to work up very early in the morning to scrub the floors and sweep the yard. You don't know our culture so you don't qualify to be my daughter-in-law'*.

Susan is taken aback and she questions: *'But what wrong have I done?'*

Still emphasising the idea that a woman must work, Timi's mother replies: *'The problem is not about what you have done, but what you have not done!'*

This verbal exchange of words between Susan and Timi's mother reinforces the West versus African dichotomy which avows/accepts 'difference' in reading the complexities of culture. In the film narrative, these complexities are manifested when the mother-in-law connived with Timi's former local girl-friend to visit the family in order to seek support and approval from Timi and his father. In the kitchen, the would-be mother-in-law has lots of praises for the girl's ability to do household chores: *'Ehe-e, Hauchiona uyu ndiye muroora chaiye'*. [Ehe-e, this is what I call a proper daughter-in-law for me'] However, Timi's father thinks otherwise. When he gets into the kitchen, he is surprised to see a skimpily dressed woman cooking. He passes lewd comments:

*'Aah! Ichindichochii ichi? Iwo mapfekero acho hamuone kuti haaite aya. Ndiani anoda muroora ane nyama dzakanzi yacha pachena sechimukuyu?'*. ['Aah, what is this? Can't you see this is a very bad way of dressing? Who would love for a daughter-in-law a woman with exposed flesh like biltong?']

From the father's rhetoric, the film narrative is criticising the narrowness and blinkered assessment of Timi's mother. Here, the film resisted its initial tendency to reproduce cultural censorship by relying on stock characters and stereotypes. The narrative voice of Timi's father suggests that within the African traditional contexts, change and modernity has penetrated deeper to the extent of soiling what has often been viewed as the 'untouched' or 'unsullied' spirit of African ness expected to reside in African people (Wa Thion'go, 1996). Neither Susan nor Timi's former girl-friend are completely affirmed as unproblematic characters, hence the question: Who qualifies? or *Akakodzera ndiani?*

Timi's aunt influences his father to consider for marriage a girl from their rural area. In the rural areas, when all paternal relatives are gathered, an uncle makes an announcement to Timi: '*Tave kuda muroora akabva kuvanhu. Saka zvino tava kuda kukuratidza chimhandara chakakodzerana newe*'. [We want a good mannered daughter-in-law who comes from people (Africans). So, we are about to show you a girl who is suitable for you] Susan is surprised to see a bare-footed woman making her way to the gathering, accompanied by a group of women who dance and ululate. Susan asks Timi's mother to explain to her what is taking place. She is told that: '*Even when Timi marries you, he still has to marry an African woman*'. However, Timi's father declares that '*Mwanangu Timi wekuAmerica haaroore chidzoi chakadai*' [My son Timi who has gone to America cannot marry such a rural bumpkin]. The film dispels the notion that the rural area is a space where culturally authentic African woman is found. As relatives begin to argue fiercely among themselves the camera motion follows the receding images of Susan and Timi in each others arms. This kind of ending can suggest to the audiences that one who qualifies (*akakodzera*) depends on the choice of one who decides to marry. In the narratives of *Akakodzera Ndiani?* the idea of individualised choices is fiercely contested by family members who feel that a 'grand' cultural narrative such as marriage is a shared responsibility. The discourses of collective decision-making on the suitability of marriage partners are projected as discourses that place restrictions and prohibitions on the existential powers of an individual to make choices that will affect his/her life.

### **5.6.1 Timi and Conflictual Narratives of 'choice'**

Timi is a victim of communal decision-making, symbolising the belief that still exist in some African communities that individuals are given due respect and honour only when they use the collective ‘voice’ to achieve their goals in life. The censoring effect of this kind of African belief is that it aims to destroy the sense of ‘self’ as a cultural alternative that can creatively tap individual power to make informed choices on matters that call for a life-long commitment. In this case, the short film *Akakodzera Ndiani?* temporarily ‘drowned out’ Timi’s ‘voice’ in order to expose to the surface the hidden narratives of prohibition emerging from other family members that negatively affect Timi’s efforts to select a wife of his choice. If the ‘self’ in Timi was going to suffer ‘the crisis of confidence’ (Khan, 2009: 10) in the face of family pressure, the lack of a concise decision by the same family members as to who Timi should marry, provides him with the opportunity to choose the woman that he wants.

*Akakodzera Ndiani?* authorises counter-discourses that deny community and family-sanctioned stereotypes on matters of love. The short film manifests that even in African traditional contexts people’s responses to cultural change are differentiated. The effects of globalisation and post-modernity have considerably affected the way some Africans re-interpret tradition, and life, generally (Van Eeden, 2006). Hence, when at the end, Timi is depicted blissfully enjoying himself in the arms of Susan, it seems the short film is stamping its ideological signature to reflect that issues of a life-long commitment such as marriage are better left for individuals to decide upon. It is through this revisionist sensibility that the film subverts attempts by communitarian narratives to impose an undemocratic collective will on the individual. Viewed from this perspective, the film *Akakodzera Ndiani?* succeeds in authorising new values that question traditions of censorship embedded in patriarchal modes of thinking.

### **5.6.2 *Akakodzera Ndiani?* (2008): Fracturing the West /Africa binary**

The narratives of the film *Akakodzera Ndiani?* have been able to de-construct ‘essentialisms’ created in African and European cultures regarding the critical issue of marriage. In doing so, the narrative suggest that the West versus Africa dichotomy should not be cast in concrete terms because each of the cultures has its own merits and demerits. The rupturing of a West versus Africa binary is

also achieved by the use of both English and Shona in the narrative so that the languages exist side by side for the benefit of the local and international audiences. In fact, what the short film has succeeded in doing is to include speech acts in both Shona and English languages so that the narratives appeal to the international market inasmuch as they are meant to address the concerns of the local market. This kind of approach is commendable in that it can disallow censorship mainly brought about by differences in language. In short, the film *Akakodzera Ndiani?* (2008) debates the dilemmas of young Africans who are coerced to follow the dictates of tradition so that they are not viewed as 'aliens'. The film's deconstructive principle prevents African and European cultures from appearing as settled and culturally absolute belief systems. It is this quality in the representation of the theme of cultural conflict that expands the audiences' understanding of the volatility of the marriage institution.

However, *Akakodzera Ndiani?* is limited by its patriarchal perspective. For example, four women: Susan, Timi's mother, Timi's former girl friend and the rural bumpkin prepared for Timi by rural relatives, are all differentiated by negative qualities. And yet, Timi's character is not questioned; he is presented as an unfortunate angel dating women of questionable moral turpitude. This depiction of female characters reveals the censoring and controlling ideology informing the values of the film. It is precisely these masculine discourses that are questioned in the short film, *The Whispers*, in the ways it foregrounds women's emancipation from the clutches of patriarch's hold.

### **5.7 *The Whisper* (2006) and discourses of women emancipation**

*The Whisper* (2006) is a short documentary film directed and produced by Prudence Uriri. The film critically exposes the constraints, prohibitions and limitations that women face in Zimbabwe's socio-cultural, political and economic spheres of life. Blending factual information with visual images, *The Whisper* debates the theme of women empowerment. Since a documentary film, 'emphasises the creative treatment of actuality' (Grierson in Giannetti, 1982: 334), it means language aspects such as speech acts, sound effects, *mis-en-scene*, voice, names of actual persons and their faces on the screen have to provide authenticating evidence to the 'truths' that the documentary expose. The focus of this section below is to critically analyse these languages of 'truth' with a view to exposing the buried narratives of censorship that the short documentary film conceals even as it attempts to map out strategies for women empowerment.

### **5.7.0 The role of African Customary Laws: Uncovering Discourses of ‘erasure’ in *The Whisper***

The theme of the oppression of women under customary law is depicted through *The Whisper*(2006). The basis of women oppression in Zimbabwe is found in the language of labeling that African tradition and customary laws espouse. These customary laws bestow language that forces blind conformity in married women in which they are not expected to be critical nor challenge their husband on issues regarding family affairs as well as the material well-being of the family. In fact, as Vambe and Mpfariseni point out, ‘A married woman under customary law is perceived as an unpaid servant of the husband who works for him, looks after the family, acquires and preserves property for him’(2011: 95). This is despite the fact that in rural areas, a woman spends her life working hard for the subsistence of the family, and at the end of marriage she leaves the matrimonial home with no claim to own part of the family property. In the film narrative, Mbuya Rukweza says that: ‘*In the olden days we were not developed. Some women used to sleep outside after having been beaten by their husbands. Men didn’t like educated women. They were said to be prostitutes*’.

Under African customary law, a prostitute was viewed as a threat to the marriage institution, community health and patriarchal system. To monitor or control the power of women to critically analyse issues, educated women were labeled as ‘prostitutes’. What is limiting about the term ‘prostitute’ is that it naturalises the status of educated women for its failure to imagine and articulate alternative ‘routes’ that women could take for positive development in society and culture.

It is important to underline the crippling effects of African customs on the empowerment of women. However, it is uncritical and restrictive to assume that today women are totally liberated from the shackles of traditional customs (Williams, 2011). In *The Whisper* , the Voice Over argues that, ‘*While Zimbabwe is highly rated among developing countries for its new policies that work towards gender equality, some roles being played by women are limiting and prohibitive*’. Women are still sidelined in matters to do with decision-making, education, property ownership, employment and other critical areas of life. To confirm this, in *The Whisper* a visual image is screened showing women doing menial work, such as selling tomatoes, cabbages, onions and other goods at what appears to be *Mbare Musika*. This visual image is metaphoric in that it shows how women are undermined when they are expected by tradition to do jobs that are not intellectually challenging. To

support the explanation above, the Voice Over in *The Whisper* bemoans: *'Most newly designed policies and systems only partially address issues of women oppression. The designers are still men who since time immemorial have had an upper hand'*.

For the documentary narrator, if women are to change their status of being the 'oppressed ones', there is great need to incorporate them in policy-making systems and processes so that they plan and implement strategies for their freedom. Speaking from a legal perspective, Welshman Ncube—then law lecturer in the Faculty of law at University of Zimbabwe, says that:

*'The laws that had operated prior to independence as part of the customary law system brought in by the white people were, in many respect, discriminatory against women. Women were treated as second class citizens, unequal to men in matters to do with Marriage laws, Family laws, Commercial laws and many others'*(*The Whisper*, 2006).

After independence in 1980, the state had to intervene and in a fairly radically manner, changed as it were, *'...the legal law plan in order to introduce laws which were, in the face of it, at least, treating both men and women equally as well as equitably to empower women and to change their legal status'*. In his view, Ncube used the terms, *'...in the face of it...'*, and *'...at least'*, to suggest that the changes that have been put in place by the government to empower women were piece-meal, either in their conceptualization or in their practical manifestations. These limitations hinted through Ncube's view can suggest that it would take time for women to fully enjoy independence from the strictures imposed on them by African tradition and customary law. This is also compounded by government's lack of seriousness when it comes to the issue of implementing laws that discourage gender discrimination and domestic violence.

In fact, Williams (2011: 4) notes that, 'The State only pays lip service to gender discrimination and domestic violence issues and never does anything concrete to ensure that it is brought to an end. However, in the film *The Whisper* inspite of the stifling nature of the African tradition towards women emancipation, Everjoice Win—a Human Rights Advocate, has an optimistic view as regarding the Legal age of Majority Act declared by the government in 1982. She says that the law on the Legal age of Majority Act has far-reaching effects in that it sought to redress a situation whereby a black woman was treated as a minor legally from the time when she was born to the time



when she died. When she was still single, she fell under the control of her brother or father. If she got married, she would be under the control of her husband, and if she gets divorced, she would go back to her family. Evidently, a woman was restricted or censored from making decisions that would affect her life without seeking consent from a male figure-head.

Jenkins (2005) advises that if women are to enjoy freedom, they have to brace up for a struggle in order to 'break below the surface' (ibid, 55) of vulgar 'masculine' discourses that underscore the matrix of customary law. A step in the right direction is the introduction of the law on the Legal age of Majority Act. It enables a woman to enter into business transactions using her name or she can open a bank account without having to seek male guidance. However, an important point to note is that while it is fairly easy for some educated women to understand the legal implications of the Legal age of Majority Act, it is debatable whether or not most illiterate women who reside in rural areas understand the benefits brought by this piece of legislation. For women such as Mbuya Rukweza, in *The Whisper* some social implications of Legal age of Majority Act are negative in that its terms can be manipulated by,

*'...young men and daughters to disrespect elders. They think independence means going to the beer hall, and drink beer recklessly without taking care of their children. This is not what the new law says; it says that people should take good care of their families'*(*The Whisper*, 2006).

The manipulatability of legal laws is aptly captured by Hart(1993) who asserts that it is because legal statutes involve recognizing or classifying cases instances in general terms that they exhibit an open texture. Thus, legal language and its contextual application remain 'unsettled', 'indefinite' and above all, 'manipulatable' (ibid, 1983: 40). To confirm the manipulatability of the terms of the Legal age of Majority Act, the documentary narrative depicts an image of skimpily dressed young women walking recklessly along the pavements as if to attract the attention of passersby. At this point, the director of the film should be credited for suggesting that while modernity brought by the Legal age of Majority Act frees women from the shackles of oppressive traditions, the way some young women make use of it, can be morally demeaning.

In fact, what is worrisome is that if an image of skimpily dressed women is narrowly interpreted by some male audiences, it can help to justify and legitimise the existence of some cultural stereotypes

in which women are viewed as sex objects. Naturalised stereotypes are limited in that they are judgmental, selective, simplistically deployed, and that the stereotypes emphasise a ‘singularity of values’ (Bhabha, 1996: 40) that are viewed as incontestable. To confirm the negative effects of cultural stereotypes, the Voice Over from *The Whisper* argues that even if,

*‘...nowadays some women are highly educated they still have problems quite similar to women of the old generations. Society is still controlled by traditional customs and values. Some modern women are not able to use laws effectively due to deep-rooted socio-economic problems under the umbrella of customary laws’.*(*The Whisper*, 2006).

If the opportunities of women are blocked by how customary laws are applied in the social sphere, this is also true as regards women’s access to land ownership as depicted through the film *The Whisper*.

### **5.7.1 *The Whisper*: Women and Land Ownership**

The idea of land ownership has always been controversial between African men and women and among societies and communities (Gaidzanwa, 1985). In African tradition and customary laws, a woman was not supposed to own land for the reason that she was the married ‘one’ operating under the tutelage of the husband. One woman in *The Whispers* testifies that, ‘*men say because we bought you women, you should not own land. We can only give you a bit of money but not land*’. A man counter-argues that, ‘*the problem is that traditionally or in modern times, a married couple is not allocated land as two different people. It has never happened that a woman gets her own land*’. In the above exchange, the statement, ‘...it has never happened...’ which are echoes of the ‘fixed’, prohibitive and blocking discourses of customary law, patently show the degree to which some men can cling to the dictates of tradition in order to advance their selfish interests(Moto, 2009). However, another man in *The Whisper* who is optimistic about women’s emancipation asserts that:

*‘A woman is supposed to own a piece of land even in her infancy. That is why in the past grand mothers were master farmers who own their piece of land on which they would carry out activities ‘unregulated’ or ‘unrestricted’ by their husbands. Some men here in the rural areas men would opt to go for beer drinking while most of the work in the fields is done by women and children. After all the hard work, the husband takes all the money. This is not fair’.*(*The Whisper*,2006)

The recognition of women's rights of access to land in the past serves to de-construct and de-mystify the notion that men are naturally the sole owners of land. To view men as the sole owners of the land erodes the land rights that also should be extended to women. In fact, as Welshman Ncube puts,

*'...the question of land ownership by women has been addressed by the Land Commission. What the government has to do is to move expeditiously to guarantee and ensure that women have land rights which are secure and long term both in communal areas and resettlement areas' (The Whisper, 2006)*

Following the line of argument advanced by Ncube, it is important to point out that although the government has principally extended the rights for women emancipation to include land rights, practically the number of women who own land in Zimbabwe is still small. Whether it is women's lack of concern about the critical issue of land ownership, slow implementation of land rights to empower women or the ingrained patriarchal attitudes that promote the view that women must not own land, is something that needs serious consideration by policy planners. However, what can be deduced is that the incrustation of 'traditional' roles in which a married woman is viewed as a minor by her husband has also affected the Zimbabwean policy planners who fail to consider the reality that women also need land of their own, to farm, just like men.

In *The Whisper(2006)* squandered a rare moment by not screening images of women that are successfully engaged in some productive agricultural activities. If the director had done that, she would have helped to construct a new 'perception', 'psyche' and 'narrative' that would make those hardened Shona men to respect the positive contribution of women to the society(Gaidzanwa, 1985). In these 'absent' narratives, *The Whisper* is censored by the director's ideological limitations that prevent the audience experiencing alternative ideas that can help to build positive images of what women are capable of achieving.

### **5.7.2 Women and Politics in *The Whisper***

Although the *The Whisper(2006)* depicts reasonable numbers of women in political leadership positions, there is not much that the government has done to encourage rural women to become political leaders. It is ironic that when it comes to supporting political parties, women are actively

involved. Those women in Zimbabwe that occupy the centre stage in politics are mainly elites who can pretend to share the same vision with the illiterate and impoverished women in the rural areas (Chikowero, 2010). Other women who fail to make it in the high echelons are reduced to sycophants and merry-makers that sing and ululate for male leaders during national celebrations. Against this backdrop, the director of *The Whisper* should be accorded due merit for arguing through the image that although a sizeable number of women now occupy important leadership positions, much still needs to be done for women to meaningfully participate in politics as decision-makers. It will not be fair for society to assume that if few women are involved in decision making in politics, their struggle for freedom will simply vanish; there is also need to train and incorporate ordinary women in leadership positions. As if to prove that there is less comfort in few numbers, a woman in *The Whisper* who occupies an important leadership position testifies that, '*The problem is that some men do not want to be led by a woman. So when they come to me they think that I'm not able to handle their problems, but I don't work like that*'.

The mentality that women are incapable of leading is rooted in African tradition in which women are stereotypically viewed as intellectually 'weak' or 'soft' and as not able to make intelligible decisions. In cases where women are involved in decision making, some men would make it a habit to find fault in what these women say in order to justify pre-conceived ideas that women cannot pass sound judgment. Such men's attitudes can be equated to, '...the 'evil eye' of lore and legend (Seidler, 2000: 68) and Foucault's(1975) all-scrutinising panoptic gaze that disciplines, punishes and aims to create a docile body in women so that they conform to patriarchal rules. Furthermore, the act of censoring female leaders exemplify the workings of the hegemonic phallogocentric language that has historically privileged the power of men to decide what women should say and act within the parameters set by men. Those women who went out of their way to exercise their freedom were rebuked or subjected to emotional, psychological and physical violence.

### **5.7.3 *The Whisper*: Women and Domestic violence**

Since time immemorial, women have always been subjected to domestic violence by men. On one hand, this generational phenomenon of men's violence against women, among the Shona people in Zimbabwe, is encrusted in traditional discourses that approve, and sometimes view violence as a sign of love towards one's wife. On the other hand, violence is a way of advancing hegemonic

masculinities (Modleski, 1991; Hanke, 1992) on women so that they are prevented from forcing men to account for their action that can have the potential to bring the whole family into disrepute. In post-independent Zimbabwe, there are a number of cases of domestic violence reported to the police in which women are victims. Everjoice Win in *The Whisper* testifies that where-ever cases of domestic violence are brought before the courts of law, judges or magistrates can simply trivialise or ignore the seriousness of women. Win says that,

*'Sometimes the way in which the magistrate pass down judgment, is as if to say that whatever happened to you [woman] was justified. A study I have made of women that have been killed in domestic violence shows that the judgment can sometimes be reduced to something else not straight murder, and there are always extenuating circumstances'* (*The Whisper*, 2006).

These revelations by Win are pertinent in that they reveal the power matrix that is at play in interpreting the legal statutes that refer to domestic violence. Also the fact that Win's voice is head chronicling the hurdles that women face as they seek for fair judgment, proves that women refuse to be muffled by law's selective application.

At a meta-level, the revelations by Win also serve to de-construct the notion that law's application is objective, fair and incontestable. For example, Williams (2011) leader of Women of Zimbabwe Arise (WOZA) complains about the implementation of the law on Domestic Violence Act that was put in place by the Zimbabwean government to deal with problems caused by domestic violence. Williams argues:

*'In as much as we have the Domestic Violence Act, the implementation part of the law is the major challenge. On paper, the Act is implementable and sound proof. It is designed to protect victims and bring to book violators. What lacks in the Act is the political will to enforce it and the will to make sure that all concerned understand what the law entails'*. (2011: 4).

Williams suggests that legal censorship can be present in the ways the laws are not implemented. While men are the major culprits in cases of domestic violence, the state becomes the second biggest perpetrator evidenced by its reluctance to enforce effectively the law and put mechanisms in place that protect women. In other words, by not taking effective measures against domestic violence, the state is implicated in undermining alternative ways of dealing with the problem apart from involving men in condemning domestic violence. However, for the director of *The Whisper* to commission a

one-sided 'voice' that images men as perpetrators of domestic violence is to suppress or constrict diversity in thinking that can expose how some men are often beaten for not conforming to the dictates of their wives. Such an ideological prohibition on the part of the film director and the respondent can be a result of the limiting ways in which some people, in Zimbabwe narrowly conceptualise the notion of domestic violence. Also, this faulty conception that women are in all cases victims of domestic violence actually feeds on the hegemonic masculinities of men that aid them to consolidate their 'fictions' and 'realities' about the extension and effectiveness of their power to control women.

#### **5.7.4 *The Whisper* and the power of ideological 'pastiche'**

In spite of its weaknesses, Uriri's short documentary film has revealed a multitude of forces that conspire against the liberation of women. Through style of 'fragmentation' and combining oral stories and testimonies, Uriri has been able to create a 'pastiche' or mosaic that attempts to capture different perspectives about the problems women face in different spheres of life. Uriri's style of re/presentation challenges Feneley's(2010) assertion that the major weakness of a short film is that it is not usually allowed to 'breathe', or develop a sense of an independent exploration of the matters at hand. A sense of independence in the documentary film *The Whisper*(2006) is achieved both through its narrative structure as well as through the ideological convictions of the documentary's characters. In other words, the heterogeneous nature of the documentary's characterisation can allow the director some space to explore the psychological, intellectual as well as the emotional geography of the characters involved. This helps to break free the 'walls' and 'frames' of traditional thought patterns that stifle the advancement of women in Zimbabwe. What the argument points to, is that it not necessarily true that the documentary film as genre has embedded limitations. That some film directors can use the documentary mode to close debate while other directors use the same documentary mode to create and presented differentiated characters suggests the content of the form or style of a film can be manipulated to censor or open up spaces for cultural debate.

### **5.8 Conclusion**

This chapter critically explored four short films *Asylum*(2007), *Tariro*(2007) *Akakodzera Ndiani?*(2008) and *The Whisper*(2006). The aim was to bring out levels of censorship embedded in

the narratives of the short films. First, it was observed that the style of short film is not ideologically deficient. A short film is 'complete' in its shortness. Second, it was argued that, although, in Zimbabwe, the short film emerged as an experiment that was meant to fill the 'gap' following a lack in full length feature films, the short film's 'shortness' can limit what can be explored. A director's use of 'jumps' and 'elisions' that quicken the pace of the film can place restrictions that hinder audiences from getting full details of the story. Yet, in Zimbabwe a short film project has the advantage of working on small budgets, few crew members and less logistical concerns. It was shown that the Zimbabwean short has the advantage of tapping from oral tradition such as song, story telling, dance, poetry, legend and ritual narratives (Mhiripiri 2010). These rhetorical devices are constitutive of the film language. However, it was argued that such a stylistic rendition can place restrictions especially for the international audiences who may not be well versed with aspects of Zimbabwe's traditional culture. Apart from analysing the forms of structural censorship, the chapter revealed that censorship is expressed in the films on the levels of social ideas acted out through day-to-day speech acts and socialisations that are then incorporated within the film narrative. It was also manifested that in the analysis of the genre of the short film, the length of these films were crucial in determining the capacity of the individual films to dramatise at length and elaborate on social issues. *Asylum*(2007) was analysed first, followed by *Tariro*(2007), *Akakodzera Ndiani?* (2008) and *The Whisper*( 2006). The time of production of these short films was the period between 2006 and 2008. This period is remembered for its social hardships due to economic sanctions imposed on Zimbabwe by western countries. Yet, none of the films depicted this reality. The period 2000 to 2010 also witnessed bitter rivalry marked by political violence among Zimbabwe's major political parties especially during the controversial elections of 2008. Again, none of the films directly confront the theme of political violence that occurred in Zimbabwe. This can suggest a sense of self imposed censorship on the part of filmmakers. The exploration on second issues of inequality could however be taken as deliberate; politics is not only expressed through pre-occupation with open resistance or political protests. To this extent, the four films are deeply political. Furthermore, an analysis of individual films revealed different strategies by which films upheld or contested official censorship.

For example, *Asylum*(2007) focused on the suffering of people in the Darfur; the rhetorical language device that the film uses is allegorical. It enabled the filmmaker to comment indirectly on political crisis in Zimbabwe. *Asylum* centralises the problems that refugees from Darfur encountered when

they escaped to foreign lands such as Britain, America and France. The problems are captured through silence, sound, screams and visions, all which nourishes the audio-visual grammar of the short film. *Asylum* also used the style of defamiliarisation that relies on the use of one context to comment on other similar contexts experiencing similar problems. This enabled the filmmaker to confront Zimbabwean authorities indirectly thereby ensuring that the film is not banned by official in Zimbabwe. The style of defamiliarisation also forces audiences to think outside the ideological frames of the narrative and fill up the gaps left by *Asylum*. The film's reliance on sound and absence of verbal narratives is likely to impress upon audiences' interpretive strategies by suggesting that in film, messages can also be relayed through visuals. Also, *Asylum's* dependency on non-linear techniques of jumps and elisions was meant to bring realist styles into crisis that favours linearity and predictability of social events.

The shortness of the film *Asylum* suited the conditions of its consumption in the Zimbabwean context of 2007 in which many people failed to spare time or money to spend on films at a time leisure was competing with survival politics. It was however argued that despite the film's attempt to capture the mood, torture and psychological disorientations that a victim of political violence suffers, the use of a complicated style can censor or limit the potential of audiences to interpret the narratives of *Asylum(2007)*. *Asylum(2007)* was also criticised for using diversionary antics when it focuses on Darfur at a period when Zimbabwe had its own citizens that were over-spilling to the neighbouring countries such as South Africa, Botswana and Namibia for fear of political persecution, and in search for food and jobs. Evidently, the film director may have imposed on herself some internalised restrictions for not confronting openly the Zimbabwean government. The short film *Tariro(2007)* is a documentary that narrativises the story of Tecla who was raped and infected with the HIV virus that causes AIDS. The film presented a character who argued that despite being infected with HIV and AIDS, Tecla did not lose hope. She works just like any other normal person, and this helps to deconstruct myths created out of HIV/AIDS. However, despite such a refreshing approach towards the theme of HIV/AIDS, it was argued that the director censored Tecla's 'voice' by not making her reveal what happened to the man who raped her, and her family that betrothed her culprit. The act of excluding some narratives while including others amounts to ideological censorship. Narratives left out can have the potential to challenge the 'truths' of those narratives that are included. In other words, by not including men as victims, the documentary has been criticized for creating 'fictions'



by failing to acknowledge, through the 'truths' of the image that men are also vulnerable to HIV/AIDS. The question of censorship was depicted as more influenced by the narrow ideology of the director than by the fact that the film is short.

This act of exclusion is a form of censorship that denies those men suffering in silence, a platform from within which to speak out the challenges they face, as men living with the virus. *Akakodzera Ndiani?* (2008) centralizes the issue of cultural conflict. In the film, Susan a white woman from America is rejected by Timi's mother and father citing problems with her European cultural practices that are not compatible with African cultural practices. Initially, the film presented a stereotype of an African woman—a work horse, as a condition that is '*sui generis*' to African biological naturalisation. This was contrasted to a white woman notably stereotyped as lazy. This excessive depiction of African woman and European woman threatened to inhibit complex ways in which female characters in the film could be understood. The characterisation of Timi is one who is the victim because he failed to find a suitable wife promotes the myth that women must work harder to prove their worthy if they are to be considered as useful by society. If this was the message the film director wanted to reveal, then it can be argued that the film succeeded in undercutting the ideologies of patriarchy that seek to frame what women should aspire to be, to be acceptable to men.

The film, *The Whisper*(2006) problematises the issue of gender discrimination in which women are sidelined on the basis of their sexuality. The film uses the 'voices' of prominent personalities and the 'voices' of ordinary people to reflect as well as debate on how the uncritical application of African tradition can place barriers and 'walls' against the advancement of women. However, it was argued that since *The Whisper*(2006) was produced as part of affirmative action to advance the freedoms of women, some narratives of the film exaggerates the problems faced by women, and this has the negative effect of naturalising problems that women face. The discourses of naturalising women's struggles can have the potential to undermine the reality that men are also vulnerable to abuse by women, even when men can quickly resort to the language of censorship rooted in African traditions that promote the dominance of men over women. To summarise the argument of this chapter, short films are 'complete' in their shortness. The films differ from each other; some are only five minutes long while others can be as long as forty minutes. The economics of production of short films is dependent on the financial resources that the film producers can command. However, some very

short films are disabled from exploring social issues at length while those short films that are a bit longer can allow some considerable space to elaborate on social issues. Shorter films stifled their narratives while longer short films were ideologically ambivalent. The films simultaneously reproduced and resisted political and cultural censorship.

The content of form can generate alternative film narratives that neither officials nor the audiences anticipated. In such as case the shortness of the short film introduces elements of novelty in how censorship can be evaded and countered. The genre or form of the film such as documentary can simultaneously close or open cultural for debating issues without allowing style to be subordinated by economic and political factors in the production of this type of short film. However, since the question of the economic production of short film has been highlighted as responsible for its form, the next chapter explores a film in the issue of the Zimbabwean economy is debated from various angles. The aim is to find out how the language of censorship has infiltrated the images of film produced in Zimbabwe that problematise economic issues. The films that are going to be textually analysed are: *Fraud and Corruption*(1995), *Zimbabwe the best country*(2008) and *The transition: Land Reform*(2010).

## Chapter 6: Censorship and the Economic Film in Zimbabwe

*'A delimited group, pursuing economic or political ends, determines which meanings circulate and which do not, which stories are told and about what, which arguments are given prominence and what cultural resources are made available and to whom.'* (Garnharm, 1990: 65)

### 6.0 Introduction

In chapter five it was argued that certain usages of style or form in film can prevent messages reaching their intended audiences. When this happened as in the case of *Asylum*, a case for self-censorship was found to be operating. However, because the audience experiences are not uniform, some audiences could experience a new form of experimentation at work in *Asylum*. For this sophisticated audiences, any innovations with style, genre, form and characterisation can create layers of meanings that allows the film to confront modes of censorship. It was then argued that whether or not form could be used to subvert censorship of messages or encourage self-censorship, this was a function of the capacity of the filmmaker's ideological understanding of the complexity not only of censorship but of how to generate styles and techniques to question that censorship. This conclusion arrived at in chapter five still suggests that the filmmaker is directly at the centre of how films can make meanings.

Chapter six extends this argument, first by exploring films on economic issues, second by revealing that in Zimbabwean nationalist discourses the land is the only theme that authorities feel, constitute an important subject for film or artistic expression. Third, the films explored in this chapter undermine this assumption that put salience on the land issue only. Fourth, it is argued that the films do so clandestinely, first circulating in circuits where censoring discourses of public officials are not able to patrol at all times and second through informed debates by academics and intellectuals discussing issues that range from democracy, corruption, land and women's role. This focus is a refusal by the films to be channelised to spend valuable film space and time analysing one subject: land. In short, this chapter demonstrates how film fractures expectations of authorities by focusing on several aspects of the economy and debate how these can be understood in the context of Zimbabwe in which politics and economics are conveniently separated.

The first section shall define what an economic film is and how the concept can be viewed from different ideological persuasions. The second section will reflect how the ‘dominant’ ideology can infiltrate the sensibility of a filmmaker to the extent of influencing the stories that can be told through the verbal and audio-visual elements of a film. It shall be argued that although in Zimbabwe there are a lot of economic activities that provide fertile grounds for film narratives, the overbearing control of state machinery discourages filmmakers from producing films on locales that should otherwise be open to the ordinary people. The third section shall analyse how the twin issues of production and distribution are negatively affected by state intervention, lack of funding, monopoly among filmmakers and the unfavourable economic conditions in Zimbabwe. The fourth section delves into Zimbabwe’s market structure for films in order to find out how conditions of supply and demand can place severe limitations to a film dealing with *not-so-popular* themes such as economics. The sections that follow shall textually analyse three films *Fraud and Corruption* (1995), *Zimbabwe The Best Country*(2008) and *The Transition: The Land Reform*(2010). The aim is to critically expose the buried narratives of censorship within the film’s verbal and visual elements. It is also to show that the very act of dealing with the *not-so-popular* theme of economics in film subverts the shrinking public culture in Zimbabwe where debates are narrowed to politics of polarity between the ruling party and the opposition parties.

## **6.1 Defining the Economic Film**

In Zimbabwe, it is common to refer to a film as being ‘political’ or ‘cultural’ depending on the depth to which the film explores issues to do with power relations or social conflicts that bring about change or ‘newness’. The nomenclature may however, seem odd, unsuitable or less convincing when a reference is done to describe a film that centralises an economic theme in representing life experiences. An ‘economic film’ can be defined as one that verbally and audio-visually articulates the socio-cultural impact of economic policies fashioned out by a government to extend its economic interests and hegemonic grip onto people’s thought patterns(Wayne, 2005). This definition by Wayne (2005) carries three vital strands, that: (1) the economic film should express the socio-cultural impact of economic policies pursued by a government, (2) the film should unveil the vested economic interests of a government in pursuing a given policy, (3) the film should locate the hegemonic tendencies of a government in implementing its economic policies.

In the 'dominant thesis' paradigm in media studies, privilege is accorded to the characterisation of power relations in terms of binary of the powerful/powerless to explain how economic power is exercised by the government to control how people think and act. Following this lopsided perspective in Marxist parlance, any film structured to reflect class struggles born out of unequal material conditions of members within society can qualify to be an 'economic film'. Garnham writes that:

'A delimited group, pursuing economic or political ends, determines which meanings circulate and which do not, which stories are told and about what, which arguments are given prominence and what cultural resources are made available and to whom.' (1990: 65)

An analysis of the type proffered by Garnham (1990) is vital in uncovering discourses of power relations in which a privileged group with the financial power to produce films can determine the content of film, and the purpose to which that film content is put to use.

As argued above this view of an 'economic film' is deterministic because it vests extraordinary capacity in the ruling class to control of the economic activities of the ruled. The view fails to recognise the fact that ordinary people in general and film directed by the subaltern in particular possess the capacity to generate counter-narratives against normative ways of interpreting the economic challenges facing a country. Also, an 'economic film' is rooted in the film's ability to create 'a dialectical image' (Peleg, 1993: 46) that teases out imaginative and creative readings in audiences' assessment of economic issues being screened. The implication is that the slipperiness and transformative nature of a film dealing with economic issues carries a freight of meanings that can undermine a routinised way of interpreting the film's verbal and audio-visual language[s] of communication.

For Fiske, popular forces [audiences] can, 'transform film into a cultural and economic resource, pluralise its meanings and the pleasures it offers, evade or resist its disciplinary efforts, fracture its homogeneity and coherence' (1987: 14). Put in simple terms, the explanation provided by Fiske(1987) can suggest that the success of an 'economic film' largely depends on the existential power of audiences to read 'in between' the ideological lines of argument proffered by 'dominant' readings. The following sections bring the analysis to the central issue of how a film dealing with economic issues can be asphyxiated by: (1) state intervention in the production and distribution

processes of film images, (2) the ideological limitations of a filmmaker, (3) lack of a suitable language to communicate film messages, and (4) the blinkered ways in which some members of the audience can interpret film messages.

## **6.2 The Economic Film and ideological ‘muzzling’**

Since the adoption of the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) by the Zimbabwean government in the 1980s, the country witnessed rapid economic meltdown that negatively affected industry and the social welfare of the people. While it was relatively easy to debate the effects of ESAP through mainstream media such as television, newspapers and radio, little has been captured through film to chronicle Zimbabwe’s economic woes of the 1980s. Generally, ‘silence’ has been allowed to thrive regarding what should have been uncovered through film images about the state of economy in Zimbabwe. This state-induced silence was a form of gagging film; a way to censor people’s criticism of the government’s economic policies without showing that the authorities were doing so. It can further be suggested that the lack of interest to invest money in film, considered as a risky and non-profitable business in Zimbabwe, censored the production of films that could have captured the impact of economic challenges that the country was facing as a result of ESAP. While ESAP was gnawing at the heart of economy in Zimbabwe, Hollywood studios seized the opportunity to expand the economic ambitions of American capitalism over Zimbabwe. This gave birth to the production of fictitious narratives such as *King Solomon’s Mines* (1985) and its sequel *Allan Quartermain and the Lost City of Gold* (1987) that exaggerated the extent of gold fields in Zimbabwe, and the challenges of mining gold among the so-called primitive and barbaric African societies (Hungwe, 2005). The two film narratives cited above are a reflection of cultural and economic continuities of earlier film productions such as *The Rose of Rhodesia* (1918) which makes uncanny reference to the theft of a very big piece of diamond by local African people.

As an economic film, *The Rose of Rhodesia* (1918) endorsed and legitimized the paternalistic and exploitative nature of the British colonial system in Zimbabwe. More so, the production patterns of colonial films were constrictive in the sense that they promoted trite and innocuous themes that viewed Africans as fools who failed to adapt themselves to changes brought about by the so-called European civilisation. In terms of film distribution, Frank Goodliffe—a Southern Rhodesian designated cinematographer, asserts that publicity films were mainly produced for white audiences,

and cinemas were prohibited to show locally-made films, owing to restrictions imposed in their contracts by their suppliers—the African Consolidated Films(Nell, 1998). After independence, a failure by the Zimbabwean government to proffer counter film narratives to the trope of western philosophy of imperialism and economic determinism engendered by Hollywood productions was a form of betrayal that undermined the growth of an ‘economic film’. The merit of having an ‘economic film’ is that it would have revealed the depth to which black people in Zimbabwe are connected to their material resources.

In Zimbabwe, the continuous economic meltdown and increase in human rights abuses in the 1990s saw the proliferation of donor-driven film projects anchored on the western models of ‘development’ and the ‘human-rights based’ approaches (Hungwe, 2005). While the donor-funded film emphasised democracy, human rights and rule of law, the film would not be emphatic about the need to re-dress economic discrepancies caused by colonial laws on land distribution in Zimbabwe. Evidently, a yawning gap was promoted between the principles of freedom that were exposed to the black people through film by donors, and the impoverished reality of black people’s material condition which was a result of economic policies engendered by colonialism. In selecting themes for local films, donors often argue that social and cultural themes provide a niche for the local and international audiences who are keen to know the day-to-day challenges that are faced by Africans so that money and sponsorship can be availed to the needy in Africa.

However, in spite of the fact that donors can try as much as possible to muzzle the reality about how they undermine the legitimacy of African governments through film images, dwelling only on the ‘horrific’ through social themes can be an indirect way of attacking economic and political policies adopted by African governments. Barlet (1996) argues that if African filmmakers are forced to make concessions inherent in the philosophies of internationalisation supported by the donor-driven film, African cinema runs the risk of losing both its soul and its chances of survival. Indeed, the unavailability of finance within the Zimbabwe’s film industry has made it possible for donors to produce films that portray images of perpetual suffering, hunger, disease, poverty, political as well as economic instability and the subjects of portrayal are exaggerated for the international audiences. Ironically, a genuine economic film that can shade some light on how Africans have been economically dispossessed by European colonialism and exploited by the new rulers under the

present and current economic quagmire is deliberately prevented by donors from emerging. Ultimately, African audiences are deprived the opportunity to critically debate about the nature and depth of economic and political forces within and outside Africa that contribute to the impoverishment of black people. Analysing the relationship between film art and its audiences, Barlet asserts that:

‘ Without a shock effect, there can be no art: to stimulate thinking, art must disconcert; it must be novel, break with the dominant forms, challenge the audience’s ordinary ways of thinking, reveal to the public that it is in some ways behind the times(1996:272).

While it is vital to stimulate shock within the audiences, in a way, some donor-driven films in Zimbabwe have actually stripped film of its ‘shock effect’ due to the way themes are uncritically re-circled especially in films to do with social and cultural issues. It is not surprising to find African films that have won awards in Europe being totally incomprehensible to an African audience. In Zimbabwe, it can be suggested that an ‘economic film’ is avoided by donors as it is likely to advance the rights of citizens to have access to material resources—which is a move antithetical to the philosophy of capitalism based on the exploitation of resources in less developed nations. In this respect, an economic film would be viewed as self defeatist since it will likely to promote the rights of the oppressed African people—who, according to the dictates of capitalism, should remain in their state of being the oppressed ‘*others*’.

It is however, saddening to note that while the pioneers of capitalism could factually or fictitiously visualise the bountiful nature of Zimbabwe’s mineral resources with the hope of exploiting them, the Zimbabwean government has not seriously taken the initiative—through film images, to clarify its policy position regarding the exploitation of vast mineral resources found in Zimbabwe. For example, the newly found diamonds in Chiadzwa district of Marange in Manicaland—like the ‘*rose*’ of Rhodesia, should have made the Zimbabwean government articulate clearly and practically implement a policy about how ordinary people would benefit from the exploitation of the mineral. A government sponsored documentary film could have done well to capture the vision of the government regarding the diamonds at Chiadzwa, and perhaps help to clarify allegations that government officials are involved in looting diamonds at Chiadzwa. However, much as the activities at Chiadzwa are shrouded in mystery and mysticism, the absence of an ‘economic film’ about



Chiadzwa can also be explained by the fear instilled in the minds of people about a subject matter so 'politicized' that it may mean life and death to individual filmmakers.

The culture of 'silence' promoted by horrible narratives of rape, murder, police harassments and the heavy-handedness of the army units at Chiadzwa in the exploitation of the mineral by powerful politicians may have failed to enter the medium of the film. In Zimbabwe, it is now as if the 'discovery' of precious minerals becomes a curse rather than a means of alleviating the suffering of its people. In fact, the economic realities at Chiadzwa have deepened class cleavages and hatred among Zimbabweans due to the emergence of those with political and financial power to exploit the minerals; those that can exploit the minerals by virtue of having powerful connections in the higher echelons, and those that have nothing but claim that they should be direct beneficiaries since the diamond was discovered in their area.

A feature or documentary film sponsored by Zimbabweans and about Zimbabwean experiences could do well to open up debate on the class struggles that characterize life at Chiadzwa. However, the 'buried' narratives of the exploitation without redress of diamonds by the Chinese local politicians, South African mining magnets and the British outfits that is experienced at Chiadzwa remain muzzled in official discourses. The nature of exploitation is articulated by individuals in fragmented forms through oral stories and hear-say that can sometimes exaggerate or under-represent the extent to which ordinary people are subjected to violence at Chiadzwa. The following section shall critically explore the matrix of censorship locked within production and distribution patterns of an economic film in Zimbabwe.

### **6.3 The Economic Film: Production and distribution Limitations in Zimbabwe**

In Zimbabwe, the production and distribution of films is controlled by western donors and independent filmmakers. The situation in which a handful of donors and independent filmmakers dictate the pace and nature of Zimbabwe's film industry has the negative effect of styming the growth of the film industry and prevents it from reaching its full potential. The economic film has greatly been affected especially by donor monopoly felt through a selection of themes that usually focus on cultural and social experiences of Zimbabweans. Another form of censorship, on film

production has to do with the poor state of Zimbabwe's macro-economics that would not allow sufficient 'space' for fully-fledged business of film production (Hungwe, 2005). Generally, the Zimbabwean government has lost interest in commercially produced film production following the financial fiasco of the film '*Cry Freedom*' in 1987. In cases where individuals decide to have their own productions, the superintending 'gaze' of the state has the negative effect of instilling internalised restrictions within the filmmakers. When interviewed, Nyasha Mboti also expressed his misgivings on how the official 'gaze' in Zimbabwe has negatively affect the production, dissemination and even interpretation of films:

**Question: Briefly describe different ways in which officials can censor film production, dissemination and even interpretation.**

**Answer:** Censorship happens through a collusion of government AND corporate structures. Still, I prefer to isolate/speak of officialdom –the hegemonic system—and not officials per se since officials are often couriers and embodiments of a system. Anyway, any oppressive system reproduces itself in its officials and in its films. Films become 'mere this or that'. This is done by using the system to generate an official gaze that reduces everything else to the plane of absurdity, illogicality and inconceivability, eg. Apartheid films were incapable of conceiving the end of apartheid; Hollywood films are unable to conceive of a Hollywood-less world; pro-capitalist films cannot see a world without capitalism; a pro-Mugabe film has to have Mugabe as the narrative/ideological centre; a pro-Israel film cannot be pro-Palestinian, etc. (Questionnaire Interview with Nyasha Mboti, 29 January 2012 16: 46)

Mboti's response brings out important points that production, dissemination and even the interpretation of films can be forced to rely or depend on the ideological 'intentions' of the ruling class' views embedded in systems of power to control, prevent or even prohibit specific films that are viewed as 'subversive'. Officials are mere conduits or couriers embodying the ideological values of their superiors. However, to view officials as impassive 'objects' or ideological 'automatons' is to censor the reality that officials can creatively implement the laws to either narrow, negotiate or even expand the statutes that govern the production and dissemination of film images in Zimbabwe or in any other country. In other words, government officials are not *tabula rasa* that passively implements policy.

Some structural strangulation in Zimbabwe films feature in the form of strict licensing procedures in which selling and distribution of films is hindered through the state's unwarranted intervention. According to Randall (1985) retail shops that sell DVDs of films with political sensitive subjects, can be denied a renewal of license or be forced to agree on conditions that will negatively affect the effectiveness of their sales. The distribution of film DVDs in Zimbabwe is done through physical deliveries to registered or unregistered retail outlets. Unregistered outlets are controlled by individuals or small groups of people who source computer 'burnt' DVDs to sell on their market stalls in places such as 'Mbare Musika', 'Gazaland' in Highfield, 'Makoni' in Chitungwiza and other places. The distribution is also achieved through sales work that involves the securing of rental contracts for film products and advertising of films through the newspapers, posters at cinema halls and magazines. In Zimbabwe, mass produced DVDs by individuals can circumvent censorship imposed through issuance of state licensing. However, these 'underground' productions and distribution patterns undermine the quality of films as well as undercut the profits that original DVDs should fetch on the market (Ugor, 2007). Mass-produced film DVDs violate copy-rights laws and prejudice film artists who should benefit from their labour through royalties. In other words, in Zimbabwe, computer 'burnt out' film DVDs have eroded the power of filmmakers to control their sales and make profits out of their film products.

In *The Daily news* dated March 6, 2012, Chinowaita reported that vendors making a living from pirated international films say the ministry of Information is spearheading a proposed ban on reproducing and selling the movies. In Zimbabwe there are no laws that inhibit the reproduction of international films. Zimbabwe is a signatory to the Berne Convention and Trips Agreement that protect international films from piracy but the country is yet to ratify and put into effect, the accords that are not yet included in local law. Zinyama, a chairman of Mbare Traders Film Association believes that indigenisation and empowerment should benefit ordinary people. However, he poses, the question: If the government intends to ban selling of African and Western movies in the name of protecting the local market and film industry, starve the local populace of entertainment when unemployment is high, in whose interest is the government serving? What is implied in this question is while, the laws on piracy and the issue on licenses is important in regulating film industry as well as protect film artists from unscrupulous marketers of film products, a ruthless application of censorship laws can create barriers to entry for would-be filmmakers who might want to experiment

with the genre of economic film. Zenzele Ndebele a filmmaker from Bulawayo agrees with the view the state imposes onerous censorship on film at the point of licensing the distribution of film products. His response to my questionnaire interview is revealing of state censorship and its negative effects on new filmmakers:

**Question: If any, how do you describe your personal experience with state imposed control?**

**Answer:** I found out that the state control has more to do with political power where the ruling party wants to suppress truth or views. The control is not normally imposed using any law but intimidation and harassment using state agents. (Questionnaire Interview with Ndebele, Zenzele. 13 January 2012, 18:41)

Ndebele is referring to one of the many ways that the state can invoke the language censoring discourses on film production and distribution of film images that the state views as politically ‘subversive’. Intimidation and harassment by the state agents can yield the intended effect—that is, instilling a sense of fear whose ripple effect is to impose internalized prohibitions within the filmmaker.

In her article entitled: ‘*The censor within*’, Mintcheva (2006:303) points out that self-censorship is a search for political balance, respect for one’s audience, consideration for feelings of others, or adherence to the standards of the art world. However, the interiorisation of the censor into the filmmaker’s psychic life brings with it humiliation, self disgust and shame. Mintcheva (2006:303) posits an important question that: ‘Is creativity beyond conventional morals and is the acceptance of social norms already a form of self-censorship?’ The reality is that an exaggerated concern for ethical principles can constrain filmmakers by limiting what they say through film images. And although such principles may be over-zealously applied, or less altruistic, sensitivity to the feelings of others is obviously not a negative consideration. But carried too far, sensitivity and extreme caution can strangle efforts by filmmakers to express critical issues freely. To expose the manifestation of ‘*The censor within*’ (ibid, 2006:303), Ben Mahaka characterised his personal experience with self-censorship in the following response, to a question posed to him:

**Question: As a filmmaker, describe your experiences with self-censorship.**

**Answer:** I avoid profane language in most of my work, even if it's language I use and encounter in my everyday life. I explore sexual themes in a self restricted way for fear of offending local sensibilities—I would be more adventurous in a Western setting. (Questionnaire Interview with Ben Mahaka, B. 12 April, 2012 15:40)

Mahaka accepts that he has practiced internalized restrictions when dealing with sensitive social themes. When filmmakers glorify self-censorship, it is in fact a score for the state officials that have created conditions that dictate what is 'profane' and what is not. If the government says filming Chiadzwa is profane and when filmmakers accept this in fear of "offending local sensibilities" then filmmakers become wittingly, vectors in their own censorship. Mahaka's response is profound in that it takes away the blame from the State for the state of absence of films dealing with economic matters.

## **6.4 The Economic Film and Market Censorship in Zimbabwe**

Zimbabwe has had very few films that deal directly with economic issues. The few films that deal with economic issues are subjected to market censorship that is described by Atkins (2006: 5) as the, 'inherent, insidious and hidden form of censorship'. When the theorist Harbemas(1989) propounded the concept of 'the free market of ideas' he had the vision that ideas of all sorts should have a chance to be put to the public, to be expressed and argued fully and not in soundbites. However, in Zimbabwe the playing field for ideas from an economic film is far from level. This is because most films that enter the market are either social dramas that address social issues or feature films with a special interest in politics. In other words, the unbalanced phenomenon in thematic depiction in most Zimbabwean films helps to keep the economic film on the sidelines. Also, the larger film producers, producing more films on social issues, with sound advertising budgets at their disposal can impose enormous restrictions on economic films that are usually viewed as 'non-profitable'.

For example, films such as *Fraud and Corruption*, *Zimbabwe the best country*, *The transition: Land Reform* and *The transition: Restoration of economic stability and growth* are not readily found on the market partly because they are non-profitable or that production levels have since dwindled or even stopped completely. Other important reasons that can be suggested to understand the language of 'absence' of the above mentioned economic films on the market are that: (1) since these films

directly deal with the economic issues, they may have failed to entice audiences that were supposed to create a niche for those films (2) Zimbabwe lack filmmakers who can animate a film to do with economic issues, (3) the film companies that had initially shown an interest in producing films about the state of Zimbabwe's economy have since folded or gone 'underground', and (4) that in Zimbabwe, economic issues can be extremely 'politicised' to the extent of intimidating filmmakers who may wish to debate the state of Zimbabwe's micro and macro-economics through film images.

An important dimension brought out by Schiffrin (2006) is that films can be censored through cases where decisions on what to include in the film is not made by filmmakers but by the sponsors of the film project. As evidenced by donor monopoly in most film projects done in Zimbabwe, interference by financiers has put constraints on creativity, the marketing and access to films that deal with economic issues. For example, when I asked the director of Media for Development Trust where they normally sell their film products, her response reveals the degree to which donors can control and determine the market's sphere of influence for films produced in Zimbabwe:

**Question: Where do you sell your film products?**

**Answer:** We sell to local NGO's, to other NGO's in Africa and Europe and to the general public. (Questionnaire interview with Director of Zimbabwe Media for Development Trust, 05 April, 2012 15: 30)

The economic power of donors and private film producers is so vast to the extent of overshadowing a call for national commitment in filmmaking. Soley (2006) argues in, '*Private censorship, Corporate power*' that, by virtue of financial power, the corporate business involved in film production, distribution and marketing can now pose a greater threat to free speech than does the government. Yet, corporate and artistic decisions are almost always inseparable. In the environment of global neo-liberalism, a film must fulfill certain aesthetic requirements as well as yield reasonable profits from its sales on the market (Ugor, 2007). In Zimbabwe, other forms of market censorship of film images have to do with the inherent problems of the organisation of the film industry, poor inter-corporate relationships and lack of sound marketing strategies by filmmakers, registered retailers and small-scale marketers of film DVDs. In other words, there is always suspicion among

players that are involved in the production, distribution and marketing of films, with each part suspecting that another part intends to maximise profits out of one's sweat.

One other important factor that can negatively impact on the sales of films, but is often underestimated, is hinged on the issue of the language that a filmmaker chooses as a medium for communicating ideas. Ndebele expresses his opinion on how the issue of language can diminish the sales of film DVDs on the Zimbabwean market:

**Question: Briefly describe how the issue of Ndebele, Shona and English as languages of expression in the films that you produce affect your sales?**

Answer: Some people have negative attitudes towards certain languages, eg. Ndebele people view Shona as a language of domination because of Gukurahundi experience and they would not buy a film that is produced in Shona. Probably Shona speakers will not enjoy a film in Ndebele. But people tend to accept English as the official language and films produced in English will sell more compared to those produced in Shona or Ndebele. (Questionnaire Interview with Ndebele, Zenzele. 13 January 2012, 18:41)

When viewers discriminate viewing films basing on the language used in the film, this tends to impose some restrictions caused by a divided market attention. However, the situation can be different when it comes to films produced in English language which is viewed as the official language that many Zimbabweans understand, and or speak fluently. In other words, English is taken as a language of 'compromise.' This view sediments until it is argued that indigenous languages cannot express complex ideas through film. This too, is a form of cultural self-censorship. Economically, this prohibits the development of film languages in Shona and Ndebele. Zenzele Ndebele also suggests that the historical buggage of *Gukurahundi* narratives still has an effect on how people of either Ndebele or shona origin make their choices when buying films produced in the vernacular languages. In this case, the film dealing with economic issues is likely to suffer most because of the 'unpopular' nature of economic themes that can be viewed by many audiences as 'cold' and less titillating.

In a nutshell, the marketing restrictions imposed on Zimbabwe's economic film have a lot to do with (1) the scanty production of the economic film, (2) the monopoly of film production and distribution

patterns adopted by donors and private filmmakers, (3) selection of language of rendition and social themes considered 'profitable' by retailers and small-scale marketers, (4) prohibitions imposed by Shona, Ndebele and English as the three major languages spoken by Zimbabweans, and (4) the lack of government interest towards commercial film production in Zimbabwe.

While the above sections were primarily focused on analyzing the language of economic control and prohibitions imposed on a film that deal with economic issues, the following sections are going to critically explore the language of censorship embedded in the verbal and audio-visual narratives of the films *Fraud and Corruption*, *Zimbabwe The Best Country* and *The transition: Land Reform*.

### **6:5 *Fraud and Corruption*(1995) and the paradox of 'non-disclosures' in Zimbabwe's official discourses**

The film *Fraud and Corruption*(1995) is the brainchild of the Zimbabwe Institute of Public Administration and Management. Produced in the form of a documentary narrative, *Fraud and Corruption*(1995) was designed for use in the training of public service officials. With the shrinking of Zimbabwe's economy, most people are tempted to make a living through unscrupulous means involving fraud and corruption. In Zimbabwe, fraud and corruption is a cancer that is threatening to tear apart the economic and social fabric of the society. Fraud and corruption are practiced by peoples of different gender, age group, class, race and educational background. *Fraud and Corruption*(1995) singles out public officials as the major culprits of fraud and corruption, though, such a selective treatment suppresses or censors alternative discourses of 'truths' that can also point out at 'top' government officials and those in the private sector that are also major culprits involved in acts of fraud and corruption.

#### **6.5.0 Causes of fraud and corruption in the public service**

The film *Fraud and Corruption*(1995) begins with visual images showing newspapers awash with bold headings reporting cases of fraud and corruption. The presenter Florence Sachikonye gives a brief summary of how fraud and corruption in the public service sectors have become rampant to the extent of threatening the economic and social gains that Zimbabwe achieved since independence in 1980. The film narrative switches to show the visuals depicting Chef Chinyanga negotiating a deal



involving twelve thousand dollars. Chef Chinyanga has employed his grand son who runs errands as well as acts as a 'go-between' responsible for negotiating deals on behalf of his grand-father. The documentary narrative commissions the voice of Dr Mhloyi of the University of Zimbabwe to explain why people engage in acts of fraud and corruption. Mhloyi says that lack of employment, lack of finance to start small businesses and lack of the spirit of self initiative can force individuals to commit acts of fraud and corruption. Dr Mhloyi's explanation leaves out factors such as lack of sound investment and rapid deterioration of economic growth that result in massive retrenchments of workers who were ready to do anything that would make them survive as contributing factors to the scourge of fraud and corruption.

In the film, Dr Mambo—Permanent Secretary of public service, comes in from a slightly different angle when in the documentary narrative, he says that, 'I think fraud and corruption is being caused by people whose mind is still encrusted in tribalism. These people lack cohesive national ethos'. Mambo's sociological perspective is supported by Professor Gaidzanwa of the Sociological department of the University of Zimbabwe who asserts that, 'In work places, some people aim to create fiefdoms and thereby create monopolies in business. This mentality of 'get rich quick' has resulted in increased cases of fraud and corruption'.

In the documentary film, the institutionalisation of fraud and corruption is confirmed through visual images in which Chef Chinyanga colludes with a manager of an electric company to deal in stolen electrical equipment. This portrayal of Chef Chinyanga in the film confirms the sociological factors described Dr Mambo and Professor Gaidzanwa as important in contributing in encouraging and entrenching a culture of fraud and corruption. Dr Mambo and Professor Gaidzainwa do not emphasise that fraud and corruption also happens with the same intensity in nthe private sector. Focusing only on the public servants can prevent people from realising that in most cases it is the private sector that brings bribes to public servants. In other words censorship is also manifested in the ways academics conceptualise issues, focusing on one side and not the other.

Although the film narrative uses Chef Chinyanga as a metaphor to depict the moral decadence of those people holding higher offices, the narrative 'silences' alternative explanations that give a realistic picture about the pervasiveness of fraud and corruption in Zimbabwe. For example, the Crime Reporter for *The Herald*, dated Tuesday 6 March, 2012 wrote that:

‘...Legislators wanted by the Anti-Corruption Commission on allegations of abusing the Community Development Fund have allegedly gone into hiding...Pumula legislator Albert Mhlangu(MDC-T) was arrested by the Anti-Corruption Commission officials on allegations of abusing the Community Development Fund’ ( p, 6).

The reporter goes on to say that, ‘Mhlangu was accused of failing to account for US\$7 000 from the US\$50 000 initially given to him’ (p.6). To further demonstrate that fraud and corruption can transcend political boundaries, the Crime Reporter says that, ‘...Magunje legislator Franco Ndambakuwa (ZANU PF) was arrested on allegations of failing to account for US\$39 000 from the US\$50 000, he received to develop his constituency’ (p. 6). From the information given by the Crime Reporter, some interpretations can be made to reflect that: (1) in Zimbabwe fraud and corruption cuts across political boundaries, (2) greediness can be given as one of the factors that motivate individuals to commit act of fraud and corruption, (3) film images can fail to effectively expose cases of fraud and corruption when its director impose self-censorship on himself/herself.

The above readings that can be contrasted to the visual grammar of the film *Fraud and Corruption(1995)* are informed by the reality that film images are not seen only for what they are, but for what they are for the subjects of interpretation(Fuery and Fuery, 2003). What this implies is that, while the audience can be seduced by the economic and social positioning of the images of *Fraud and Corruption(1995)* audiences can have the power to question the basis from within which the film’s images are constructed. In other words, an alternative reading that can be proffered is that the scourge of corruption in Zimbabwe can mutate as a manifestation of power politics in which the ruling class in Zimbabwe exercise a firm grip on economic resources that it can use to extend its political power. The discourses of erasure that prevent audiences from asking critical questions about the complexity of fraud and corruption in Zimbabwe are also evident in the film’s treatment of the effects of fraud and corruption.

### **6.5.1 Effects of Fraud and Corruption**

To show the effects of fraud and corruption, visual images of the film *Fraud and Corruption (1995)* portray Chef Chinyanga having a heated argument with a man with whom a deal has flopped. Apart from souring relations, acts of fraud and corruption criminalise individuals. According to Sachikonye, the presenter, fraud and corruption can make people withdraw their trust in the public delivery systems. In fact, the contamination of the public administration has serious repercussions in

that a 'rotten' administrative system is bound to perform dismally, and thus, short-change citizens in terms of providing critical services. In collaboration of this viewpoint, Gaidzanwa says that, 'what is worrisome in Zimbabwe is that there appears to be a collusion of systems or criminal syndicates that promote acts of fraud and corruption'. Systems of corruption have deleterious effects in that they siphon finance that is meant to start projects that can benefit a majority of people. Consequently, projects fail to materialize and the intended beneficiaries are prejudiced.

Through critical 'voices' the documentary has been able to single out some effects of fraud and corruption. However, an important point which the documentary muffles is that if public administration in Zimbabwe is contaminated the way it is, people are bound to ask critical questions that seek explanations as to why the government failed to address issues of fraud and corruption before things go worse. As argued above, the bureaucratic approach adopted by the documentary seems to have informed the sensibility of Ben Zulu, the director, in censoring information about how some 'top' officials may have contributed to the rot that characterises the public service. As a serious contagion that thwarts freedom of speech, self censorship disavows the truth and it is a defensive mechanism that incapacitates artists from facing themes and issues too uncomfortable to face (Lieberman, 2006). What this implies is that power can have a crippling effect that can make artists' respond consciously or unconsciously to power's preventive or prohibitive actions. However, the 'antagonisms of strategies' (Foucault, 1983: 211) created through power's latent control of artists can encourage cultural critics to explore the 'buried' truths that power would rather conceal from public scrutiny. Part of the concealment is achieved through 'official' discourse of selective treatment that is permitted to infiltrate the film *Fraud and Corruption (1995)* as the documentary fails to explore effectively, the role of public service in curbing fraud and corruption. Or to put it more cynically, is it possible for public servants embroiled in fraud and corruption to investigate themselves?

### **6.5.2 The role of Public Service in curbing acts of fraud and corruption**

Public service is an important organ of government which ensures that service is provided to people in line with the aims and objectives of the government. Mhloyi argues that unless public administration workers evolve an honest work 'ethic' that can provide a comprehensive guideline regarding their conduct, cases of fraud and corruption will not end. However, Mawere proffers a

counter-argument by asserting that government should do something to ensure that its workers are adequately paid. This can go a long way in reducing criminal cases of fraud and corruption. Mawere's logic seems a response to the question: 'How could government expect public service workers to work hard and 'honestly' if they receive meagre salaries in return?'

The documentary does not address this question by providing alternative explanations as to how the government can curb fraud and corruption apart from using police to try and fish out culprits. The 'centralized and stabilised language systems'(Deleuze and Guattari, 1983: 113) of the film *Fraud and Corruption*(1995) projects the official ideology of 'blaming' those that are powerless. The lack in diverse 'voices' about the role of public service in curbing fraud and corruption is also evident in the documentary's limited way of audio-visualising the measures that government is undertaking to eliminate fraud and corruption.

### **6.5.3 Measures government is taking to address cases of fraud and corruption**

The last segment of the documentary narrative presents Chef Chinyanga enjoying himself during an end of year party held at his work place. At the party, there are some managers from other companies including those managers that are involved in unscrupulous deals with Chef Chinyanga. As people are busy enjoying themselves, police officers arrive and ask for Chinyanga. When Chinyanga responded, a police officer announces that Chinyanga is arrested for criminal acts of fraud and corruption. Chinyanga is not given chance to defend himself—rather, he is quickly whisked away much to the surprise of the people. The arresting of Chef Chinyanga is symbolic in that it shows that government is capable of bringing to book people that are involved in criminal acts of fraud and corruption. Also Chef Chinyanga metonymically represents what could happen to the people who abuse higher officers by engaging in fraud and corruption. To the extent that the documentary shows that the government can use law as an alternative way of solving problems bedeviling Zimbabwean society, the film should be given due credit. However, in trying to visually prove that the law is still effective in dealing with cases of fraud and corruption, the documentary has censored the fact that through coopting, manipulation and denigrating ideas which might challenge it (Nyamnjoh, 2005) the Zimbabwean state can stifle alternative discourses that implicate

‘top’ officials in cases of fraud and corruption. Since the establishment of Anti-Corruption Commission, a lot of cases have been reported in the print media about ‘top’ officials that were involved in fraud and corruption than what the audience were exposed to through film images. What this entails is that the economic film is lagging behind in representing measures that the government is taking to try and eliminate the ‘cancer’ of fraud and corruption in Zimbabwe. *Fraud and Corruption(1995)* succeed in exposing the rot that characterises public service. However, the film does not reveal the ‘hidden’ narratives of fraud and corruption that implicate ‘top’ government officials. This is selective focus on ‘small fish’ is a manifestation of self-censorship on the part of the director—Ben Zulu.

The following section is going to explore how the short film *Zimbabwe The Best Country(2008)* deals with the theme of hyper-inflation that reached its peak in Zimbabwe in 2008. The focus on the economic theme of hyper-inflation can reveal the how the film is prevented from critically interrogating the source of hyper-inflation.

## **6.6 ‘Blanketing economic truths’: *Zimbabwe The Best Country (2008)***

*Zimbabwe The Best Country(2008)* is a slap-stick comedy directed by Patience Tawengwa. The film dramatically depicts the 2008 as the most difficult year for most ordinary Zimbabweans due to economic and political meltdown. Economically, the year 2008 is memorable because it marked the height of hyper-inflation in which the Zimbabwean currency virtually became worthless resulting in the drastic reduction of food production and its scarcity in retail outlets. Supermarkets and shops became popularly known for their ‘empty shelves’. Dzirutwe (2005) writes that as far back as 2003 Zimbabwe has had years of economic recession, dramatised by high unemployment of more than 70 per cent, inflation of 425 per cent, foreign currency shortages, ballooning domestic and foreign debts and, shortages of the Zimbabwean dollar. 2008 also saw a marked increase in political violence in which ZANU PF and MDC supporters fought ceaseless battles to win potential voters as the country headed towards presidential elections. The film *Zimbabwe The Best Country (2008)* dramatizes years of strife in Zimbabwe and in the process, unlocks the ‘unsaid’ in official discourses regarding the state of the economy.

*Zimbabwe, The Best Country*(2008) begins with inscribed headings showing on the screen cases of economic meltdown. Some headings read that, ‘ In July 2008 there was run-way inflation in Zimbabwe reached 231 million percent’, ‘There was vast shortages of everything which could be bought’, and that, ‘Due to the continuing effects of economic sanctions imposed on the country by western nations the Zimbabwean government adopted a ‘Look East’ policy to lure Chinese investors to the country. This journalistic approach infused in the film narrative is important in that it factually captures the economic woes of 2008 as well as sets an agenda for the critical exploration of the economic issues visually represented by the film *Zimbabwe The Best Country*(2008). However, while the introductory note of the film chronicles how western countries are implicated in causing economic and political mayhem in Zimbabwe, the film is muzzled from exposing an argument often projected by the western nation that sanctions were not meant to pull down Zimbabwe’s economy but to punish individuals who were alleged to be enemies of democracy, rule of law and good governance. The ordinary Zimbabweans suffer collateral damage as a result of the fight between the ruling elite and western powers. This ‘other’ side of the story re-embodies ‘difference’; it cultivates diversity in terms of interpretation, and above all, it ‘frees’ the cultural image from the ‘telos’ of officialdom. That the ordinary people are imagined as non existent in the film is a form of censorship.

The film narrative shifts markedly in a flash-forward to focus on the year 2033 where it is speculated that Zimbabwe would have stabilised economically and politically to assume its golden years of the 1980s. An elderly story-teller entertains a group of young people as well as narrates the grim realities of 2008: ‘My children we were seeing fire (meaning trouble). Right now in Zimbabwe we are not financially, economically, culturally, physically and mentally stable’. The story teller speaks in generalities without elucidating what he means by the term ‘stable’. Generalities are obscurantist in nature; they censor particular references or the ‘whatness’ of critical issues (Myles, 2010: 41).

In a folkloric fashion, the story teller goes on to say: ‘Once upon a crazy time. Coming from United Kingdom also known as Harare North. When I came in the time before they remove ten or twenty zeros from the currency, there was no food in the shops, petrol in the service stations, and the country experienced a critical shortage of cash’. Visually, the film shows a young man who has just arrived from UK with his belongings. The young man is desperately looking for foreign currency

exchange agencies so that he can convert pounds into the local Zimbabwean currency. He goes straight to the Eastern Union building owned by a Chinese businessman. At the building, he joins a long queue of people who want to convert foreign currency into Zimbabwean currency.



**Fig 9:** Shot from *Zimbabwe The Best Country*(2008)

The above shot depicts a Chinese business operator of Eastern Union. The operator is treating roughly those Africans who cannot bring currency of higher value at the market. Through the above image, the film demystifies the notion that the east is the best option for Zimbabwe. In other words, the film is urging the Zimbabwean government to re-consider its relationship with China.

There is an exchange of rude words as one customer expresses his emotions: 'You Chinese are a problem'. The Chinese businessman replies: 'You dirty Africans; you don't talk to me like this. This is my shop'. At this juncture, the film narrative interrogates the 'look east' policy adopted by the Zimbabwean government. The image of the Chinese businessman shouting at Africans disrupts static viewing positions (Fuery and Fuery, 2003); it can awaken Africans from their slumber that uncritically makes them view Chinese people as 'all-weather' friends.

In fact, what the film seems to be suggesting is that while it is credible to lure Chinese investors into Zimbabwe, it must be borne in mind that Chinese people can look down upon the local African people as the underdogs. The speech from the Chinese businessman 'assimilate, rework and re-accentuate' the words and the tonality of the dominant (Bakhtin and Holquist, 1981:89). The

suspicion that is fuelled by the speech uttered by the Chinese business is necessary because language always resist ideological containment. In other words, the liminality and fluidity of language enables it to de-centre and jar unified interpretations that will lead to uncritical assessment of the activities of Chinese people in Zimbabwe. What can be established is that the reality of Chinese dominance may have elided government policy-makers who appeared to have underestimated the ability of Chinese people in the country to play racial politics whenever dealing with local people in Zimbabwe. The film therefore succeeds in bringing into its narrative structures a questioning of the off-screen realities of competition brought by the concept of globalisation and commercialisation that force some Chinese people to become unscrupulous in their dealings with Africans. In other words, what the film is suggesting is that it is high time that the Zimbabwean government must begin to reassess its position *vis a vis* China.

The callous nature of the Chinese businessman is further demonstrated when a Nigerian goes to the counter to convert *nairas* into the Zimbabwean currency. He is told point blank that, 'You are wasting my time with this dirty Nigerian money'. The Nigerian was taken aback, and shouted back, '*Chineke*, If it was in my country, I would have cast a spell and you would not open those eyes'. However, the mood becomes lighter when it was the turn for the man from UK to be served. The moment that he announces that he wants to convert pounds to Zimbabwean dollars; the Chinese businessman is shocked and expresses great pleasure in serving the man from UK. Explicitly, the businessman says that, 'Did you say pa-pa pounds'. For only half a pound, the man from UK is surprised when the businessman brings to the counter heaps of Zimbabwean dollar notes. The businessman immediately announces that the shop is closed for the day much to the disappointment of other customers who are waiting anxiously for their turn to come so that they could be served. Metaphorically, the action demonstrated by the Chinese businessman represents selective treatment in which some black businessmen chose to serve diasporic individuals with money that had a higher value on the money market.

Camera motion follows the movement of the man from UK wheeling a bulging '*monarch*' bag as headed towards the supermarket. When he enters the supermarket wishing to buy bread, the man is confronted by empty shelves. He soon finds out that bread is being sold by people operating through the back door. The man offers fifty billion for a loaf of bread but is told to buy newspaper instead,



which is worth that amount. In fact, the retailer tells him that, ‘If you surely want a loaf of bread bring out one trillion.

### **6.6.0 The haunting ghosts of ‘black market’**

In film narrative, and within the circumstances of hyper-inflation, the ‘black market’ is mushrooming everywhere. Rhetorically, when the man from UK asks where he could find water to drink, a ghost appears and tells him that that he should go to the black market. The same haunting ghost sarcastically tells him that, ‘I’m *diaboros*[satan]. Join the black market. The fastest growing industry in the country. Don’t join the white market or the coloured market. Don’t even join the curry market’. What is satirical about the foregoing statements is that they indirectly chide at the leadership of Zimbabwe for failing to control the macro-economic situation that in turn, let in conditions of black market where economic activities are not properly regulated. The black market is an ‘underworld’ environment where its social geography is dominated by shady deals that are negotiated without proper legal channels. Print media has been very successful in showing how ‘top’ government officials have been implicated in ‘black market’ activities that involved siphoning or externalising Zimbabwean currency to foreign nations. What is worrisome is that the film narrative is silent about how ‘top’ government officials contributed to the economic meltdown—a situation which is satisfactorily tackled in print media (Media Monitoring Project Zimbabwe, January-May: 1999).

Because of the silence induced in the text of *Zimbabwe The Best Country*(2008) about how ‘top’ government officials were involved, the text remains incomplete. However, Eagleton(1985) argues that it is in the nature of artistic work to be incomplete, tied as it were to an ideology which silences it at any given point. The task of the critic is to seek out the principles of conflict in silencing artistic work with a view of reflecting on how conflict is produced by art’s relation to ideology, and art’s inability to ‘speak out’ against social, economic and political injustices. It is in the significant silences of the film *Zimbabwe The Best Country*(2008); in its ‘gaps’ and ‘absences’ that the restrictive effect of the dominant ideology is most felt (Myles, 2010).

Despite the domineering image, the spiral of silence within the image can be in narrating the economic stature of the Zimbabwean nation can be broken by few critical audiences who refuse to

be mystified and duped. It can be argued that although a film text can be ideologically forbidden to say certain things, the fact is that in trying to represent reality in a univocal way, the film is forced to reveal the limits of the ideology within which its narrative is constructed. In the case of Zimbabwe where people have had first hand experience with challenges brought by the economic and political meltdown, there is room for initiative or agency at the level of individuals to challenge or fracture the symbolic order of the dominant ideas perpetuated by film's verbal and audio-visual images(Fuery and Fuery, 2003).

In *Zimbabwe The Best Country* (2008) Diaboros is a cunning ghost and a trickster that goes out of its way to discourage the man from UK from joining alternative forms of market systems. Metaphorically, this implies that during the economic meltdown of 2008, people were made to believe that the black market was the only place that could satisfy their hunger for food and material possessions. While the black market challenged corporate monopolies in the production and distribution of goods and food stuff, the black market in a way 'killed' established industries as well and stifled the growth of nascent industries in Zimbabwe. In the film narrative, the 'badness' of black market is lucidly brought out through the 'wise' words of the guardian angel that appear in the vision of the man from UK. He is told by the angel that, 'Do not be cheated by cunning and deceitful ways'. Son of Adam, wake up don't you know that the black market is bad'. At this point, a number of ghosts appear in a choreographed singing and dancing session spilling out a litany of the problems that people are facing in Zimbabwe including that of the mushrooming 'black market'. If the black market is a space of heterogeneity where goods and services are found, then it is possible to argue that conventional narratives that emphasise the western model of economic development are discourses that hide their own artificialness or the constructedness of their own values. In other words, in this film, it is the space of the black market – maligned as it is – that defy the censoring discourses contained in the narratives of accepted economic models that have ironically failed Zimbabwe. The fact of having another market – even when perjoratively described as black – market implies that there is no single narrative or road to economic development. The film has implied this but did not pursue the issue, something that could have set Zimbabweans think about alternative models of economic development in the country.

### **6.6.1 Big John: An epitome of discourses of 'trickery'**

In the film, *Zimbabwe The Best Country*(2008), still in his state of bewilderment, the man from UK is confronted by a big man who introduces himself as, 'John the dealer, John the journalist, John the catalyst, and John the Baptist'. In a dramatic act, the man from UK is forced to bend his head as if he is about to receive baptism. Ironically, the gesture of baptism becomes a 'wake up' call that introduces a man from UK to the critical issues of the black market and the realities of economic collapse in Zimbabwe. Perceptibly, this comes out when, in a bid to quench his thirst, the man from UK is told by Big John that he had bloody water, river water, ocean water and some dirty tape water, and that the water was going for four hundred trillion or four hundred dollars revalued. In a rapid shift of events, Big man announces that, 'the water is now four hundred and fifty two dollars', because while they were still negotiating, the price just shot up. The ballooning and astronomic rise in the price of water being sold by Big John is symptomatic of galloping inflation. While the film succeeds in reflecting on these negative effects of economic meltdown, the same film narrative blocks or prevents audiences from locating exactly the root cause of hyper-inflation that Zimbabwe was experiencing in 2008.

Failure by the film narrative to pin point the root cause of inflation may have been a conscious self-censorship move in which the director of *Zimbabwe The Best Country*(2008) avoided issues that were likely to invite the ire of the state. Rather, in her self imposed restrictions or her limited understanding of the causes of inflation, the director hedges around the negative effects of inflation on the morality of individual people. The director reveals moral decadence by depicting the man from UK being forced to engage into acts of fraud and corruption by police officers who demand two thousand pounds from him. It is a form of economic censorship when a film cannot unravel the source of the economic problem but concentrates on the symptoms of the problem.

However, in some ways for the film to have portrayed the effects of inflation and economic collapse partialises the discourses of 'truths'. In fact, Macherey argues that a work of art such as film is tied to ideology not so much by what it says but by what it does not say (Eagleton, 1985). To put it contextually, Macherey is saying that when the film *Zimbabwe The Best Country*(2008) reflects only on the social effects of inflation, audiences are bound to search for alternative explanations that can bring to crisis the 'preferred readings' embedded with the film narrative.

The film narrative ends showing a scene in which the man from UK pleads desperately so that he is released from police custody. While the film *Zimbabwe The Best Country* (2008) dramatises the condition of hyper-inflation and its negative socio-economic impact, the following section shall critically examine how the economic film handles the issue of land reform in Zimbabwe. In this endeavour, this section will expose the language[s] of censorship locked within the discourses of the documentary film *The transition: Land Reform*.

## **6.7 *The transition: Land Reform: The ‘mis/fortunes’ of a violent nationalism***

The land reform, also dubbed the ‘*Third Chimurenga*’ (Mugabe, 2001) started in the year 2000. The reform triggered a wave of violent occupations of white commercial farms by veterans of Zimbabwe’s armed struggle, security forces and youth militias led by leaders of the ZANU PF political party. Historically, black people in Zimbabwe were disposed of their land by white colonial settlers who deployed a plethora of laws such as Land Apportionment Act (1931), Land husbandry Act (1951), and Land Tenure Act (1969) to deepen their economic grip on land and agriculture as well as extend their political influence over the black people. In the 1990s, the political discourse around land took an aggressive tone as Britain—the erstwhile colonial power failed to honour its obligation of compensating land that was seized during colonialism. Thebe writes that:

‘By mid-2003, the government had successfully transferred 11 million hectares, including the country’s well endowed agricultural land, from 4,000 large scale white settler commercial farms to 300,000 small producers and 54, 000 indigenous medium/large-scale commercial farms’ (2011: 309).

However, since the invasion of white owned commercial farms in 2000, there has been much criticism leveled against the Zimbabwean leadership because of (1) the method adopted by black people in acquiring land, (2) the nature of the beneficiaries of land reform, and (3) lack of productivity and the slow pace of economic development in commercial farms occupied by blacks. For Sachikonye (2004), the politicisation of the state and land reform reflected a competitive scramble for commercial farms by members of the ruling elite. In the same breath, Alexander (2006: 181) comments that, ‘In practice, it was not the land hungry but the ‘indigeneous’ elite who dominated questions of land redistribution in Zimbabwe’. For Thebe (2011), ‘*jambanja*’ or violent farm invasions gave birth to landholders with different motives, backgrounds, experiences and

resources. The official 'voice' represented by Mugabe(2001) views the struggle for land rights as an intergral part of the common struggles against imperialism for the full sovereignty of the African continent.

Supporting the official view, Chitsike asserts that, 'Land redistribution was high on the list of priorities for the new Government in 1980. Soon after coming into power the Government established an Intensive Resettlement programme. The specific objectives of the resettlement programme were summarised as:

- To alleviate population pressure in the Communal Areas;
- To extend and improve the base of productive agriculture in the peasant farming sector, through individuals and cooperatives;
- To improve the standard of living of the largest and poorest sector of the population of Zimbabwe;
- To ameliorate the plight of people who have been adversely affected by the war and to rehabilitate them;
- To provide, at the lower end of the scale, opportunities for people who have no land and are without employment and may therefore be classed as destitute;
- To bring abandoned and under-utilised land into full production as one facet of implementing an equitable policy of land redistribution;
- To expand and improve the infrastructure and services that are needed to promote the well being of people and economic production.
- To achieve national stability and progress in a country that has only emerged from the turmoil of war' (2003: 3).

However, despite its noble vision, land reform created land based inequalities, new racial and class cleavages contested within the Zimbabwe's economic and politico-cultural contact zone. Instead of empowering the majority of impoverished Africans, the land reform has ironically produced a species of greedy African elite group who own multiple farms because of their political clout. The synopsis also presents to this study a leverage to locate and interrogate the ideological 'silences' or narratives of 'prohibition' promoted within or without the frames of the documentary film *The Transition: Land Reform* regarding the critical question of land reform in Zimbabwe.

## 6.7.0 Segment 1: The transition: The land question

Segment 1 of the film begins with visual images depicting the key players of the Global Political Agreement (GPA)—Robert Mugabe, Arthur Mutambara and Morgan Tsvangirai. After signing the agreement, each of the players makes a statement of commitment starting with Morgan Tsvangirai: *‘I have signed this agreement because my hope for the future is stronger than the grief I feel for the needless suffering past years. The road ahead is long and will not be easy. Patience is a virtue’*. Following Tsvangirai is Mugabe who says that: *‘And it is up to you to explain to the grassroots what has happened and now there is this new way of moving forward’*. Lastly, Mutambara asserts that, *‘This government has to make some very painful decisions to drive this country forward’*. Immediately, after this speech the documentary makes a jump-cut to present the moderator—Thembisa Sachikonye who introduces the subject of discussion and the panelists to be involved in that discussion in the following way:

*‘This is a programme that takes the GPA to the people engaging them in direct participation in governance issues. We acknowledge that the land question has been central to contestation in Zimbabwe. To be involved in tonight’s discussion is Professor Paramu Mafongoya of the Department of Crop Science at the University of Zimbabwe, Professor Mandivamba Rukuni of the Rukuni Land Commission, Professor Rudo Gaidzanwa Lecturer in the Social Sciences Department at University of Zimbabwe—also a committee member of the Ute Land Audit and finally, Doctor Vincent Gwaradzimba, an Agricultural Consultant’*.

**Question: Let me start with you Professor Gaidzanwa. The GPA states that the parties accept the irreversibility of land acquisition and re-distribution. What is meant by irreversibility?**

**Answer:** Well, irreversibility is a very broad term because in real terms many things are reversible. But at the same time I think it is very important to note that obviously in one sense there is no going back to where we were prior to 1999. But on the other hand, it depends where we want to go and what we want to do with land. What is there to reverse and what is not there to reverse. I think it is very important to be clear about what is irreversible, and I know in popular terms when people talk about reversibility what is always very critical and topical is the monopolization of land by few people. But again you can also have the same phenomenon where you can have a land reform but still have land being monopolised. Maybe not on racial grounds but on class grounds or political grounds or other grounds. So, really, I think it depends on who is speaking and what they mean because it is never defined in the agreement what is not reversed, what stands and what doesn’t

stand. So, it's very ambiguous and very ambivalent. We don't actually know. Each person means what they mean with it, and they can go where they want to go with it.

**Comment:**

From the response given by Gaidzanwa, it can be read that land acquisition in Zimbabwe is marred in controversy mainly because the exercise tended to favour few people on political and class grounds. Yet, when Mugabe enunciated his policy on land reform, he made it clear that it, '...should be a one-farmer-one farm outcome in a de-racialised commercial agricultural sector'. The implication is that land reform should be broad based in the sense that every Zimbabwean who wants to participate is able to do so (Tsvangirai, 2012). Against this backdrop, when GPA was put into effect, its terms of agreement should have spell out clearly the extent to which land acquisition was going to be carried out, and measures that could be taken should individuals abuse the system of land reform. However, the reality is that the ambiguity in some of its terms of reference, for example, '*irreversibility*', '*black people*', '*landless peasants*', '*beneficiaries of land reform*' become a form of censorship that blocks people from having a full picture about the salient questions regarding the calibre of people who benefited so far from the land reform in Zimbabwe, and what they are doing to make land productive. Ironically, if the question of land is said to be non-reversible, and yet some people happen to possess multiple farms—then the statement of non-reversibility is/was not applied in good faith. In fact, when Gaidzanwa talks about 'class grounds' she is in a way, insinuating for the reversibility of that '*other*' land[s] acquired by greedy African elites who think they have the material and political stamina to possess multiple farms. Gaidzanwa's critical voice is echoed by Sachikonye (2003: 42) who describes the action of some government officials as, 'a competitive scramble for commercial farms by members of the ruling elite'. In fact, by early 2003 the extent of abuse was so intense that it received some condemnation from President Robert Mugabe. Actually, President Robert Mugabe had to establish the Utete commission to review 'Fast Track', and issue a directive ordering Zanu (PF) leaders to give up excess farms (Alexander, 2006).



**Fig 10:** Shot from *The Transition: The Land Question*(2010)

The above shot depicts a panel of discussants examining the impact of land reform on racial, class and gender relations in Zimbabwe. To open up debate about land reform is a sure way of revealing the challenges that are faced by the land reform. However, while the intellectuals have space to articulate their views about land reform, the majority, who are the ‘land hungry,’ are blocked from carrying out discussions about land re-distribution because of the non-availability of such fora at lower levels.

**Question: What’s your understanding of the term irreversibility Doctor Gwaradzimba?**

**Answer:** Thank you very much Thembi. I think when we look at the GPA and go to the irreversibility of land acquisition and re-distribution we are basically talking about politics. I should say that it was a process that was undertaken, and that the land was taken from former white commercial farmers and given to the landless blacks and that land can never be taken back to the whites. It can only be re-distributed if we are to go back, and then we include those whites who are basically Zimbabwean. The reversibility from the technical point of view, yes. Professor Gaidzanwa is correct that probably it depends where you start from but from a political perspective, it’s obvious that we have seen that the land cannot go back to the white people.

**Comment:**



There are critical ‘gaps’ and ‘silences’ that need to be addressed from the response given by Gwaradzimba. For instance, when he says that, ‘...land was taken from the former white commercial farmers and given to the landless blacks’; his statement is still couched in nationalistic terms that have the potential to obfuscate reality. In other words, the all-encompassing language about ‘landless blacks’ is manipulatable; it censors the reality of ‘selective attention’ that goes/went into the exercise of land acquisition in Zimbabwe in which the discourses of ‘who is who’ within the corridors of power took/takes precedent. If the majority of landless blacks still eke out a life of precarious existence in rural areas, this reveals the partiality and misfortunes of land reform implemented with the noble vision of black economic empowerment. However, when Gwaradzimba is asked about the racial politics underlying land re-distribution, he gives a cleverly crafted answer:

**Question: So, what you are saying is that irreversibility is a racial issue?**

**Answer:** Not particularly a racial issue as such. I think there are also Africans who lost their farms as well. What we are saying is that the former owners who had much of the land which was fertile inclusive of Africans as well, land was taken from them and it was given to those who had no land or who came out of the communal areas which were congested and therefore once given to these people, it’s no longer possible to actually say former white owners or whatever Africans, whoever it is owned the large scale commercial farms go back to your land. It’s no longer possible, it’s not feasible. We have reached a point where we cannot go back. We can only try to correct the process and legalise it further.

**Comment:**

The racial issue addressed through the response proffered by Gwaradzimba is crucial in that it puts on the agenda, and attempts to clear out the misconceptions associated with land reform. In September 2001, when the Zimbabwean government officials attended the Abuja Agreement, it was agreed that land was the core problem in Zimbabwe, and had its roots in the ‘historical injustices’ perpetrated by British colonialism (Mugabe, 2001). Following the line advanced by Mugabe (2001), it may be justifiable for Gwaradzimba to dismiss overtures that reduce the land question to the issue of racism. However, the erstwhile beneficiaries, namely—white commercial farmers and western neo-liberals were the first ones to label the land reform exercise as a manifestation of ‘reverse racism’. However, the ‘unsaid’ in the discourses of Gwaradzimba cannot imagine the ‘class wars’ or

even the ‘gender wars’, (Alexander, 2006: 192) that the land reform created. In these wars, there was a situation in which land that some blacks lost through re-distribution was distributed to some other blacks. The questions that perhaps remain unanswered are: Who were those black people, and what criterion was used to disposses other blacks and empowers others some of which have proved to be in-effective? Did the reform also consider women as legitimate beneficiaries?

In his review of the Shona novel *Sekai Minda Tave Nayo*(2005) by Mutasa, Makanda(2008:66) writes that, ‘In depicting the allocation to women the author is challenging society to do away with some traditional values that are counter-productive and to galvanise the state into re-examining the laws of inheritance and ownership of the means of production’. However, issues of class and gender among black—as subjects of land reform, are muffled or ‘blanketed over’ by discourses of nationalism that sit comfortably in white versus black binarity. In the film attempts are made to explain the land reform in more than racial and class dimensions. Rukuni attempts to clarify the administrative and legal challenges underlying land reform in Zimbabwe:

**Question: To go forward Professor Rukuni, what is going to be the correct procedure for acquiring land in the future under the inclusive government?**

**Answer:** Well, the GPA has provided for an interim procedure which is contained in Article 5 which the major parties have agreed to, and essentially before you can have a functional land market of functional administrative system which is self regulating, there is need to actually ensure that an audit is carried out. Article 5 alludes to that. Part of it is to clear out issues which were contested before the GPA; the level of multiple ownership, level of under-utilisation of land, and so on. But the audit requires still to be buttressed by, if you want, the interrogation of a number of policies that would then make land to be productively used. And two of the most important elements of that policy is the Land Tenure Security Policy and The Land Administration Information System Policy which make it possible to transfer land, trade it whatever with minimal bureaucratic impediment. And probably urgent is the compensation issue because there are those farmers whose land still has to be compensated, and GPA provides that room. So those three things have to happen as the audit is happening so that when once the audit is finished, we do have a clear land tenure system in place which is not politicized. But also the system becomes self-regulating within provincial and national court systems.

**Comment:**

If article 5 of the GPA addresses the issues of multiple ownership of land and under-utilisation of land that should be viewed as a good starting point. What Rukuni has not shade light on is what the GPA was doing on the ground as a way of implementing its principles. If there are impediments, in the implementation of Land Tenure Security Policy and The Land Administrative System, who is causing that? In other words, in the film, there is a deafening ‘silence’ about the results and effectiveness of the land audits that were implemented to provide ‘checks and balances’ to the land reform programme. Media should have gazetted the results of the land audits, and if discrepancies were noted, government has the duty to inform people where things were going wrong or going on well. Article 5(5.9a) of the GPA states clearly that Zimbabwean political parties had to agree to conduct a comprehensive, transparent and non-partisan land audit, during the tenure of the Seventh Parliament of Zimbabwe, for the purpose of establishing accountability and eliminating multiple farm ownership(Copac, 2012). However, in spite of the clear vision expressed through Article 5(5.9a), Alexander (2006) writes that, a renewed emphasis on land productivity, although noble, meant that it was not the poor but those with resources who were targeted by the land reform.

Echoing similar sentiments, Rukuni further unravels the suspicion and lack of common understanding among contesting parties about the nature of land audit, and what it seeks to achieve within the context of a hotly disputed land reform in Zimbabwe.

**Question: You have talked about the issue of compensation and I want to come back to that later. But what do you think is standing in the way of us being able to progress all these policies and other instruments that you have mentioned?**

**Answer:** When I have taken time to discuss with all key players in the land issue—that is those in government from ZANU PF group, from the MDC formations, donors and so on, you find out that the single most impediment is simply a lack of common understanding of what these provisions in the GPA are. Different groups even within the same group had different understanding, for instance, what land audit is for. What would make it a non-threatening; non-partisan independent procedure which every one of the key players should look forward to. But there is no open dialogue on it. There has not been a process to interrogate all these issues. It’s just almost perceptions left to the imagination of different groups what it is.

**Comment:**

When political commentators view GPA as a ‘marriage of convenience’ they are attempting to reveal the deeply embedded suspicion and lack of trust among the players that entered the Global Political Agreement in Zimbabwe. This suspicion and lack of trust comes out openly against the background of speeches from the ruling elite that they are the ‘*only*’ people entitled to control and legitimize the discourse of land reform since they are the ones that led the land acquisition programme. For example, Mugabe makes it unequivocally clear that it is a ZANU PF government that should map up strategies for land reform when he asserts that:

‘It is important that our structure move in tandem or even ahead of the land redistribution exercise so that our people can properly contextualize where this huge benefit is coming from. Have we told them that the land is being brought to them by a ZANU PF government? Have we told them who it is that opposes land reforms, who is it that is fighting for the continued occupation of our land by a mere 4 000 white commercial farmers? (2001: 120).

While it is important to acknowledge that ZANU PF played a pivotal role in stirring the land reform programme into action, it is also equally important to reveal how the discourse of entitlement is manipulated by some unscrupulous elements within ZANU PF to advance selfish interests. If members of the GPA express their misgivings about the partisan and threatening nature of land reform, there are perhaps, attempting to highlight the restrictive and prohibitive nature of land reform that allows a ‘selected’ few to benefit as well as create conditions for corruption and abuse. In the same forte, Makanda alludes to the, ‘... corrupt tendencies exhibited by misguided officials, some war veterans and ‘middleman leaders’ who were responsible for the distribution of the land’ (2008:67). Ultimately, in the absence of an open dialogue that can clear the suspicion and wrong perceptions about the focus of GPA in context of land reform, ordinary people can be blocked from having enlightened information about the direction and benefits of land acquisition.

**6.7.1 Segment 2: The transition: The land question**

Segment 2 starts with the moderator providing a brief summary of the major concerns that were discussed in segment 1:

‘We are discussing the land question this evening and we had just touched on the issue of compensation. According to GPA it’s agreed that the obligation to compensate former land owners rests with former colonial powers’.

**Question: How do you envisage that happening Professor Mafongoya?**

**Answer:** Yes, compensation as Professor Rukuni pointed out is very critical. Whether we use the seller-willing-buyer concept or state coercion to acquire land for re-distribution or reform. There is always that the gainers have to pay the losers. Now, conceptually the way it was done, and historically that the British were supposed to pay at that time, elapsed. So, it means then that the government, if they access fiscal money to pay, they should compensate the losers or those who are selling land because there is a dichotomy in this land issue we are talking about. They are white settlers who bought land who invested on it. They are those who grabbed land from the people and who didn’t pay anything. So, to say politically that white people grabbed land and even black people who bought farms and invested, they were grabbing it or whatever criteria was used is not justified. So, the issue is now: Does the government has the resources to invest on land? Apparently, they are not there. Now, how do you get the resources? It means you might have to re-engage with those donors who release those resources. Then that asks for a bigger policy framework. Professor Gaidzanwa and Doctor Gwaradzimba alluded to that point. Even those who are settled, there is no free ranch here. They are not paying taxes; you just get a farm, and you just get a house. So, if you start putting a system; a framework in place, even raising revenue, taxing them in one way or the other to build infrastructure, to make those farms productive, and that does contribute to potential compensation. So, I think there is an issue which is very ambiguous here. If we are talking in chemistry, this is an amorphous oxide.

**Comment:**

The issue of compensation remains thorny within the context of Zimbabwean land reform. If the argument of the state is to go by that Britain was supposed to compensate for land grabbed during colonialism, then the same principle could also apply to land that was taken from blacks and whites during the land acquisition programme. Yet, the Zimbabwean government argues that land reform is just but one of the national projects that is focused on retaining the economy to their rightful owners—the majority of black people in Zimbabwe (Mugabe, 2001). The foregoing is plausible if it is/was carried out within the spirit of fairness and honesty. However, the situation on the ground

reflects otherwise. That some war veterans and ‘middleman leaders’ (Makanda, 2008: 67) are the ones that are enjoying the best out of land reform programme, is beyond contestation. In addition, Mafongoya is skeptical about the capability of government to sponsor financial and material resources that can be invested in agriculture. But in his skepticism Mafongoya is one-sided; he censors the information that during every rain season government always make effort to avail inputs to resettled farmers. In fact, what Mafongoya could have questioned or condemned is the misuse of finance and farming inputs by some unscrupulous farmers that are known to divert the inputs to ‘selfish’ and unintended destinations. To put it differently, the question about whether those inputs are adequate or productively used is something that needs empirical verification. And also the allegation by the opposition that the inputs are only fairly distributed among supporters of ZANU PF party is also debatable. Instead of proffering speculative explanations, critics of land reform could benefit ordinary Zimbabweans by gathering empirical data to prove that government has no resources or that the distribution of available resources to resettled farmers is/was done on a partisan basis. However, an important point brought out by Mafongoya is that a policy framework should be put in place to raise revenue through taxing those that occupied land. That way, the state is able to create a revolving fund that will again be re-channelled back into buying inputs and equipment for agriculture. Policy implementation is important because it synthesises and coordinates various agricultural structures so that they become focused towards production. Also, an effective policy implementation ensures that the aims and objectives of government as regards agriculture are easily translatable to farmers.

In the documentary film, when Gaidzanwa was asked about the issue of compensation, she provided an answer that supports Mafongoya’s viewpoint that land that was lost during re-distribution programme should be compensated for.

**Question: What’s your comment on that, Professor Gaidzanwa?**

**Answer:** I think that this is not just an issue which is peculiar. Historically, these things have happened, but I think we also need to understand African experience. People have had to pay. I know about Uganda, for example, a lot of Asians have had their properties restored to them and they have had to be paid. You cannot just get away by not paying. You just grab things and hope for the

best. Many people have invested on land. They are black people today, I was doing research on them, who bought their farms and have them grabbed. They were kicked out.

**Question: But the question is: Who will pay?**

**Answer:** Well, all of us will pay because eventually all of us will pay. What happens is that any kind of state at any point in history does these things. But the debt is inherited by the people of that state. So, even if we were to look for aid, donors and so forth that would be one of the conditionalities. We were going to pay either through concessional or non-concessional loans or through whatever aid because the point is that all the countries where these things have happened, people have to pay. I think the example of Uganda is a very important one. It's very clear that you will pay and whether it is today, in ten years or twenty years because you cannot leave in a globalised community on your own. Other Africans will also be tainted and will have to bear the burden with us. In many cases where you have this kind of upheaval, its fall out is imposed on other countries. The South Africans, you know have had to bear a lot of this. All our neighbours—they are bearing the cost for the upheaval that took place in Zimbabwe. We are paying the price through the displacement of our capital and our human resources, and of course, how do we have to build our country without meeting the obligation of paying debts. I think it is very important for us to understand that internationally we will pay. And also we are not very strong, and very big and powerful country. How do we resist paying, and I think that is very important. You have also to locate yourself in the international domain.

**Comment:**

Although both Gaidzanwa and Mafongoya agree with the idea of compensation, the two differ on the methodologies that can be deployed. While Mafongoya believes that government should compensate for land it has acquired through land reform, Gaidzanwa places compensation in the hands of all Zimbabweans. She is emphatic about collective compensation when she asserts that, *'Well, all of us will pay....What happens is that any kind of state at any point in history does these things. But the debt is inherited by the people of that state'*. The dimension that Gaidzanwa brings out is quite interesting in that it exposes the 'censored or unsaid' in official discourses that taxing citizens, seeking aid from neighbouring countries or the international community to compensate for land is, ironically, a manifestation of how people are made to pay for land acquired by the government.

Gaidzanwa goes further to use Uganda to illustrate her point that no-matter what, land is always compensated for by the citizens of the country where land acquisition would have taken place. Still, Gaidzanwa would argue that the fall out of the economic upheaval resonated in neighbouring countries by placing a heavy burden on their economies. For example, South Africa, Botswana and Namibia are bearing the cost of the upheaval that took place in Zimbabwe. In addition, Zimbabwe lost capital and human resources in the process. However, to critics such as Makanda, the Zimbabwean land reform as depicted through the Shona novel '*Sekai Minda Tave Nayo*' (2005) is a response to:

'South Africa, America and the West in general, who expressed cynicism about Zimbabwe's land empowerment model, and, in particular, a xenophobic attitude towards black foreigners(who are derisively described as 'Makwerekwere') for migrating (mostly to South Africa) during the fast track land reform programme in Zimbabwe'(2008: 65).

For Alexander the land reform, '...remained enmeshed in contestations over authority, over loyalty and belonging. Land claims were simultenously multiplied and sidelined, tied to the mis/fortunes of a violent nationalism, and hedged against the promise of an alternative politics' (2006:194). The contradictory picture that comes out of the assessment made by Gaidzanwa, Makanda(2008) and Alexander(2006) about the issue of land reform in Zimbabwe brings to the fore the diverse 'voices' that are symbolic of the heterogenous nature of responses that characterise discourses on the successes and failures of Third Chimurenga. It is a mark of success for the documentary film to have provoked such a diversity of views on the land issue. This diversity reflects that film can engage the theme of economics in Zimbabwe. For example, in documentary film, in his response, Rukuni delves deeper into the question of land reform by providing three important factors that complicate the issue of compensation.

**Question: Considering the amount of controversy that has surrounded the land reform programme, do you think that perhaps countries in Southern Africa can assist or can give some support in the question of compensation, Professor Rukuni?**

**Answer:** Well, it's not that straightforward. I think the provisions in the GPA are sound. The principles are sound basically because land derives its value from the improvements that take place. That's why there is separation between the British colonisers paying for the land and then the improvements are paid by Zimbabwean government. The Zimbabwean government is the authority which actually appropriated the land. So, the principles are straightforward. The problems are in the



detail. I think three things are layered together which complicate the compensation issue. Where, ordinarily in other situations, it should be simpler. The first one is the issue of race because decolonization meant that, in theory, land that was owned by whites was supposed to be distributed to blacks. If land was to be appropriated from people of the same colour and distributed to other classes of people of the same colour that complication wouldn't be there. Then finally, land is appropriated and then distributed to people who, at the face of it, have no obligation to assist the government in the actual compensation for that land. In situations where land reform programme is part and parcel of an agrarian reform programme—in other words, you are doing so to broaden the economic base and to ensure that the agricultural sector eventually becomes the engine that drives the whole economy, that process would have ensured that as government is appropriating land and distributing it to other classes, those people getting it are actually quickly screened before the distribution as people who can invest in that land. People who can assist compensation for it or if that isn't the case, there are financial institutions which would allow for that to happen. Alternatively, if it's a situation that there is no immediate destabilisation of economy, you can buy a period of five to ten years during which, essentially, those who are judged not to be suitable on that land can then be taken out. In other words, they will have an instrument which makes it possible for them to be weeded out as you replace them with more competent farmers.

**Comment:**

According to Rukuni, there are basically three things that complicate the issue of compensation, and these are: (1) the issue of race as it practically manifest itself in which the ideology of decolonization is used to explain why land that was owned by whites was supposed to be re-distributed among black people, (2) re-distribution was also played through the politics of colour in which white commercial farmers lost out, and (3) land was distributed to people who had no obligation of compensation for it. The last point is particularly important if one considers the reality that when black people occupied land, the government used official rhetoric and propaganda (Alexander, 2006) to win the support of people by telling them that blacks had no obligation whatsoever to pay for land that rightfully belonged to them. And sometimes the lack of commitment displayed by some resettled farmers is a way of demonstrating their power over land, and that they cannot be made to account for that which belongs to them. This kind of attitude has actually blocked or even destroyed

the vision of Zimbabwe as the ‘bread basket of Africa’ that should be fulfilled through productive agriculture. However, contrary to whole-sale images of chaos, destruction and violence the research carried out by Scoones, etal (2010) revealed that the question of land reform in Zimbabwe is a complex one that requires solid, nuanced, ‘on-the-ground’ research aimed at finding out what exactly happened to whom and where with what consequences.

It is pertinent to point out that although Rukuni outlines in general the factors that make compensation difficult to apply in Zimbabwe, his response did not treat fairly the question he was asked. One would have anticipated Rukuni to critically analyse the factors that hinder the Southern African region from assisting or giving support within the context of compensation for land in Zimbabwe. In other words, the ‘selective attention’ that Rukuni gives to some parts of the question is a form of censorship or restriction that prevents people from having a broader picture about the position of Southern African countries regarding the land question in Zimbabwe. Commenting about the response of some countries in Southern Africa, Makanda (2008) writes that South Africa had expressed cynicism about the land reform in Zimbabwe, and following his statement, South Africa would automatically be counted out as a potential compensator for land in Zimbabwe. This can also apply to Botswana and Namibia—that are yet to face the social, economic and political challenges brought about by land reform programmes. However, instead of looking for solutions from other countries, the moderator ‘comes home’ with her question focused on finding out what the Government of National Unity(GNU) is doing to ensure that land is used productively.

### **6.7.2 Segment 3: The transition: The land question**

**Question: What has the inclusive government done to ensure that all land is used productively in the interest of the people of Zimbabwe, Doctor Gwaradzimba?**

**Answer:** Thank you Thembi. Well, the inclusive government has been in place for the last seven months and it only started in February to be specific, and since then efforts have been underway to try to get resources to get to the people for production. Unfortunately, the situation on the ground particularly from land that was taken over, there is no format neither is any kind of character on the land, you know, activities in those areas. In other words, we don’t know who is doing what or who is supposed to be doing what. As a result, if you are to distribute resources to support any of those

farmers you don't know who to target. So, as you know in the last three months we have had the government coming into place to support mainly small holder farmers in the formal rural areas. At least things are organized. You actually put resources and you can see the results. But over the last five, ten years when the Reserve Bank was putting resources on the resettled farmers who took over the former commercial farmers, nothing came out. In fact, for the years we actually lost production which means we didn't have any format. There was no record of noting who actually was doing what. It was a random exercise, and we cannot survive on random exercises. And that same applies now, that the GPA came out non-committal to those people who are on former commercial farms because we don't know who they are so we cannot support. The GPA cannot be seen to support that. What we can only do is to try to come out with a methodology to try to understand what is happening on the ground, and that is what is called the land audit. We want to do that so that we know who is who, and what is happening. The idea is to have a methodology, a formula on which we could address those people out there on the former white commercial farms. But otherwise the GPA has been addressing the issue of productivity through the rural farmers which I think is probably the best way to do it given the situation which we are in at the moment.

**Comment:**

Gwaradzimba raised critical issues of what should be done to take stock of the economic progress in resettled areas. He says that the inclusive government is tasked to have information about who is doing what or who is supposed to do what. In other words, if resources are to be distributed to resettled farmers, government must have full knowledge of the agricultural activities happening in those areas. Unfortunately, the inclusive government appears to have partial knowledge of who is doing what, and that has impacted negatively on production levels in agriculture. Gwaradzimba further proposes that there should be a methodology of taking account of the agricultural activities in resettlement areas. The successes of the GPA in addressing the issue of productivity through the rural farming model should also reveal success for commercial farming in Zimbabwe. At this point, one can have a feeling that the Zimbabwean media is not doing enough to provide people with information about farming activities in resettled areas. For example, the social responsibility theory (Plaisance, 2009) demands that the Zimbabwean media should report 'success stories' in farming as well as cases of fraud and corruption involving influential farmers in acquiring farming material, fertilizers and seeds. Oral stories chronicling cases in which 'top' government officials who simply

give a directive that farming equipment, fertilizers and seeds be diverted to their farms deserve to be investigated and be given full media coverage. Also, oral stories can provide a fertile ground for scriptwriters of film to create stories that can bring awareness to the Zimbabwean audiences about the ambiguities and contradictions of the land reform. The act of producing a movie about the challenges of land should not be viewed as an impossibility considering that *Zimbabwe The Best Country* (2008) was produced despite the sensitivity of its theme, the volatility of its 'narrated time' (White, 1987: 40). The 'absence' of a feature film about the land reform is in way, part of the ideological 'silence' that censor the distribution of information as well as block alternative stories about land reform from reaching the public domain.

In response to the high rate of corruption in acquiring land, the Zimbabwean government was forced to put in place the Utete land audit in which President Robert Mugabe issued a directive ordering Zanu (PF) leaders to give up excess land. The moderator poses a question to find out the effectiveness of land audits in providing 'checks and balances' to the process of land acquisition as well as monitor progress on resettled land:

**Question: Talking about the land audit, we have had the Utete Land Audit; we have had the Buka Land Audit. What have we gained from these land audits, and do we need yet another land audit, and what action steps will come out of that, Professor Mafongoya?**

**Answer:** I think, to pick out from what Doctor Gwaradzimba has been saying. If you don't know where you are going any road will take you there. So, you have these audits and they produced a lot of useful information but if you don't have the will power to use that, you claim more and more audits. The issue here is to raise productivity both in communal areas and resettled areas. Now, we know that it has been shown globally that land reform disrupts production. For the first five years people switch to their traditional crops, you lose income; you lose forex and so forth. Now, what we need here is to say: What do we need to get for these people to be productive? Land reform disrupts supply of inputs; it disrupts marketing; it disrupts technical information. The commercial farmers who were there had contact with scientists at research stations for information. The people who were put on resettled farms are not the same. You know, they are scattered all over; they don't form associations to capitalise on economies of scale so that they start producing. When you go to the farms people start saying: 'My farm starts from that *mutowa* tree, goes this way, and that way'. That's not the way of doing things. Those places must be geo-referenced; we must know where the

farm is, and the specific area that it covers. Our children won't have to fight for the borders. So, what we need in condition of that audit is the information that: who is there, who has multiple farms and so forth and so on. We need a framework that addresses questions such as: how can we bring inputs; how do we get outputs; how do we get information; how do we get to the market; who is going to pay for the infrastructure which is really in a dilapidated state? So, the strategy needs to be in place. If we don't know where we are going as I said, any road will take you there.

**Comment:**

Mafongoya agrees with the fact that it is important to have land audits as a matter of taking stock on the agricultural activities on resettled land. But having land audits is one thing and implementing the findings is another thing. In fact, Mafongoya raises some concern about the partial implementation of land audits, and yet there is an urgent need to ensure that there is productivity in both rural and commercial areas. He argues that since it is a reality that for the first five years or so resettled farmers are likely to resort to their traditional crops and farming methods, there was need for government to anticipate such a scenario, and thus put in place some intervention measures. For Alexander the Utete Report was:

‘...an effort to limit the internal ZANU-PF spats that had erupted over land benefits, while also trying to serve as a bridge to eventual reconciliation with the international community. It rapidly became clear, however, that the views that informed the Report did not command political influence. Instead on focusing on providing settlers with infrastructure, services and secure tenure the Report called for, just a few months after its release the Land Acquisition Amendment Bill was proposed so as to allow the acquisition of previously protected large estates, plantations, forests and conservancies, unleashing another violent scramble for land in which farm workers once again came off worst’ (2006: 192)

Interpretations that can be made from the above citation are that: (1) the Utete land lacked the spirit of ‘genuine-ness’ because it was conceived as a way to fore-close potential criticism from the local citizenry about the corrupt nature of some government official who were acquiring land, (2) the Utete land audit had also the intention of appeasing international community, and possibly create conditions for reconciliation, (3) the Utete land audit lacked maximum political support in its implementation, and that explains its ineffectiveness, and (4) the Utete land audit created a platform for the establishment of Land Acquisition Amendment Bill, and this unleashed another wave of violence as people scrambled for land. Moore has argued:

‘It would seem that the imperative for speedy resettlement did not come from an aroused peasantry, but in the politics of a regime facing economic crisis; the loss of allies within the civil society; and being into a corner by the war-veterans’ (2001:312).

These diverse interpretations citing the weaknesses of the Utete land audit and the land reform programme are crucial in that they expose the ‘limitedness’ and ‘fractured-ness’ of official policies that are conceived with the ‘questionable’ vision about the idea of representing the will of the people. To substantiate the foregoing assertion, the committee tasked to find out the status of Natural Resources, Environment and Tourism on Conservancies and Forestry Plantations report that:

‘...the settlers are causing extensive damage to the plantations through forest fires. Erin forest lost over 80% hectares of land to fire caused by arsonists....Furthermore, the settlers are causing intolerable land degradation in the forests which will result in the siltation of rivers and streams....The committee also observed that the people who have occupied these plantations through the general Land Reform Programme had not been capacitated and conscientized to stick to the original to the original land use. They had neither capital to invest in the industry nor expertise and knowledge of the business...’(Parliamentary Debates, Vol. 38, No. 32, 2012, pg24-25).

What can be deduced from the above observations by the committee is that the occupations on land lacked strategy; they overlooked the need for settlers to have specialized knowledge about agriculture as well as knowledge on how they can invest in agro-based industries. However, the reason that land acquisition was/is highly politicised, explains why it screened, and even muffled the voice of young people— labeled the ‘born frees’ that had received formal training to do with agriculture in colleges such as Chibhero, Mlezu, Domboshava and others, from occupying land. One wonders why a government so committed to see the successes of land reform fails to experiment using its youths that it had groomed in agricultural colleges, to find out the effectiveness of specialised training. In other words, government could have selected or still can select specific areas that are allocated for youths with agro-based knowledge and skills to run commercial farms, although being mindful of the fact that the landless peasants and war veterans also need land to farm. This would then present government with opportunities to carry out purposeful research focused on comparing and contrasting productivity in order for it to map out future strategies for a broad-based agricultural vision in Zimbabwe. Moreso, allocating land to the youths is one way of creating employment, empowering the youths, and ensure that the youths are diverted from engaging in anti-social activities. Zimbabwean youths should play a meaningful role to boost the country’s economy, and thus contribute to the development of the nation.

Gaidzanwa responds incisively to a series of questions that government has to consider in order to specifically create a firm foundation in agriculture as well as create a broader vision for the Zimbabwean economy in general.

**Question: Land reform disrupts production. Do you agree with that, Professor Gaidzanwa?**

**Answer:** It disrupts production up to a point, but it depends also whether you have got a plan with your land reform or not. Is it part of a larger agrarian reform or is it an *ad hoc* thing where you do something and think what to do next. I think the point that Professor Mafongoya made is very important. You need to have a plan not just for agriculture but for the whole economy. What do you want to do with agriculture? What kind of agriculture? Where is your economy going because you are not planning on a year to year basis? You are planning for your economy five to ten years ahead, and you need to understand where the world is, and where you fit into that so that your agriculture also fits in. So, I think you need to have a bigger plan. You need an economic plan. Is it the old agriculture plan; the one that was there before or is it a new type of agriculture? Is it small scale, commercial scale or mixed farming system? Do you want to commercialise or industrialise agriculture?

**Question: Having inherited the situation as it is now, what can the inclusive government do from today?**

**Answer:** It can still sit down and decide where it wants to go in the next ten years or in the next five years because really you can't just go and say I'm going somewhere—things will work out as I go along. You need to know where you want to go; why you want to get there and with whom you want to go. This is why I'm saying you plan on the whole, for the economy with the place for agriculture, for manufacturing, for mining given your realities on the ground.

**Comment:**

So far there seems to be a consensus reached among the discussants that the Zimbabwean land reform lacked strategy; it lacked a comprehensive plan that would address critical issues of productivity and accountability. Moreso, land reform allowed some unscrupulous individuals to manipulate the discourses of nationalism and collectivity to advance their sinister motives. These greedy individuals—derogatively labeled as 'cellphone' farmers fail to closely monitor farming

activities by making occasional visits to their farms to manage and make sure that land is being fully utilized. The reality is that many ‘cellphone farmers’ are pretenders, ‘non farmers’ and opportunists with no genuine passion for agriculture. Undoubtedly, the activities of these ‘cellphone’ farmers are undercutting the noble vision of government and land reform programme resulting into under-utilisation of land. Furthermore, the mismanagement of land by some resettled farmers has also made some people to become less optimistic as well as express their scepticism about the successes of land reform in Zimbabwe.

### **6.7.3 Segment 4: The transition: The land question**

**Question: Professor Gaidzanwa, to what extent can the fast track land reform exercise be viewed as gender sensitive, and what measures could be put in place to ensure that women benefit from the land reform programme under the inclusive government?**

**Answer:** Well, I think the fast track land reform programme has not been very gender sensitive in fact in some areas it set women back and also it created problems for men because as you know culturally from the previous commission –the Rukuni Commission, there was an observation that unless you have legislation and other support in place for inheritance, administration of land generationally, you will have problems. In the previous incarnation of land in the black commercial areas, when a farmer died, it took about nine years for a farm to pass from one person to the other because of culturally-based disputes. I think what happened now as more black elites have managed to access land, that problem is going to become more generalised. In the A2 and in the A1 areas where land gets tied up in disputes—sons can start to fight each other and the same can apply to uncles and nephews. For women of course, they have always known that they are very vulnerable. The fast track land reform did not have any kind of mechanism for their security. From my research, just as many women as men are migrating out of the communal areas because they think that there is nothing there for them. If they get married, they won’t access land. They can’t inherit land where they were born. So, there is nothing for them to invest in, and I think that is where the tragedy of land reform is because even in the previous set-up, women provided unpaid, poorly paid, seasonal, casual, contractual labour in commercial, in communal and other types of land. For young men as well, if commercial land is inherited in non-traditional manner, for example, where its not divisible, young men who are not the first born will not want to invest in that land. This is because if you are not the first born and you are not in line to inherit that land, why should you stay. You don’t want to



invest; you go and make your fortune elsewhere which is what happened in a lot of colonies. A lot of the young men were usually non-inheriting sons who had to seek their fortune elsewhere because there was nothing there for them in a system where the eldest male gets everything. So, unless there is a system for dealing with land between the generation and between genders, I think we are going to have a lot of problems most of which we have not been able to prepare for.

### **Comment**

Gaidzanwa's *Images of women in Zimbabwean Literature (1985)* has helped to 'break the silence' by questioning patriarchal structures and strictures that undermine the development of women. In Zimbabwe, one critical area in which women are restricted and even blocked from exploring their full potential is to do with land and property ownership. Gaidzanwa criticises the partiality of land reform for being insensitive about the need for women to own land, and thereby supply income to their families. In fact, Gaidzanwa bemoans a situation created by tradition and African Customary law in which women who are married have no access to land inasmuch as women are prevented from owning pieces of land from places of their birth. In the context of land reform, the violent nationalism led by men—a point refuted by Mafongoya, explains the workings of hegemonic masculinity in which women took part in land invasions but are denied full realisation of their contribution. McClintock exposes the chicanery inherent in nationalist discourses when he puts that:

'All too often in male nationalisms, gender difference between women and men serves to symbolically define the limits of national difference and power between men. Excluded from direct action as national citizens, women are subsumed symbolically into the body politic as its boundary and metaphoric limit...Women are typically constructed as symbolic bearers of the nation, but are denied any direct relation to national agency'(1995: 354).

To a greater degree, land reform in Zimbabwe has denied women direct relation to national agency—land ownership being one of the greatest agency within the discourses of women empowerment. Women and Land lobby, Kubatana, and women business leaders have criticised existing land legislation and government's land reform exercise for largely excluding women, in spite of a quota of 20 percent land allocation to women (Tripp, 2012). Moreover, the 1998 Draft Land Policy allows married women to register only their husband's names. Women's effort were dealt a major setback in a 1999 Supreme Court ruling that gave precedence to customary law in a land inheritance dispute between a brother and sister(Ibid). The ruling deemed that women were

minors and that women could not be considered equal to men because of African cultural norms and the nature and structure of the African society led by 'father figures'.

Yet, Article 5(5.7) of the Global Political Agreement (GPA) recognises the need to ensure that all land is used productively in the interests of all the people of Zimbabwe (Copac, 2012). The terms '*interests*' and '*all*' should be given special attention because the terms denote that land was/is not supposed to be redistributed on partisan and discriminatory terms. However, it is worrisome to note that where law is supposed to free women that bore much of the burden of suppression over years is in fact used to intensify the suppression and blocking of women from finding their 'voice' in critical matters that deal with land rights. To put it differently, the language of exclusion promoted by African customary law reflects that the sanctity and reification that is given to legal language is censorial; it hides the reality that law can be manipulated by those with power and dominance to advance their interests (Jackson, 1985; Galdia, 2009).

Through her response, Gaidzanwa points out that whenever women are employed on the farms, they are turned into seasonal, casual and contractual labourers that are poorly paid. The temporality that is ascribed to labour supplied by women indicates that women are not taken seriously; they are neither given permanent employment on farms nor let to own land as a way of economically empowering them. In the same breath, Bhatasara (2011) writes that the Utete Report glossed over, suppressed or censored what actually happened to women farm workers. The reality is that women suffered different forms of violence. These forms of violence manifested through forced evictions, displacements, and some women were sexually violated (ibid). In the light of the observations made by Bhatasara (2011), the Fast Track land reform actually amplified the poverty of women, promoted cases of women abuse, and at the same time, exposed the 'fracturedness' of government policies that are meant to prevent violence against women. Consequently, the scenario presented by land reform, in terms of gender relations, shows that women are still the underdogs. There is a great deal that needs to be done at societal and national levels to '*unframe*' negative attitudes that result in women failing to exercise power to own property such as land. Government should also take an active role in ensuring that women have access to land; that women have access to equipment, financial resources and other inputs that will make women engage in productive agriculture. Article 5(5.8) of

GPA recognizes the need for women's access and control over land in their own right as equal citizens(Copac, 2012). Below, Rukuni advocates for a non-selective policy framework that ensures equal participation of girls and boys in agricultural activities.

**Question: Professor Rukuni, what recommendations would you make for the transitional government to avoid some of the problems that Professor Gaidzanwa has been raising?**

**Answer:** What I have recommended before, I think would still stand in my opinion. That is, for the problem to go away in the long term, you can't sort it out in the short because of historical reasons. But it's a combination of ideas that I have experienced in different countries, so I have just put together a composite which basically says: 'It's important to differentiate residential land from agricultural land. It can even be in the constitution what every Zimbabwean has is the right to residential land because usually it can be given into very small parcels, half an acre, an acre and areas should be demarcated throught-out the country where Zimbabweans, when they turn to the legal age of majority, at the age of 18, young women and men should get a piece of land before they get married. I would say, the age is just a guideline. A boy and girl would have a piece of land that belongs to them in their own right before they start a family.

**Question: Can they have equal access to this land?**

**Answer:** No, No...It's individually owned—that is, when a boy and girl reach the legal age of majority.

**Question: Would they pay for the land?**

**Answer:** Of course, in some countries you pay a nominal fee because it's not developed land. The closer it is to the urban area, the more you pay for it—closer to market price. But essentially it's a recognition that fifty years from now not every Zimbabwean would have access to agricultural land but people need homes. So, make it possible for them to have a place they call home. If you displace an African home-wise, you will have a spiritual problem. They need a home so give them a place they call home, and make it possible that only those who really are going to be serious farmers can then compete on the market for agricultural land. It doesn't completely solve the problem, and by the way, another problem is that we Africans have inherited from western civilisation an assumption that there is a solution to every problem. Our ancestors knew without science and university degrees that you don't always have a perfect solution to a problem. What you only do is that you adapt to the

situation. So, I'm just suggesting that government should make it possible, where market functions best, an economic production and let social function where it is most important. That is, bringing up families which are self contained and with clear identities.

**Comment:**

Apart from considering adults as beneficiaries of the land reform, Rukuni advocates for a broader policy framework that ensures that boys and girls acquire land through re-distribution. If implemented, such a policy is likely to yield positive results since it provides space for young people to realise their full potential. In other words, young people grow in farming; learn the demands and challenges of farming when still young so that when they retire from farming, they would have invested quite a lot in agriculture for the benefit of posterity. However, critics of land reform such as Chitsike (2003) are conscious of the limitedness and the selective nature of land re-distribution. Chitsike argues that since we gained independence, '... there was not much to show in terms of access to land for the majority of Zimbabweans residing in the communal areas' (2003:9). Although the ruling party adopted as its slogan that, 'Land is the economy and the economy is land,' (Mugabe, 2001: 67), it appears the slogan possess credible ingredients about collective ownership of land, and yet some greedy and unscrupulous elements within the ruling ZANU PF want to narrow the slogan and possibilities of having access to land. Also, these are the same people who use discourses of the liberation struggle to block capable people from owning land. These selfish people advance parochial arguments that since they were involved in the armed struggle they are therefore entitled to own as much land as they want, doing whatever they want with land without being questioned.

Where women are concerned, there is a crystallization and formation of sub-groups of rich women with connections, education, resources, money and power to claim chunks of land. Thus, the all-pervasive discourse of inequality as regards land ownership by women should be scrutinised as it is not altruistic to say that all women have not benefited from land reform. In fact, what should be questioned is the criterion that was used to select a class of women who presently are proud owners of vast expanses of land. As Thebe (2011) opines, more research should be carried out to empirically find the number of women that are benefiting from land reform and those that are not and possibly come out with solutions to cater for women that not benefiting.

In the film, Gwaradzimba thinks that Zimbabweans should not be constricted or blocked by the 'present'; they should draw their lessons from history for them to appreciate the role that women play/ed in agriculture and in the mainstream economy. That historical knowledge can then find use in policy formulation that incorporates women fully in contributing to the development of Zimbabwe.

**Question: What do you think women themselves can do to redress the problems that they are facing in terms of land redistribution Doctor Gwaradzimba?**

**Answer:** I think it's a historical problem that we have women that have to struggle for land at the moment. I think when the land reform was started; we should have actually looked back historically to what was happening particularly in the rural community—that is, agricultural productivity in rural communities. If I remember very well from my mother's point of view, agricultural productivity was actually based on my mother's hardworking, and we went to school because of my mother's hardworking from the pieces of land that she had.

**Comment:**

It is clearly spelt out by the response proffered by Gwaradzimba that in rural areas, women do most of the work in the fields. In Zimbabwe, a phenomenon where women find themselves tied to the land can be historically explained. When white colonisers in Zimbabwe created mines, industries and farms, they attracted able bodied men as labourers who migrated to those places of work leaving families in the rural areas. In the rural areas—then called reserves, women got in charge of family affairs; women had to see that children are adequately fed. This then made women to spend most of their time working in the fields to ensure enough supply of food. It is ironical that in post independent Zimbabwe, women seem to have been pushed to the margins as men claim a bigger stake in land ownership. Gwaradzimba points out that Zimbabweans should draw their lessons from history for them to appreciate the contribution of women towards boosting Zimbabwe's agricultural sector. Although Gwaradzimba's example suggests why women should be entitled to own land, it should be made clear that even during colonialism, women had no rights to own land; they were sidelined in the mainstream economy. African customary law was used as a legal tool to block, prohibit and prevent women from claiming the legal rights to own land. The film shows that it is

paradoxical that law that was supposed to end suppression and extend the rights of women was in fact used to stifle those rights.

#### **6.7.4 Segment 5: The Transition: The land reform**

**Moderator: Welcome back to the transition. We are discussion the issue of land, and Doctor Gwaradzimba was just telling us the value of women in the traditional agrarian system.**

**Answer:** I was actually talking about the role of women in the traditional agricultural sector particularly in the rural communities. Then I was to say that the unfortunate part of our land reform was that it was not organised; it was rather chaotic and it was led by men, and obviously women were behind, and men grabbed the land. Now, what do we need to do in order to bring women on board? I think first of all we have to recognise the role women played historically in the rural communities, then when we do our rationalising process, in other words, we have to conclude the land audit and then see who is who, and then rationalise that land ownership. I think then we have to recognise that women play a bigger part because our men-folk tend to be more comfortable in the urban areas rather than in rural areas. I think women should be encouraged to own pieces of land even the A2 ones or the A1 ones—that is big commercial farms. Women should be able able to that. I believe they have got a lot of potential to do that given the history that they were actually the backbone of rural agriculture in a lot of cases, and in a lot of rural areas over the history of this country.

**Question: We talked about women and inheritance issues. How does the inclusive government seek to ensure that landholders have security of tenure on the pieces of land that they have been allocated, Professor Mafongoya?**

**Answer:** Before I answer that, I want to go back to Doctor Gwaradzimba's point which I beg to differ that land was grabbed by men. It was also grabbed by women. I think the issue here is the issue of gender blindness. The men and women who grabbed land don't think that women need land. They think that women are there to work on the land so the issue is that how do you make sure that there is institutional arrangement that we get women to own what Professor Rukuni was talking about. Now, you don't just say that women must own land: the question is how do you ensure that? So, you could use the quarter systems even if you carry out an audit and found out that 1% own that land or sitting on that land. It doesn't give us enough power to say how then do we ensure that 50%,

25% of the women should own that land in each province or district. I think the inclusive government has got some bit of homework to do. But talking about tenure, it's a very thorny issue. Right now people who are sitting on resettled land, some of them were given 99 year lease. We are sure that it was on the news yesterday that the banks were refusing to accept that 99 year lease was collateral for loans. If I have a bank, and you bring a piece of paper which says, 'I want money and take my lease', that piece of paper is pretty useless. This is because if you default, there is nothing I'll do with it. It's as good as saying, 'give me money for free'. People are used for free things because they got land for free. So, what we need to do is testing systems. You can give leases; let's say for 5 years or rentals and say: 'If I see that you are productive, it is a road to give you a title deed'. However, just to work up one day and say, 'I have given you a 99 year lease', is not the proper channel. I'll not be interested because that's not my land. That lease doesn't mean anything; it means I can be there as far as I want but what does that mean? So, we have to try different models of how we induce resettled people to understand that if you have the lease, and you are not productive, you can even be kicked out. If you are a good farmer then you'll deserve some title deed.

**Comment:**

When Mafongoya differed with Gwaradzimba's viewpoint that men grabbed land while women were behind, he seems to have missed the underlying meaning of that statement. If men and women invaded land as equals, and shared it equally among themselves what then is the point of talking about gender inequality as regards land redistribution? What Gwaradzimba seems to suggest is that even when men and women were involved in land invasion, the matrix of inequality could still be at play depending on who actually carried the raid, and evicted white farmers. In many cases men used their physical power and political influence to intimidate, and even physically drive away white farmers. This is where men's power to claim land as theirs emanated from. A strand brought by Mafongoya that men and women who grabbed land did not think women need land is weak and ahistorical. What should be brought out is that land invasion was genuinely led by men and women with a history behind, and who felt the need to possess land in order to engage in productive agriculture. What perhaps should be interrogated are masculinist discourses that some men used to discriminate against women on the basis of '*who did what*' during land invasions. This led some men to restrict and narrow the role that women played during farm invasions. Those men and women who felt that they had no place in commercial farming stayed in the rural areas. Women who

were working as farm workers have nasty stories to tell. In fact, women who were supplying labour-force in the farms suffered evictions and displacement. Bhatasara (2011) writes that women were deprived of the capability to have secure jobs, incomes, food, and homes for their families.

Cernea cited by Hantarck(2005) notes that the displacement of women led to impoverishment, homelessness, unemployment, landlessness, marginalization, food insecurity, loss of property, erosion of health status, and social disarticulation. When women were socially disarticulated, it meant that they were forced to adopt self-censorship as way of escaping persecution should they break the 'silence' about the atrocities that were perpetrated on them.

Rukuni opines that the introduction of a tenure system would go along way in eradicating some traditional structures that men use to suppress women.

**Question: What is your contribution to that Professor Rukuni?**

**Answer:** We need to secure tenure for two primary reasons: first, you need to assure the land occupiers that they can continuously farm for some time. So, continuity use is important. Second, the reason why we need to secure tenure is that land should eventually be converted to capital so that you can develop the land. What's critical is that the tenure is secure; it's not so critical what type of instrument it is. It can be a lease—short tem, long term or a title deed. The critical thing is that provisions in that instrument ensure at least four rights which should not be violated. First right is the right to use land continuously for various purposes. The second right is the right to transfer land to others either through selling, mortgaging, leasing and bequeathing to your children when you pass on. The third right is the right to exclude others, but also to include others because you can't have everybody to enjoy the same rights you are enjoying. The fourth right is the right to enforce—it means if somebody is violating those rights you have recourse to the courts of law. This is where women suffer most because, traditionally the recourse was within the traditional system which would immediately sit in a communal court system and try to rectify a situation. Today, the recourse is in the courts of law that require lawyers and so on. Women tend to be disadvantaged when they are out there so they are taken advantage of. But going back to the question of securing tenure, the thing is that whatever instrument you use ultimately is a financial instrument. So, if you are going to



make a 99 year lease function, it actually means you are trying to establish a market for 99 year leases. For you to establish that market you have to demonstrate that people can be given a 99 year leases, and be able to farm profitably and successfully so that when they take their lease which is convertible to the bank, the bank will not think twice, they know that if this one defaults or goes out of funding, there are many people out there who are dying to buy that lease.

**Comment:**

Although Rukuni explores the reasons that makes tenure a critical issue, it should be pointed out that without the necessary political will and government support the idea of acquiring tenure will become fruitless. It appears that the Zimbabwean government becomes unsure on the issue of tenure because it is comfortable with making land ownership temporary, and this makes it easier for the government to exercise it's the powers. Exercising powers entails imposing laws that stipulate how land should be used, or even evict farmers that government feel have failed to use land properly. The four rights alluded to by Rukuni have also been positively identified by Chaumba et al (2005) as factors that give confidence and reassurance of permanent ownership to the resettled farmers. Unfortunately, the government censors information by not referring to these rights or by partially implementing the four rights alluded to by Rukuni. It is to the credit of this documentary film to have revealed, through engaged discussions, how the government created gaps in knowledge production and information circulation. These gaps are forms of censorship that the government wittingly or unwittingly imposed on the Zimbabweans. It would have been more engaging had the film director also included some representative from the government. Unfortunately, government itself did not allow these kinds of debates to take place. In other words, credit is further due to the film director for having left out government representative who might have stifled critical debate.

### **6.7.5 Segment 6: The transition: The Land question**

**Question: Is it feasible to carry out a land audit given the chaotic nature in which the land redistribution has happened, Professor Mafongoya?**

**Answer:** It's not a question of being feasible, it is imperative. We need an audit. We don't know who is out there. We don't know what is happening there. We don't know the state of infrastructure. We don't know the level of production. We don't know who has ten farms; who has one farm. We don't know the gender issues that underpin land reform. We don't know what we need. We can only

be informed to move forward by the audit. Without the audit, we are just going in circles. So, the audit is not a case of: Is it feasible, is it desirable? It's almost imperative that we have an audit because it will put inputs to our strategy formulation.

**Question: Just before we close Professor Rukuni, what do you see as the way forward for the inclusive government?**

**Answer:** I think the inclusive government has achieved the most important thing—that is, restoring a level of economic and political stability. There is no easy way forward. Well, I believe that life doesn't have to be easy, but it has to be purposeful, and there is some direction. I think on the land question, the principles have to now agree; make it clear that if we are going to have an audit, what would it look like to produce what results? But the audit on its own cannot be strategic until you translate the data into policy issues. What does it tell us about tenure? What does it tell us about compensation? What does it tell us about the prospects of land tax? They are a number of issues which would need to be teased out. And then the positive side about that is that we should be able to come up with ways of up-grading the quality of utilisation of land. Not just to achieve a short term objective. Although we don't like to be recolonised, and no one really wants to be colonised again but here is how we get colonized again. If we don't have long range planning and ensure that we hit our targets, we will be recolonised again. It's already happening in some other parts of Africa who actually fought colonialism and got rid of it but because of poverty various countries are coming back—for example, China and India, leasing land in large amounts. Just last 4 years alone, 4 million hectares of land has been appropriated from government and chiefs—poverty. So, it's not about, we get land and the problem is over. It's about how do we do to convert that land to economic power. Africans are now politically free, but we are economic slaves. The question is how do you translate political freedom to economic freedom?

**Comment:**

Through his responses, Rukuni lays bare a number of critical questions that the inclusive government should consider to harmonise agricultural activities in Zimbabwe. He argues that if the government does not have a long term plan, land can be recolonised as this is already happening in Eastern Europe where China and India are leasing vast expanses of land. Rukuni bemoans a situation that abounds in Africa where Africans have gained 'flag' independence, and yet there are still

economic slaves and refugees. According to Rukuni, the conundrum is: how do Africans translate political freedom to economic freedom? Although Rukuni's argument is credible, his reference to the term '*Africans*' is censorial or constrictive in that it 'papers' over the reality that there some Africans that are enjoying the political and economic fruits of independence while the majority of ordinary people wallow in the cesspool of poverty. Moore (2001), Masiiwa, (2005) and Alexander (2006) have aptly pointed to the politics of hunger that is artificially created by some African leaders who abuse state funds, and then shift the blame to the erstwhile colonisers. It is also the same African leaders who create conditions for the recolonisation of Africa. The issue of recolonisation is further elaborated by Mafongoya and Gwaradziba.

## **6.8 Winding off the discussion with critical comments**

**Mafongoya:** Just to reiterate what Professor Rukuni has said, there is this issue of buying fuel. Companies from Europe are leasing large masses of land. Mozambique, just across there, people are being forced out to grow jatropha, sugar cane, and so on, and then they become workers for the plantation. So, this is real. Bio-fuel companies are coming. They are taking chunks and chunks of land—300 000 to more than 400 000 hectares. So, if we are not careful, you'll just sit there and say investing is coming and jobs are being created. Thinking about the landless, these people have no recourse in the courts of law. So, it's not just a case of I have got land but it's a case of what are I'm I doing to avoid it being taken away again. Even in this country, white people are going back to resettled farmers and say: 'look here, you have failed to farm. Can I come and farm with you'. Then they consolidate small farms and they become big again.

**Gwaradzimba:** Well, I would like to agree with the other discussants. I think we have a challenge as far as Africa is concerned. We are hungry not because we don't have the resources, but because we don't have a plan of our lives. We don't know what to do with our resources. I would not like to mention a country but Professor Mafongoya said that there is some link of expropriation of land back to the plantation system. I think this is also happening in other countries whereby villagers are actually moved out of a certain area which has been kind of bought or leased to a billionaire to actually do either rough game farming or whatever it is they want to do. And that is on the expense of people that were on the land but the issue as far as Zimbabwe is concerned, we need a land audit that is carried along non-partisan lines. But the unfortunate thing that we have on the ground is that I

don't think within the inclusive government, there is actually political willingness to undertake that kind of exercise because of its implications as far as ownership is concerned—that is, multiple ownership. This is going to be a hard task for the government of national unity (GNU).

## **6.9 Broader lessons from ‘*jambanja*’**

Sachikonye(2003: 62-63) provides a comprehensive picture of what Zimbabwe and Southern Africa can learn from Zimbabwe's ‘fast track’ land programme popularly known in street lingo as ‘*jambanja*’. He says that in the context of land reform:

- Populist politicians can fan the flames of agitation among the dispossessed poor. The land question would then be exploited in struggles for political office and power, rather than for social justice and historical redress. Land reform can also be approached through emotive campaigns in which race and xenophobia are used as ideological instruments. It can be orchestrated from the top in such a manner that the elite class controls the reform process and reaps material gains.
- Land reform can be a genuine instrument for poverty reduction, in which the criteria for redistribution favour the poor, landless and serious tillers. In this case, there is a more pragmatic approach to reform, with great emphasis on planning, consultation with key stakeholders, and mobilisation of resources for both capital and social expenditure on the reform process. Such an approach needs to be orderly and peaceful within the realm of the ‘rule of just law’ for it to earn credibility and support from local and international institutions.
- If the Zimbabwean experience is anything to go by, there is a need for consistent political commitment to land reform. Procrastination is a lack of political will, and populists and demagogues can exploit it. However, land reform should not be used for electoral advantage. If it is, then it is likely to pander to short-term political expediency, rather than serving as a long term pragmatic and systematic process of historical redress, social and poverty reduction.
- Finally, there is a more general issue which Zimbabwe's fast-track reform programme failed to address in a consistent fashion. The programme did not define or address the ‘land question’ in the terms of a broader ‘agrarian question’. This is something that countries that launch land reforms should do. The agrarian question is much more than redistribution of land to ‘small’ farmers and ‘large-scale’ black farmers. It relates to the broad relationship

between agricultural and industrial sectors (Goodman and Redclift, 1981). Key questions that link agriculture to industry are:

- Will agriculture generate sufficient surplus to make further industrial development possible?
- Will the agricultural and rural sector contribute to the expansion of the national market by absorbing goods from the industrial sector?
- In other words, can the backward and forward linkages between the two sectors become complementary, strong and sustainable?

## 6. Conclusion

This chapter six explored different ways of defining the economic film. The chapter critically analysed how the dominant ideology can use the language of film to project certain economic worldviews that are taken as natural and essential while the material status of those without power is censored, undermined or blocked from entering the public domain. After that the chapter demonstrated how production and distribution patterns of a film that deals with economic issues can be restricted by lack of funds, competition among filmmakers and state intervention. The chapter went further to analyse how market competition and control of supply and demand can block fledgling filmmakers from entering the market. This was revealed as posing an enormous challenge to the economic film since seasoned filmmakers dominate the market and monopolise production and selling of films. Also, a film that deals with economic issues suffers because it does not have a ready market in Zimbabwe because filmmakers lack creative imagination that animates economic issues so that they appeal to the wider audiences and potential buyers.

Apart from examining economic factors that censor or hinder the development of an economic film, this chapter textually analysed selected Zimbabwean films that deal with economic themes to 'unlock' the language[s] of restriction or prohibition within the film's verbal and audio-visual images. The analysis of *Fraud and Corruption*(1995)was broadly divided in four sections which are: Causes of fraud and corruption in the public service; Effects of fraud and corruption; The role of public service in curbing acts of fraud and corruption, and measures government is taking to address cases of fraud and corruption. It has been argued that although the documentary *Fraud and*

*Corruption(1995)* locates the problem of fraud and corruption within the public service, that act of ‘selective attention’ the documentary has adopted as its style of rendition censors information about how fraud and corruption can manifest itself among ‘top’ government officials. In fact, fraud and corruption within public service may be taken as symptomatic of the rootedness of corruption that abound in the high echelons. Due credit was however given to the documentary for depicting how criminal acts of fraud and corruption can destabilise the economy by implanting a culture of laziness among the people.

But, it has been noted that since the documentary *Fraud and Corruption(1995)* was produced by Zimbabwe Public Administration—an organ of the state, its language[s] of representation is narrowed or restricted so that it says some things, and yet forbidden to say ‘*other*’ things that are critical. This is true in view of the fact that the documentary’s ‘voice’ is muffled from addressing questions related to how the state has failed to provide decent salaries to its workers, and let alone provide jobs to the unemployed or even create an enabling environment for job seekers. The second film *Zimbabwe The Best Country(2008)* dramatically tells the story of hyper-inflation that was exacerbated by the political situation in 2008. The short feature film depicts the challenges of inflation, and how the government adopted a ‘*Look East*’ policy that saw Chinese investors coming to Zimbabwe in droves. The film also critiqued the way some Chinese investors undermine local black people on the basis of race. In representing the Zimbabwean economic meltdown of 2008, the film has however censored the internal political contradictions that impacted negatively on the economic environment. Also, while the film reflected how petty traders and individuals adopted unscrupulous means to survive, the film has prevented or blocked knowledge on the reality about how some government officials and rich people externalised local currency and ‘planted’ their own people in the streets to exchange foreign currencies at astronomic rates. Despite its shortcomings, it has been argued that *Zimbabwe The Best Country(2008)* has succeeded to represent the result of economic quagmire in Zimbabwe.

The third film *The Transition: The Land Question(2010)* is presented in six segments. The documentary focuses questions based on the non-reversibility of land, the correct procedure that government should have followed in acquiring land and the issue of compensation, the issue of tenure, gender and land reform, what should be the wayforward for the inclusive government to

ensure accountability on land utilisation and the politics of redistribution. First, it has been argued that while it was important for blacks to acquire land, some unscrupulous blacks manipulated the discourses of nationalism to acquire many farms thereby undermining the desire to own land harboured by the majority of landless peasants. In other words, it is people with political power and resources who benefited most out of the land reform, and these people cunningly manipulated a black versus white binary to project their hidden agenda. Second, the film has reflected that there is lack of political will on the part of government in addressing the issue of multiple farm ownership. The land audits that had been instigated were for political expediency that is, there were done to forestall or foreclose criticism from Zimbabweans and the international community.

Third, it was also argued that although there is good number of women that have acquired pieces of land, most of those women who invaded the farms did not get land or were still considered as minors bereft of full land rights.

It is important to highlight the fact that economic films adopted different strategies to circumvent state censorship. The adoption of the mode of vigorous debate that was captured through an interviewed panel of academics allowed the film *The Transition: The Land Question* to discuss issues that the government would not have allowed on the state television. In fact, the idea of having one state television in Zimbabwe is a form of imposing censorship that the state has deliberately maintained. In this regard, the film was more innovative in arranging the academic interviews in a space that was not patronized by the government. It is a form of subverting official channels that would normally want to limit what can be said and known by the majority of the people.

At another level of signification, the documentary made use of visual pictures of personalities and academics from the State owned university of Zimbabwe. Academics such as Gaidzanwa and Rukuni have been used by the government to help it carry out land commissions, so in a sense the documentary appeared like it was using voices of people that the government could be described as comfortable with. But the critical issues that the documentary discussed through the diction of academia that values freedom of speech were subjects that would not be considered taboo in ordinary lives. To the extent that the film director used critical voices to debate critically, the limitations of the government's vision regarding the land reform, the documentary was highly

successful in undermining censorship of the same topics if they were discussed outside an academic forum.

The irony is that the very clandestine channels that are used by the film to discuss the important issue of land reform is bound to alienate many ordinary people who do not have access to these films that circulate only in academic circles. In other words, despite the success that the films register in the ways that they multiply the themes that the economic film can express, in reality many ordinary people whose lives are affected by the decisions on the land reform remain outside the important debates. It is in these ways that the films can be said to have imposed some forms of self censorship.

The next chapter is going to tie up all the arguments advanced in this thesis. The thesis summarises the answers to the research questions raised in chapter one. The next chapter also offers recommendations how future studies can explore the interface between language, censorship and film in Zimbabwe.

## **Chapter 7**

### **Re-thinking Language censorship in Zimbabwean film industry**

#### **7.0 Conclusion**

The aim of this study was to critically explore the dialectic of censorship of film and the attempts by the same films to evolve rhetorical language that subverted state-sponsored forms of censorship. The study aimed to do this by analysing the censorship of language in Shona and English films and exploring the language of resisting censorship produced in selected films produced in post-independent Zimbabwe. The study was motivated by the need to find the extent to which the Zimbabwean state is implicated in using censorship laws to control, restrict or even ban film images that are viewed as 'obscene' and 'subversive'. Apart from that, the study also exposed some subtle forms of censorship that the state can deploy to muzzle the voice of the filmmakers. The banality of some forms of state censorship include intimidation, limiting the movement of a filmmaker, denying the filmmaker access to equipment, denying the filmmaker a chance to film important events and withdrawing licenses and permits from retail shops that are accused of selling subversive film material. In Zimbabwe, some of the forms of censorship cited above were found to be applied by



government administrators, Censorship Board, law enforcing agencies such as the police and security units such as Central Intelligence Officers. Individuals that work as mouth-pieces of government and custodians of Zimbabwean moral values also had a hand in limiting what films can say through verbal and visual images. Academics in the employment are also eager to censure using language that whipped up the emotions of the audiences against particular films. In short the ideological state apparatus at the disposal of the government is wide enough and maintained in a way that guarantees that if one form of state censorship failed to limit what filmmakers wanted to express, another more lethal form of censorship would lying in waiting to gag what filmmakers could articulate through film.

However, the study argued that film semiotics consists of de-centred rhetorical strategies and languages that in many cases could be used to subvert state censorship. The study went further to reveal how filmmakers in Zimbabwe have created various 'escape corridors' to avoid state persecution. Some ways that filmmakers use to escape persecution include the use of metaphoric speech, irony and satirical language to expose the foibles and weaknesses of the dominant powers. Some filmmakers such as Rumbi Katedza used unconventional film language including sound, and light, camera movements unaccompanied by words. If state censorship was more effective on undermining films that used words, filmmakers also revealed that the elements of colour were resignified to undermine state censorship. If state censorship relied on controlling moving images circulating in conventional circuits such as the national television, some filmmakers adopted guerrilla tactics and circulated their films in places where the government could not totally control.

To critically examine the manifestations of censorship, the extent of control and resistance, I elected to answer the questions raised in this study, and the first question was:

- What terms are used in the legal language of censorship with the potential to restrict filmmakers from expressing ideas and images freely?

In responding to the above question, the study has analysed the terms, statutes and phraseologies that are invoked by the laws Censorship and Entertainments Control Act, Access to Information Protection of Privacy Act[AIPPA] and Public Order Security Act to control[POSA], restrict or even ban images considered 'obscene' or 'subversive'. It has been found out terms such as '*obscene*',

'subversive', 'offensive', 'interests of defence', 'public safety' 'public order' and 'economic interests' found in some statutes of Censorship and Entertainments Control Act [10:04] are vague and ambiguous such the government of Zimbabwe can invoke them to justify its action of censoring film language. It was demonstrated in **chapter 3** of this study how the government manipulated or can still manipulate the split personality of ambiguity and vagueness to censor the images of films *Flame*(1996), *Gukurahundi: A moment of madness*(2007) and *The Interpreter*(2005). Also in the same chapter, the study has shown how the Zimbabwean government used 'silence', diversionary tactics and historical amnesia from censoring Gukurahundi narratives while focusing on South African history through the production of *Cry Freedom*(1987). In spite of government's use of such cunning ways to avoid sensitive issues in Zimbabwe, independent and private filmmakers have taken the initiative to narrate Zimbabwe's history using their own cultural spectacles. This has, in a way, undermined the authority of Zimbabweans to tell stories that officials could project as the only truths. In addition, this study has argued that although the split characteristics of vagueness and ambiguity are manipulated by government to hide its cultural, political, economic ambitions, the same figures of expression are used by Zimbabwean filmmakers to camouflage their motives, and in the process subvert the power of government to control film images.

Apart from resorting to the use of vagueness or ambiguity, the Zimbabwean filmmakers have learnt to use satire, metaphors, irony and sarcastic language to chide at government excesses as well as elude state imposed restrictions. In addition, the Zimbabwean audiences have learnt to make associations from what they are provided with through film images. However, it has been noted that whenever the Zimbabwean government is confronted by themes of films that question its legitimacy, the government is quick to invoke the terms of AIPPA and POSA to limit the production and circulation of such films that question the *status quo*. So, AIPPA and POSA are used in complementary ways that re-enforce the terms of Censorship and Entertainments Control Act. The provisions of AIPPA and POSA were invoked by the government intellectuals to attempt to suppress the messages of *The Interpreters*. In other cases brutal force was applied by state agents as in the case of Zenzele Ndebele who alleged that his film, *Gukurahundi: A Moment of Madness* almost caused him to be abducted.

The study has also found out that whenever the Zimbabwean government resorts to extreme forms of censorship to enforce the terms legal laws, filmmakers are intimidated, harassed, incarcerated or even forced into exile. This instills a sense of fear into the minds of some filmmakers who tend to adopt self-censorship as a strategy to avoid direct confrontation with the government. Self censorship kills imagination and creativity such that in Zimbabwe, film directors are forced to deal with trite and innocuous themes that emphasise singularity of values. Those creative directors that narrated alternative histories are dubbed ‘enemies’ of the state and this has led film directors to use ‘guerrilla’ tactics or discrete ways in order for them to produce and distribute film images. However, the study has found out that the use of ‘guerrilla’ tactics has the crippling effective of not encouraging free circulation of information and most importantly, films produced through underground means do not reach a majority of audiences. The films are only available in secret micro-settings that are not easily accessible, although not readily ‘policed’ by the authorities.

The study has also revealed that film censorship in Zimbabwe, ironically, generated its creative dimension and productive side. In the same breath, the study has argued that although freedom of expression is respected as a tenet that depicts the existence of democracy, the right to express ones self is not absolute, and it does have certain limits enunciated through legal statutes. None of the films analysed in this study justified state censorship since what was expressed verbally and visually fell within the media’s responsibility to inform the populace. The point of departure was that when laws are used to serve the interests of a minority of people to abfuscate reality. Censorship of films is not only imposed through legal language, since it also occurs through the language[s] of internalised restrictions. To analyse the nature and manifestations of internalised restrictions or self-censorship that Zimbabwean filmmakers impose on themselves, the study posited the following question:

- How does the choice of film language, selection of characters, contexts of film production and style of representation encourage self-censorship?

On the question of choice of language, the study found out that when dealing with social and cultural themes, Zimbabwean films tend to use stereotypes to define and describe the roles that men and women play in society and culture. **Chapter 4** has demonstrated how films such as *Kapfupi*(2007), *Neria*(1991), *Mwanasikana*(1995) and *Nhasi tave nehama*(1993) are replete with cultural

stereotypes and patriarchal values that restrict, constrict, narrow, block and prohibit the voice of women and children from occupying respectable 'spaces' in Zimbabwe's cultural and social spheres. However, this study has argued that while stereotypes in films can make characters to be easily recognisable, the damaging element within cultural stereotypes is that they emphasise singularity of values thereby censoring alternative ways of describing the roles that men, women, children and old people can play in the Zimbabwean societies. Also, since cultural stereotypes disavow 'newness', difference or change, there are used by some Zimbabwean men—through language, to suppress and deny women chances to open up career options in life. When these stereotypes are replicated through a film's verbal and audio-visual narratives, it only serves to reinforce cultural stereotypes as the 'natural order of things' calculated to make Zimbabwean women to follow instructions without asking questions. This came clearly in the film *Kapfupi* when the language used to describe and police women is one in which women have no voice to chose the men they may like to live their lives with.

As a counter-point to this deterministic understanding of the roles of stereotype in censoring new ideas, this study has, however, argued that although stereotypes can claim to be stable, what is refreshing to know is that film is a symbolical medium, part of whose modes of signification favours the fracturing of the very notion of stereotype as a secure and stable cultural space of the mythical, mystical and mystification. This implies that Zimbabwean filmmakers have the duty to demystify cultural stereotypes by showing that their 'constructedness' should not be taken as the national order of life. This idea of stereotype as suture came out strongly in the analysis of the film, *Neria* in which the initial image of Neria as a conformist woman was subverted in the film when Neria, the women emerged emboldened to take on patriarchal discourses represented by Phineas. In other words, it was emphasised in chapter four that the capacity of film to rise above the language of official censorship is a function of the ideological depth of the film director who could provide diverse characters that could be used to represent diverse responses to state and self-imposed censorship. If chapter four underlined the fact that censorship is most felt and also contested within the social values, in chapter five, the intension was to reveal the extent to which experimentation with the form of the short film could fracture censoring narratives.

In **Chapter 5**, the study established that in Zimbabwe some filmmakers that experiment with the short film genre used silence, sound and visions as forms of language. While the study suggested that silence, sound and visions can provoke audiences or challenge them to engage in critical thinking, the same figures of expression tended to obfuscate the reality that filmmakers could possibly have revealed through the use of verbal speech. This paradoxical function of form was manifested in the film *Asylum* in which the director, Katedza revealed how films can work without words. Since film words are the easiest to limit, censor, Katedza opted for the formal experimentation with sound, camera movement and visuals to produce an allegory in which the story of the suffering of the people of Darfur is a commentary on the people of Zimbabwe were also suffering in 2007 when the film was made. However, it was argued that such as sophisticated film anticipates a sophisticated audience that is able to decode messages that are expressed through analogous reasoning. Otherwise, there was a sense in which the short film was so shortened that it started to appear as if self censorship was at place.

Attached to the choice of language, is the selection of characters. Most films—particularly those that were dealing with cultural themes, constructed stock or flat characters invested with limited ways of exploring life experiences. The study has put blame on unimaginative directors that fail to animate film characters by investing in them multi-dimensional ways of explaining life. The kind of self-censorship that results from constructing flat characters is informed by a director's lack of creativity and sense of imagination. However, the study has argued that although lack of creativity can be caused by a director's limited experience, the existence of unimaginative directors in Zimbabwe's film industry is also be explained by the constrictive nature of economics of film production in Zimbabwe.

**Chapter 6** has demonstrated how film production and marketing strategies adopted by most filmmakers in Zimbabwe place some serious limitations to the accessibility of film images. The Films such as *Fraud and corruption*(1995), *Zimbabwe The Best Country*(2008) and *The Transition: The land Question*(2010) that were analysed in the chapter are not readily found on the local market, and this tends to place serious limitations what Zimbabweans get to view on their televisions. Ultimately, the discourses of economic empowerment largely remain a preserve of the elite class, and yet the majority of ordinary citizens should also benefit. I argued that since filmmakers in

Zimbabwe operate in a heavily ‘policed’ environment, they tend to be less adventurous through experimenting with themes that are considered as taboo. In such cases the economic film, being less common, suffers most. Added onto that, the lack of financial resources also impact negatively on film production in Zimbabwe. Because of lack of funds to sponsor film projects, film production and distribution in Zimbabwe has fallen in the hands of western donors that dictate what should be put in films, how and where the films should be sold. I found out that while donors have helped to break taboos to do with gender roles, HIV/AIDS, politics, domestic violence and so on, the idea of prescribing themes to local film directors and producers is a form censorship that is a result of failure by local filmmakers to fund film projects. By far, the documentary mode used in the films that thematised the economy is innovative. The film *The Transition: The land Question* was more engaging. Apart from using the documentary form, the film embedded a narrative of panel discussion conducted by eminent scholars from Zimbabwe. Visually, it was easy to identify with the scholars as well as the theme of land that was being discussed. Intellectually, the film exploited the notion that the discussants are not with the government yet they used their academic freedom to pass vigorous criticism not of the land reform but of the failure by the government to create self-sustaining infrastructure to make the land reform viable.

This study has found out that when representing their themes, most filmmakers in Zimbabwe use simple home environments, less elaborate props, less or no special effects. While on one hand this can help to emphasise the naturalness of events, on the other hand, the practice has actually made Zimbabwean films less exciting thereby minimising the film’s chances of making it on the international market. The situation is compounded if the films are produced in the vernacular Shona and Ndebele languages which tend to give ‘selective attention’ to either Shona or Ndebele groups of people in Zimbabwe. For some audiences therefore, choice of language and style of representation become major stumbling-blocks that diminish the possibility of transmitting different meaning potential embedded in film images. The third question which this study answered is to do with the degree to which film can build some internal creative principles that cannot be contained or muffled by state laws on censorship and the filmmaker’s modes of representing reality. The question is as follows:

- To what extent have filmmakers created film language that resist control by state laws?

In Zimbabwe, filmmakers have evolved different ways to escape strictures imposed by the state on cultural images. I have found out that many filmmakers have resorted to the use of metaphorical language, satire, allegory, irony and sarcasm to elude state censorship. For example, the film *The Interpreter*(2005) uses political allegory to attack government's method of dealing with the problems of dissidents in Matabeleland and Midlands. The same political allegory could also be taken to refer to any African country within the throes of political dictatorship. However, it was argued that while the use of allegorical language reflected one of the ways that *The Interpreter* attempted to escape state imposed censorship, the figure of allegory can be difficult to interpret especially for less competent audiences. The study has also reflected that in Zimbabwe filmmakers can use language that focuses on the social front or day-to-day challenges thereby consciously avoiding politically sensitive issues. But the act of being silent about political issues is in itself political. Silence becomes political insofar as it points to the existence of extreme forms political repression that causes filmmakers not to freely express their views about the way the country is being ruled. In other words, in the analysis of the films, it came out that the notion of resistance to censorship does not mean that films were agitating for armed struggle against the government. Resistance could manifest in the way films refused to focus on the issue of land alone because to do so were to diminish the importance of other themes such as fraud and corruption, the plight of the girl child and the problem of HIV and AIDS.

Still on the issue of film language, the study argued that while the state can use its terminology inscribed in laws such as POSA and AIPPA to block film from articulating social, political and economic realities, some restrictions imposed on local films are a result of how filmmakers in Zimbabwe experiment with different modes of representing life. For example, the fragmented discourses, chaotic or scrambled metaphors that the short film *Asylum*(2007) uses can complicate what could be easily rendered in a simple and straightforward storyline. In such cases, a film could actually obfuscate reality instead of freeing reality for the benefit of the audiences. A caveat was added to the effect that it is not the intention of a film to offer linear story lines; films aim to defamiliarise reality, and therein lays film's capacity to reject normative ways of constructing cultural narratives. However, the study has argued that despite an attempt by state laws to block the meaning potential of film images, and the uncritical ways, in which some Zimbabwean filmmakers approach their themes, audiences have the capacity to go against the grain during the cultural act of

interpreting film images. To find out ways in which Zimbabwean audiences interpret films, I have elected the following question:

- How do film audience interpret film meanings and what kind of values do they bring to the cultural practice of watching films?

An audience reception analysis is premised on the understanding that audiences are capable of interpreting film language in a variety of ways. The study has found out that in Zimbabwe most films that are subjected to extreme forms of censorship are those films that question the legitimacy of the government. Films such as *The Interpreter*(2005) and *Gukurahundi: A moment of madness* (2007) were given as examples of films that directly question the legitimacy of government by presenting Gukurahundi images. Some voices from critics of film in Zimbabwe were enlisted to support my standpoint which was that state tended to impose or interpret films in ways that encouraged film censorship. Some of the film critics whose voices were registered in this study revealed that notwithstanding the desire of censoring films, the symbolical nature of film language enabled the films to be interpreted differently, using alternative grids and that tended to destabilise what would normally be regarded as meanings with which the state is comfortable. A reading deriving from audience-reception analysis is that even though the Zimbabwean state tries as much as possible to use legal terms to bar politically inclined films from entering the public domain, audiences have devised secretive ways of accessing and distributing the films. The micro-settings in which audiences receive film messages are not easily monitored or 'policed' by the state. Moreover, whenever audiences access the films the onus is on them to interpret the films the way that pleases them. For example, the film, *Cry Freedom* may have been co-produced with the government of Zimbabwe and it embeds meanings that project Zimbabwe as the custodian of revolutionary consciousness. But the same film was also analysed in a way that revealed that its refusal to focus on Zimbabwe suppressed and helped the state to censor questions that might be raised regarding the contradictions in Zimbabwe's armed struggle as well as the political deaths that occurred in Matabeleland and the Midlands Provinces. What has also been found out is that the seemingly innocent themes that are sometimes let to pass by the state can carry subversive information that is presented as harmless by filmmakers.



Individual filmmakers have different ways of representing social, economic and political issues. It is through the language of representation that filmmakers inscribe their ideological ‘signatures’ that can either oppose or interrogate the *status quo*. This study has argued that despite the existence of ‘preferred’ readings that filmmakers promote through the language of film, audiences of film in Zimbabwe have the capacity to come with their experiences, belief systems, convictions, ideas, perspectives and world views that can confirm, co-opt or oppose the filmmaker’s modes of representing social realities. This implies that if a filmmaker attempts to create a contestable image about the *status quo*, audiences are invested with the powers to create surplus meanings out of their apprehension of particular films. However, through some limited critical voices interviewed through questionnaires for this study, it was revealed not all audiences have the ability to decipher the multi-layered meanings that film images proffer. The audiences’ inability to interpret film images becomes a form of censorship that prevents them from coming out with alternative ways of explaining life. Apart from analysing how audiences can respond differently to films, and how this can subvert a wish by censorial powers to block the meaning potential of film images, this study has explored the extent to which meanings can be blocked through a filmmaker’s choice of genre. To address the question of genre censorship, the study elected to answer the following:

- To what extent do filmmakers creatively use Shona and English languages in films where the verbal and audio-visual elements constitute film semiotics?

The study deliberately included a chapter that explored whether or not form, style, technique or genre that filmmakers use can result in encouraging or subverting censorship. The assumption was different film genres in Zimbabwe are affected differently by restrictions imposed by the filmmakers or state censors. For example, for its claim to represent authentic ‘voices’ the documentary film such as *Gukurahundi: A moment of madness(2007)* has been heavily subjected to state censorship more than the feature film *The Interpreter(2005)* which was also dealing with the same subject matter of Gukurahundi killings. It was argued that since a feature film has the space or leeway of using indirect verbal and visual languages of reference embodied in metaphor, satire and irony, it can stand a chance of eliding state censorship than a documentary film which does involve less fictional elements. In the same manner, a filmmaker working with a documentary genre is likely to impose self-censorship on herself/himself for fear of offending the cultural, political and economic sensibilities of other people than does a feature filmmaker. This is also true with soapies and drama

films that are likely to explore their subjects more independently than a documentary film genre. The study found out that that the documentary genre can also encourage layers of self-censorship, especially when filmmakers or audiences begin to take the actual people used in the film as uncontested reality. Whatever its claims of representing reality as it is, documentary film is a social construct, a simulacra of reality based on the inclusion of elements in life and the suppression of others.

Still on genre censorship, the study has also found out that filmmakers in Zimbabwe working with short film genre are likely to impose some restrictions on their works due to the fact the shortness of film may not allow them to explore fully the content of their films. Although some critics of short films can agree with the assumption that 'less is more' when referring to the capability of short film to embrace critical issues, this study has found out that the ability of a short films to be self-contained depends largely with the quality of content that a short film carries and the ideologically flexibility of the filmmaker. For example, there are some films such as *Asylum* in **chapter 5** that are structurally well constructed but carry abstract content that has the potential to obfuscate or block the meaning potential of those films. In other words, the level of abstraction is so deep that it does not live enough room for the films to build clear or well definable characters and context. Yet at the same time such short films are likely to interest audiences more because the film's abstractness forces the audiences to think deeper in order sometimes to arrive at meanings that were never intended by the filmmakers. Where this happened, this is the essence of film language's metaphoricity that on one hand aims to present reality as stable and coherent and yet on the other hand, the instability of images and metaphors defer meaning and make interpretation of meaning a space of struggle between forces that seek to suppress or censor and those that seek to expand or democratise the practices of consuming film. In short, whether a film was rendered in Shona or English language what mattered most was the capacity of the filmmaker to manipulate the sign systems of these languages either to conform to censorship discourses or to subvert them.

## **7.1 Recommendations of the study**

In light of the above findings on the analysis of language censorship in Zimbabwean films in Shona and English, I suggest recommendations indicated below as the possible basis for future research:

- the statutes and terminologies that control film images in Zimbabwean laws need to be revised to minimise vagueness and ambiguity,
- Government authorities need to relax, repeal and even abolish undemocratic censorship laws that restrict, block, stifle freedom of expression and ban film images in the spurious name of protecting national interests.
- Filmmakers should use film language as a potent tool to demystify cultural attitudes and stereotypes that undermine and censor the voices of the under-privileged groups in Zimbabwean society and culture,
- Stake-holders that include the Zimbabwean government, donors and independent filmmakers should work closely to produce new and strengthen existing cultural policies on film and cinematography
- Young filmmakers must be daring to produce film stories that negate the culture of self-censorship and instead deliberately narrate stories that embed the principles of creative dissidence
- Future studies also need to be based on a comparative study of films, in other languages such as Ndebele and Tonga.

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## **Questionnaire Interviews**

Director of Zimbabwe Media for Development Trust, 05 April, 2012 15: 30

Mahaka, B. 12 April, 2012 15:40

Mboti, N. 29 January 2012 16: 46

Ndebele, Z. 13 January 2012, 18:41

### **ANNEXTURE 1**

#### **INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR FILMMAKERS**

#### **QUESTIONNAIRE SCHEDULE**

My name is Urther Rwafa and I am undertaking a Doctor of Literature and Philosophy Degree with the University of South Africa (UNISA). The topic I have chosen is ***Language Censorship in selected Zimbabwe films in Shona and English***. Kindly answer the following questions to the best of your knowledge. The information obtained shall be used only for the purpose of this research project and shall be treated with strict confidentiality.

**DO NOT WRITE YOUR NAME ON THE QUESTIONNAIRE**

**1. How briefly can you define the concept of film censorship?**

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2. What types of restrictions can a filmmaker be subjected to?

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3. If any, how do you describe your personal experiences with state imposed control?

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4. In what situations can a filmmaker's work suffer outright banning?

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5. How can legal terms used by Censorship Board control film images?



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**6.** How briefly can you describe the concept of self-censorship?

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**7.** As a filmmaker, describe your personal experiences with self-censorship.

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**8.** What role can language play in self-imposed restrictions?

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**9.** In what way[s] can the audiences' failure to understand film language impose some form of restrictions?

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**10.** Why do you prefer to create your films in the language[s] that you use in your films?

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**11.** What limitations can a filmmaker working with either or both Shona and English language[s] encounter?

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**12.** In your opinion, what can be done to minimise the negative effects of censorship in Zimbabwe's film industry?

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## **ANNEXTURE 2**

### **INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR FILM PRODUCTION COMPANIES**

**1.** For how long have you been in the business of producing films?

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**2. Where do you sell your film products?**

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**3. State factors that limit your production output.**

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**4. Briefly describe your relationship with the Censorship Board.**

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**5.** What effect does legal language that control film images have on the production of film products?

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**6.** As a follow up to question 4, what limitations can legal language on film censorship has when you are marketing your film products?

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7. What is your marketing experience when dealing with sensitive themes such as politics?

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8. How can a selection of language[s] of expression by filmmakers affect marketing of your film products?

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9. Can gender stereotyped language place some restrictions when producing films?

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**10.** Briefly describe how the issue of Shona and English as languages of expression in the films that you produce affect your sales?

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**11.** How can you explain your experiences with self-censorship as producers of film images?

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**12. State the challenges that you meet as you negotiate business deals with filmmakers?**

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**ANNEXTURE 3**

**INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR RETAILERS OF FILM DVDs**

**1. Where do you get film DVDs that you sell?**

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**2. Who controls your access to new film DVDs?**

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**3. How are you limited by the issue of government licenses in selling film DVDs?**

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**4. What type of Zimbabwean films do you sell?**

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**5. Why do you sell the type of Zimbabwean films that you sell?**

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**6. Which films sell faster between those produced in Shona language or English language?**

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**7. Briefly explain why some customers of your business may prefer films produced in a particular language—for example, Shona language?**

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**8.** As a retailer, have you ever placed some restrictions upon yourself about the nature of films that you sell?

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**9.** What is your comment about the use of violent language in some of the DVDs that you sell?

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**10.** In your own opinion, what can you say about the selling of computer 'burnt' film DVDs?

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**11.** Why should the government be involved in regulating films that are produced for public consumption?

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**12.** What measures do you want filmmakers to put in place to promote local languages?

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**ANNEXTURE 4**

**INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR FILM ACADEMICS**

**1.** What is the role of film in addressing the critical issue of freedom of expression?

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**2.** Can you briefly describe different ways the Zimbabwean government can adopt to control films from expressing ideas freely?

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**3. Can you state Zimbabwean films that have suffered state imposed restrictions?**

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**4. As a follow up to question 3, briefly give reasons why the films you stated were censored?**

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**5. How do gender stereotyped language limit alternative ways of explaining life through film?**

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**6.** In what way[s] does self-censorship manifest itself among filmmakers?

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**7.** How can a filmmaker's selection of film language control his/her ability to communicate ideas to the audiences?

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**8.** How can donor-funding undermine the development of local languages through the medium of film?

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**9.** In your own opinion, what made the Zimbabwean government fail to produce a film about the liberation struggle?

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**10.** How can Hollywood modes of expression limit alternative film content for Zimbabwean films?



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**11.** What is your opinion about independent filmmaking in Zimbabwe?

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**12.** How can audiences block ways in which they can interpret the images of Zimbabwean films?

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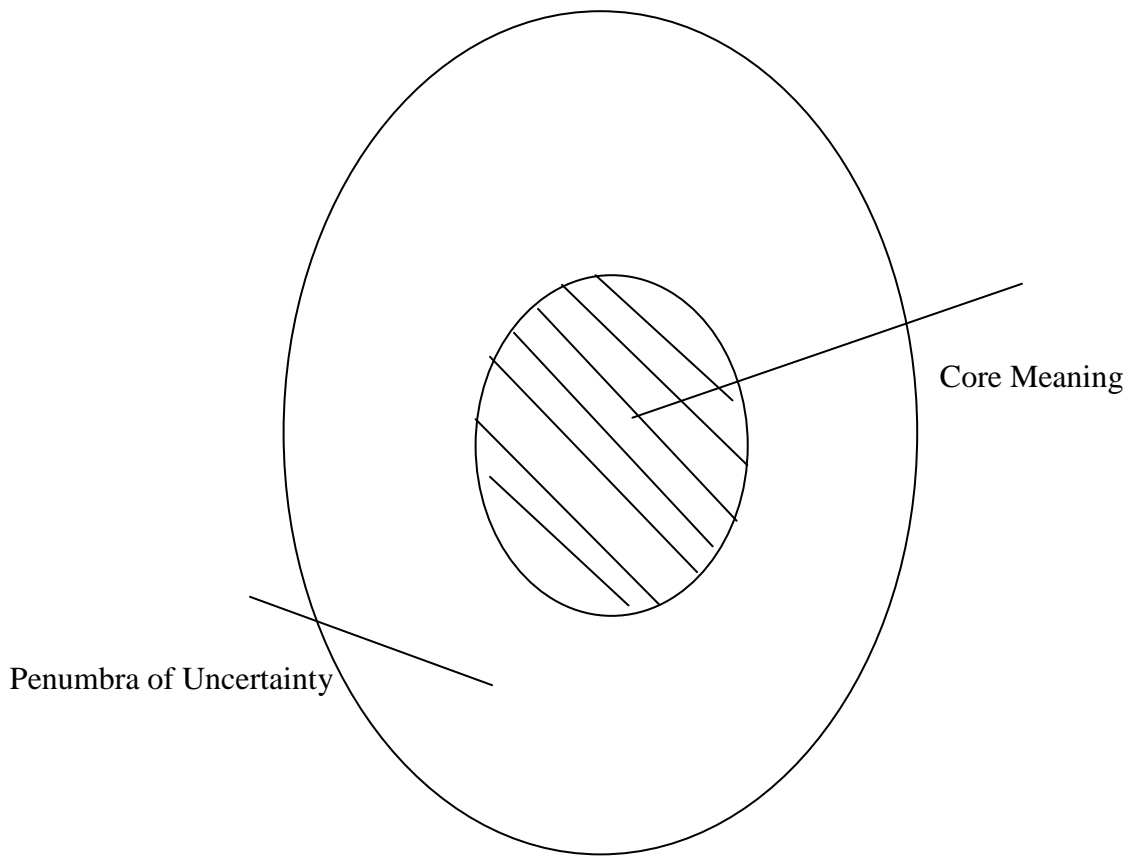
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**Figures used in this study**

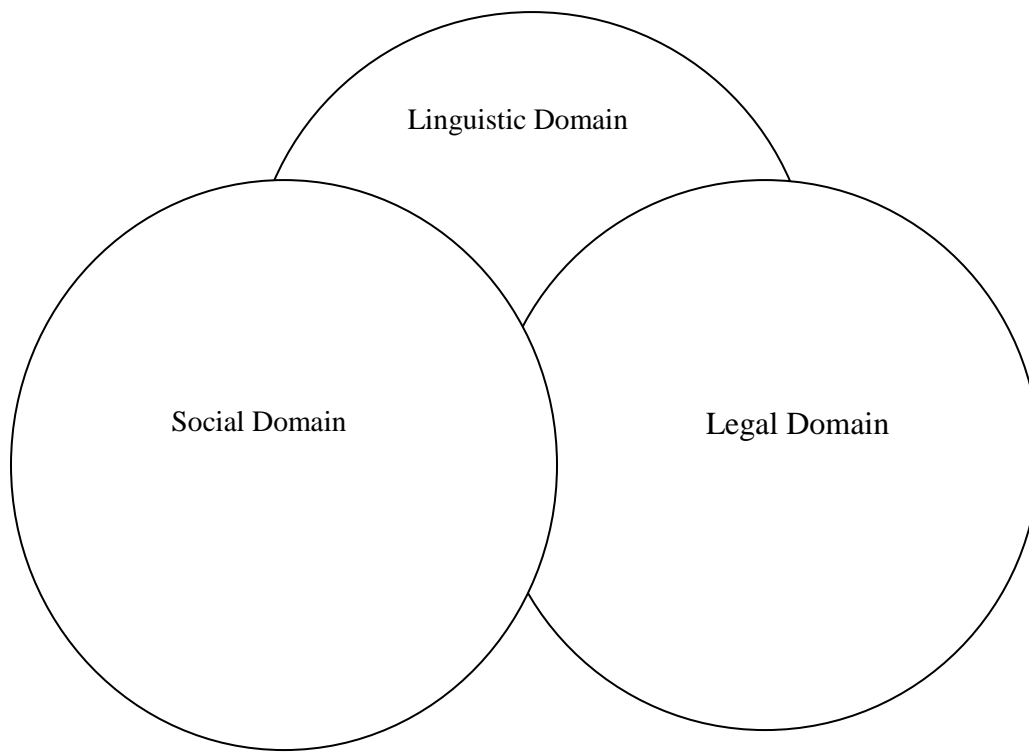
<b>Obscure</b>	<b>Clear</b>
Quiet, peaceful and undisturbed	Peaceful
Covenants, undertakes, guarantees	Undertakes
Give, devise and bequeath	Give
Sells, coveys, transfers	Sells
Shall	Will/may
Forenoon	Before 12:00 pm
Did steal	Stole
To wit	Which is that is
Abuttals	Attachments

Indemnify	Attachments
Verged	Marked
Assigner	Seller
Assignee	Buyer
Sale, assignment and transfer	sale

**Fig 1: Transforming words from obscurity to clarity (Source: Opeibi, 2008:231)**



**Fig 2: Model depicting the ‘open-texturedness’ of legal and linguistic meaning (Source: Hart, 1983:49)**



**Fig 3: Harmonizing law, linguistic and social domains (Source: Schane, 2007:30)**



**Fig 4: A shot showing a female combatant being forced to be intimate (Source: *Flame*(1996)**



**Fig 5: A shot showing a surviving victim of Gukurahundi(Source: *Gukurahundi: A moment of madness*(2007)**



**Fig 6:** A shot showing a skeleton of one of the victims of Gukurahundi from *Gukurahundi: A moment of madness*(2007)



**Fig7:** A shot depicting President Zhuwanie standing trial at ICC (Source:*The Interpreter*(2005)



**Fig 8:** A shot showing Tariro begging money from the shop-keeper(Source: *Everyone's Child*(1996))



**Fig 9:** A shot showing a confrontation between a Zimbabwean and a Chinese businessman(Source: *Zimbabwe The Best Country*(2008))



**Fig 10:** A shot showing a panel of discussants(Source:*The Transition: The Land Question*(2010))