

(Dis)continuing with Tradition: Tsitsi Himunyanga-Phiri's Exposition of Contemporary African Women's Problems in *The Legacy*

Godwin Makaudze

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8469-6452>

University of South Africa

University of Eswatini

makaudzegodie@gmail.com

Jessie Furvin

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8152-0224>

University of Eswatini

jfurvin@uniswa.sz

Abstract

Issues concerning African women have been the subject of many literary writings. Most early female African writers on women's issues conveyed these from a predominantly feminist perspective, setting a kind of tradition. Amidst this, a few writers emerged whose writings on women's issues pointed to a departure from such tradition. This article examines Tsitsi Himunyanga-Phiri's novel *The Legacy* (1992), ascertaining instances where she departs from or conforms to the tradition set by some earlier African women writers. The discussion centres on her portrayal of contemporary African women's problems, their underlying causes as well as possible solutions. Amongst the observations are that while the writer upholds sentiments held by her predecessors on the problems encountered by women and their possible solutions, she also departs from their common practice of blaming African men, patriarchy and traditional culture for the challenges encountered by the women. Instead, she singles out the colonial system, its destruction and ultimate abuse of both African customs and men as the chief architect of those challenges. The article concludes that Himunyanga-Phiri in some parts continues while in others discontinues with the tradition set by earlier female African writers.

Keywords: African women writers; African men; African culture; colonialism; feminism; literary tradition

Early Female African Writers and the Setting of a Literary Tradition

One of the main global discourses of today is the empowerment of women. When it arose in the West, feminism sought to understand and expose the various ways in which women were oppressed—socially, economically, politically and psychologically—in order to reduce, if not eliminate such oppression (Bressler 2011, 144). Across its phases, feminism rejected every differentiation between individuals upon the grounds of sex, called for the abolishment of all sex privileges and burdens, and strove to set up the recognition of the common humanity of women and men as the foundation of law and custom (Tirivangana et al. 2013). Feminists conceived that patriarchies and masculinities were uniform and monolithic and were quite generalisable to other ethnic groups elsewhere, including Africa.

Resultantly, in Africa, early discourses on women's issues also took a feminist inclination. Even in literature, female African writers such as Buchi Emecheta (*The Joys of Motherhood* 1979), Nawal El Saadawi (*Woman at Point Zero* 1983), Tsitsi Dangarembga (*Nervous Conditions* 1988) and Ama Ata Aidoo (*Changes* 1991) were largely inspired by feminist principles, apparently establishing a tradition on the portrayal of women's issues in Africa. The *Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary* (2008) defines "tradition" as "a principle or way of doing things which people have continued to follow for a long time." It implies the handing on of methods of doing things. In other words, with tradition, there is an unchanging order of expectations. In this article, "literary tradition" implies a way of writing about women's issues set by earlier writers and even passed on for relatively long. This connotes a relationship between a set of written works and later literary productions, what Bookworm (2012) describes as "intertextuality." Evident in later texts would be a pattern derived from earlier texts (Little 2008). The later texts exude similar or related literary conventions, such as subject matter and how such subject matter is treated. Hence, Little (2008) looks at literary tradition in reference to a group of works that have an underlying connectedness and coherence in the subject matter and how it is treated. In their works of art, the above-mentioned female African writers focus on related subject matter and treat it in a seemingly uniform way. They "tell women's tragic life stories" (Arndt 2002, 149), illuminating a host of challenges they face. Such challenges are presented as largely caused by patriarchy, men and African culture. In doing so, these writers set a trend, or followed a model, in the way they approach and perceive women's issues, thereby setting a kind of literary tradition.

As hinted above, the challenges encountered by women, exposed by the early female writers, share commonality. Among the challenges, the writers lament that the girl child is denied an education and is forced into early or even polygynous marriages. This is conveyed through Nnu Ego and her daughters (in *The Joys of Motherhood* 1979), Firdaus (in *Woman at Point Zero* 1983) and Tambudzai (in *Nervous Conditions* 1988), who are all denied platforms to acquire education. Nnu Ego is married off to raise fees for her brothers' education. She even "refuses her daughters a good education and

instead makes them work hard so that their brother can go to school” (Arndt 2002, 133). In Dangarembga’s novel, Tambudzai is made to stay at home while her brother, Nhamo, attends school. She only gets the chance to go to school after the death of her brother. Nnu Ego (*The Joys of Motherhood*), Firdaus (*Woman at Point Zero*), Ramatoulaye (*So Long a Letter*) and Fusena (*Changes*) all battle polygynous and seemingly loveless marriages.

The writers further excoriate the absence in African societies of women holding positions of influence or affluence. Instead, women only have the home as “their sphere of operation and the kitchen as the staging arena” (Furusa 2006, 3), a challenge conveyed in *The Joys of Motherhood*, *Woman at Point Zero*, *So Long a Letter* and *Nervous Conditions*. Married women like Nnu Ego, Firdaus, Ramatoulaye, Fusena and Maiguru spend much of their time doing domestic chores such as cooking, washing, cleaning and also pleasing their husbands. Some women are taken as sex objects and objects of abuse, like Nnu Ego and Firdaus who are both subjected to men’s lust. Nnu Ego is sexually molested by her husband as most of their children are born out of unconsented sex, while Firdaus is sexually abused by various men. Women also battle against being viewed as perpetual minors who cannot have property registered in their name. In *The Joys of Motherhood*, Nnu Ego has no property to regard as hers while in Dangarembga’s *Nervous Conditions*, Maiguru’s name does not appear on any of the family’s properties even though she is also working. These women’s writings suggest that in almost all African cultures

to be a woman means to be under a man or a husband; to be a woman is to be someone who is a wife and was paid lobola for and she is expected to respect and please her husband and in-laws and be at their service and mercy all the time; to be a woman is to look after the home/house—cooking, gathering firewood, carrying water, ploughing the fields which includes processing, storage, preservation etc. (Motsa-Dladla 1994, 31)

Apart from conveying the various challenges experienced by women, the writers also present what they view as the underlying causes. In all the aforementioned novels, African culture, men and patriarchy are, in one way or another, exposed and lampooned for their subordination of African women to men. No single male character in the novels is judged positively, or even described as being capable of change (Arndt 2002). In *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979), Nnu Ego’s husband is condemned for making his wife’s marital life unbearable and for being an irresponsible father to the children. In *Woman at Point Zero* (1983), *Changes* (1991), Ngurukie’s short story “Mother of Daughters” (1992), and *Nervous Conditions* (1988), the women’s stories are characterised by hatred for men who “(as a social group) inevitably and in principle discriminate against, oppress and mistreat women” (Arndt 2002, 89). Such disgusting behaviour by men is shown as aided by patriarchy and African cultural values, which confine women to household chores. In *Woman at Point Zero*, misogynistic tendencies of Islam are criticised, especially the way Islam is interpreted and practised by men. African cultures’ high regard for children is criticised for making life for childless women

unbearable. Above all, in most of the above texts, patriarchy is condemned for marginalising women while elevating boys and men just because they are male.

As solutions to women's challenges, the writers have a number of suggestions. These include divorce and single motherhood, fighting men and acquiring education. In *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979), *Woman at Point Zero* (1983), *Nervous Conditions* (1988), *Changes* (1991) and the short story "Mother of Daughters" (1992), the belief that marriage and children make a woman is challenged. In some cases, the writers "advocate for a complete break of women from men and the close solidarity of women as the only ways to achieve happy moments" (Arndt 2002, 148). Thus, divorce and single motherhood are celebrated as helpful alternatives for oppressed women. All the writers also consider education and material independence as ways towards the emancipation of women. Educated characters like Maiguru and Tambudzai (*Nervous Conditions* 1988) and Esi (*Changes* 1991) look forward to a bright future as education opens up avenues for them to prosper.

Tsitsi Himunyanga-Phiri's novel, *The Legacy*, adds to these voices on African women's issues but tackles them from a slightly different perspective. This article discusses her novel, determining her perpetuation of, and departure from, the tradition set by earlier African women writers.

Himunyanga-Phiri's *The Legacy*

Tsitsi Himunyanga-Phiri is a Zambian novelist and lawyer. *The Legacy*, published in Zimbabwe, is her first novel in a trilogy, which includes *Celebrating Marriage through the Law* (2007a) and *Follow Where the Spirit Leads* (2007b). Her writings, especially the first novel, *The Legacy*, have been favourably received through studies such as those by Cousins (2001), Roscoe (2008), Rubaya, Mutohori and Mabovula (2015) and Mugovera (2020). At the core of these scholars' analyses is how the writer portrays women's entrapment by cultural beliefs.

The Legacy centres on two generations of African women, their experiences and problems in life. Moya, who represents the first generation, seems content with all forms of ill-treatment and marginalisation. She accepts Victorian principles that a woman's main staging arena is in and around the home. The second generation is represented by her three daughters—Choolwe, Mazuba and Chipu, together with her son's wife, Mutinta. Moya's first daughter, Choolwe, takes after her and enjoys being a mother and wife. The second daughter, Mazuba, resorts to being a mistress of various men as a way of life. Mutinta, the daughter-in-law, is made to resign from her job at a bank and from working altogether when she marries into the family. Moya, Choolwe and Mazuba do not see hope of life outside marriage until they lose their husbands either through death or divorce. At inheritance, Moya almost loses everything she had worked for and is only rescued by the Supreme Court ruling after the lower court had ruled against her. In contrast to these women, the last daughter, Chipu, is independent and adventurous. From high school, she defies all odds to study science subjects previously reserved for

boys and later enrolls in an engineering programme, also largely thought to be meant for boys. The writer uses these women to show the various challenges encountered by African women of various social classes and their ultimate victory.

The novel is an addition to the ever-increasing works of art on women written by African women. While adding to these voices, Himunyangaphiri's novel sometimes perpetuates while at other times deviates from the tradition set by earlier female authors.

Continuing with Set Tradition: The Nature and Scope of Women's Problems

Like her predecessors, Himunyangaphiri vividly and extensively shows that "African women do in fact have some legitimate concerns regarding African men" (Hudson-Weems 1993, 22). Through characters that include young girls, married and divorced women as well as widowed women, the writer conveys African women's challenges. These challenges include being denied an education, being forced into early or even polygynous marriages, being confined to the home as the only sphere of operation, being taken as sex objects, being turned into objects of abuse, and being considered perpetual minors, issues grappled with by early African women writers. This indicates that she is continuing with a set tradition.

Himunyangaphiri laments the lack of education opportunities for the African girl child. In *The Legacy*, Moya, who belongs to the first generation, only enjoys school up to Standard Four and is told that there are no more fees for her further education. Instead, her father has identified a husband for her and needs the *lobola* or bride price to pay school fees for her two brothers. When Moya pleads for a chance to continue her schooling so that she can become a teacher, her father insists that such a prerogative is for her brothers, not her. As happens with Nnu Ego in Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979) and Tambu in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988), Himunyangaphiri shows that whenever money is short and a decision has to be made between keeping a son or a daughter in school, it is the daughter who is withdrawn. Like earlier writers, Himunyangaphiri shows that "it is considered not profitable to invest money in the education of a girl who is expected to get married and help her husband look after her children" (Dolphyne 1991, 50). Moya's daughter, Choolwe, also suffers the same fate as she is impregnated just before writing her junior secondary school examinations, ruining her chances of progressing in life. When she asks her husband for permission to proceed with school, she is advised not to even consider the idea.

In line with earlier works, the author also demonstrates that "the woman is seen as the centre of the home, and is not expected to work outside it" (May 1983, 11). On her wedding day, Moya is given a lengthy lecture on her place and responsibilities as a woman: how to keep the house clean, how to cook for her husband, how to serve his food, how to address him, how to prepare his bath and bed, how to kneel before him, how to please him and how to make him comfortable. She is advised never to consider

becoming a teacher. The lecture vilifies education as unable to teach her how to cook and clean the house, or guarantee her the comfort children bring to a mother. Through Moya's daughter, Choolwe, the writer shows that even educated women are destined for the home. In school, Moya only enjoys subjects like cookery, needlework and home management and excels in them. Despite being educated and working as a banker, Mutinta too is made to resign from her formal employment and stay at home. Her husband is considered the rightful breadwinner. This conforms to portrayals by early female writers, which show that the "man is always intended for the world and the woman for the home" (Hollis 1979, 17).

Worse still, women in the novel are viewed as sex objects. During her initiation ceremony, Moya is told to eat a lot so as to be plump and attractive to men. She is advised to take good care of her body so that she would be desirable to her husband. She has to bath in the evening with cold water and rub herself with Vaseline around the thighs so that her body is more enticing to her husband. She is also instructed on different sleeping positions and waist movements that would satisfy her husband's sexual desires. As with Nnu Ego in *The Joys of Motherhood*, the lectures reduce her to a mere sex object to her husband. Single and widowed women are not spared, either. As a widow, Moya is forced to be intimate with her *mulamu* (younger brother to her husband) as a way of cleansing her of her late husband's spirit. In another incident, Ba Mbewe offers Mazuba a job and promotes her on account of her fulfilling his sexual desires. In Ba Mbewe's eyes, as with other men in earlier novels, "women's thighs are tables on which modern job contracts are signed" (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o 1982, 19). The same concern is raised in Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* and El Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero* where Nnu Ego and Firdaus are sexually manipulated by men.

In *The Legacy*, women are victims of emotional and physical abuse. Moya's husband despises her cooking, describing it as not good enough and her work in the field as sloppy. He mercilessly beats her up and bruises her for coming late from her fish-selling business. His relatives also accuse her of plotting her husband's death and so physically and verbally harass her. On her husband's day of burial, the relatives push her around and slap her. Her in-laws snatch away her cooking utensils, household items, her own and her children's clothes. They accuse Moya of being "the author of her man's death" (Mungoshi 1980, 168–69). Like Nnu Ego in Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood*, Moya's mother cannot help her argue against her early marriage. Rather, she is powerless and never says a word. Equally worrisome, Moya's view on the matter is never sought, projecting the view that "women are only meant to be seen, not heard" (Sofola 1998, 53).

Deemed minors, Himunyanga-Phiri's women do not have national identification cards and so cannot own property. The home where Moya and her husband stay for 15 years is theirs but only her husband's name appears on the title and mortgage deeds. Moya cannot apply for a loan. It is only her husband who can do that on their behalf. The Administrator General throws out Moya and her daughter's application for a loan,

arguing that there is no policy allowing women to co-sign a mortgage. They do not have any personal property to be used as security. Treated as a minor, Moya has to ask for permission from her husband for her to start a business to supplement his salary, but this is not granted. Her husband even stops her from continuing with the business of selling fish. Thus, as in earlier novels, women are dependent on their men. The man is “the lord and master and the woman is nothing but his property” (Nwapa 1998, 93). Thus, in her exposition of the challenges women confront, Himunyangaphiri continues with the tradition set by her predecessors.

Discontinuing with Tradition: Underlying Causes to Women’s Problems

As Amaefula (2021) observes, although female African writers’ main theme is the deplorable condition of the African woman, the root of the inequality of the genders is perceived differently. Earlier writers like Buchi Emecheta (*The Joys of Motherhood* 1979), Bâ (*So Long a Letter* 1980), El Saadawi (*Woman at Point Zero* 1983), Tsitsi Dangarembga (*Nervous Conditions* 1988) and Ama Ata Aidoo (*Changes* 1991) identify and criticise African men, culture and patriarchy as the root causes of women’s unfortunate position and status in life. Unlike these, Himunyangaphiri does not present the African man as the woman’s primary enemy (Hudson-Weems 1993). She identifies contemporary society’s rules and conventions birthed by colonialism as the chief cause of such a state of affairs. To her, the colonial system and its destruction and ultimate abuse of both African customs and men is the root cause of the challenges encountered by African women. She makes use of the inheritance, school and *lobola* systems to illustrate her views.

The writer shows that the colonial system made use of African men and cultural practices in its marginalisation and oppression of African women. One example she gives is the African inheritance custom. When her deceased husband’s relatives wrestle her properties from her, Moya approaches the court of law. The colonial court administrator unfairly rules and distributes Moya’s estate as follows: Moya gets one quarter, her children get half, and her in-laws get the remaining one quarter, while her *mulamu* (younger brother to her husband) gets the house and the surrounding 10 acres of land. The argument by the administrator is that the upkeep of a big house and business would be taxing to an unsalaried woman. The writer is critical of the new order. Moya, the writer’s mouthpiece, asks a number of rhetoric questions:

The whole situation seems so unfair and unjust. Should we lose everything that we worked for so long and so hard just because I am a woman and society decreed that I cannot take care of myself? Does the fault lie with our culture? Our society? Our men? Or with us women? (Himunyangaphiri 1992, 3)

Such questions are meant to raise critical awareness in readers of the ways in which patriarchy de-subjectivises widowed women, making them powerless because they are now independent of men. Moya further juxtaposes what the colonial administrator has done with what obtained in the African past. She states:

With inheritance, in the past, a widow and her children were looked after by her in-laws. She was allowed to keep the land that she had been farming on and her children's future was guaranteed. Today nobody cares about the widow and the children. Everyone is interested only in the money and property that the deceased left behind. (Himunyanga-Phiri 1992)

Moya details the changes that have taken place with the advent of colonialism. She claims that, before colonialism, inheritance safeguarded the interests of a widow. Also, the in-laws looked after the widow quite well. The widow kept the farming land, and the future of her children was assured. This vindicates Jackson's (2002) view that customs like inheritance were born out of very caring institutions. Sadly, the situation has changed. The very in-laws who used to look after the widow well now jostle to wrestle properties and wealth from her. She also now loses the family land and businesses. The children's future is now crushed. Through Moya, the writer shows that women's problems have been worsened by the changes that have taken place in life. Under the new colonial law, a woman is considered a perpetual minor who cannot look after herself and who cannot own any property (May 1983). That is why at some point Moya loses properties to her husband's relatives, which she would ordinarily have kept even after the demise of her husband.

To show the negative effects of the changes brought about by modernity, the writer further contrasts platforms and opportunities for learning in pre-colonial and modern Africa. Moya the protagonist contends that in the past, there were initiation ceremonies and schools for both boys and girls. Through these, both boy and girl children had platforms and opportunities for learning (Himunyanga-Phiri 1992). No gender was disadvantaged or discriminated against. These initiation ceremonies and schools were used to mark the transition from girlhood and boyhood to womanhood and manhood and alerted society to the fact that the girl and boy now had to be treated differently. Sadly, with the advent of colonialism, no such schools exist now for boys. Moya notes that the ceremony and school solely exist for girls, but the focus is now on observing women's bodies and the teachings stress the woman's subservience to her husband (Himunyanga-Phiri 1992). Due to these changes, Moya is now just taught how to please her husband, cook the best food for him and consider his interests always. Moya also laments that the new colonial school system segregates against and marginalises the girl child. The new education is reserved for the boy child while the girl child has to get married to make available fees for her brothers. Unlike earlier African women writers who blame African men, patriarchy and culture for the sidelining of the girl child in the colonial school system, Himunyanga-Phiri shares Ajai's (1982, 78) sentiments that,

When education was first introduced, it was initially for boys only. This was the case with higher education and jobs in government and business. If girls were permitted to get on the ladder at all, it was always several rungs below their brothers. In all this of course, the colonial masters were simply reproducing the system they had operated in Europe.

Thus, Himunyanga-Phiri bemoans that colonialism and *ipso facto* modernity allowed men to adjust their lifestyles to suit the changing times, while denying women similar platforms. She notes that distorted colonial versions of African customs have resulted in the extreme oppression and marginalisation of African women, something that she shows was not as pronounced in the past.

The other custom the writer looks at is the payment of *lobola* or bride price to solemnise African marriages. While other writers like Emecheta (1979), Bâ (1980), El Saadawi (1983) and Dangarembga (1988) criticise the custom as championing women's oppression, Himunyanga-Phiri (1992) explains that in the past *lobola* was a token to symbolise that two families were being joined as one. The man's family gave *lobola* to the woman's family to acknowledge that they realised the value and worth that the woman brought to their family. However, today, due to the changes ushered in by modernity, *lobola* is now used as a means for the woman's family to acquire wealth. Moya laments that a woman is now seen as a commodity to be bargained over as though she were a cow or hoe (Himunyanga-Phiri 1992). Fathers "now demand unduly high amounts for educated daughters as a recompense for the money they have invested in educating their girls" (May 1983, 48). The writer differs from earlier women writers by showing that Africa had its own cultural dynamics which functioned not only differently, but also independently of Western realities. These traditions underwent distortions and change with the advent of colonialism and modernity. In Himunyanga-Phiri's eyes, writers who blame patriarchy, African men and culture as the sole causes of women's problems misconstrue colonial versions of these as purely African. In this way, Himunyanga-Phiri deviates from the tradition set by earlier writers.

While the writer exposes the role played by colonialism in the marginalisation of African women, she reckons, however, that African culture had a hand in all this. African culture "should have helped empower or even liberate African women against the imposed colonial patriarchy instead of entrapping them" (Himunyanga-Phiri 1992, 57). The writer sees African customs as having subtly aided the exploitation and dehumanisation of women. In this case, the author "questions the features of traditional African culture without necessarily denigrating them" (Mekgwe 2008, 16). She seems to note that African culture is "beautiful [b]ut ugly too" (Hughes 1971, 181).

Reconnecting and Disconnecting with Tradition: Himunyanga-Phiri's Suggested Solutions to Women's Problems

In proffering possible solutions to problems bedevilling women, the writer at times embraces the same solutions suggested by earlier women writers while at times she proffers something new. Thus, while she perpetuates approaches suggested by her predecessors, she also adds her own. Among the solutions suggested by early women writers are divorce and single motherhood, challenging men and the acquisition of education. In *The Legacy*, Himunyanga-Phiri presents rebellion against cultural practices, being single, getting an education and pro-women legislation as possible

sources of salvation for women. Except the last one, the rest shows Himunyangaphiri following the trend set by earlier writers.

Himunyangaphiri calls on African women to rebel against being wives and mothers and claim the right to work with their hands. She proffers being single as a solution to women's challenges. For Moya, Choolwe and Mazuba, it takes their husbands' deaths or divorce to realise that they can do much better outside matrimony. After her husband's death, Moya learns to stand on her own. She individually fights to regain the properties and wealth she had lost to her husband's relatives. She develops the strength and emotional acumen to face challenges posed by life. Mazuba and Choolwe especially come to realise that there is more to life than being someone's wife or mistress. Having lost her husband, Mazuba too is left with no option but to face life on her own. When she is divorced, Choolwe discovers that is not the end of life and is prepared to rise and work towards a better future. As single women, Choolwe and Mazuba are shown as having a brighter and happier future to look forward to. They even look forward to pursuing their goals and aspirations without any hindrance. To them, "marriage is a stinking bother" (Gambahaya 1987, 59). Through these characters, women are shown as not just meant for marriage and childbearing. This view is also shared by earlier African writers like El Saadawi (*Woman at Point Zero* 1983) and Aidoo (*Changes* 1991) in whose works women opt for single motherhood in dealing with abusive and uncaring husbands. In El Saadawi's novel, *Woman at Point Zero*, Firdaus opts out of her marriage with Bayoumi who beats and sexually abuses her. She finds refuge in street life. The same happens in Aidoo's *Changes* where Esi files for divorce from her husband Sekyi Oko, opting to live a life of independence. As in earlier novels, Himunyangaphiri "denies the possibility and profitability of any solidarity between men and women" (Arndt 2002, 192).

Himunyangaphiri concurs with earlier novelists that education is another avenue for female emancipation. This view is conveyed in such works as *Nervous Conditions* (Dangarembga 1988) and *Changes* (Aidoo 1991) where the educated female characters such as Maiguru and Esi respectively find it easy to generate incomes for themselves or their families because they are gainfully employed. Similarly, *The Legacy* shows that lack of an education restricts women's roles to the home and exposes them to marginalisation and abuse by estranged men. Without a relevant education, Mazuba gives in to being someone's mistress as a survival strategy. Without an education, Moya is tied to the home, doing domestic chores and being denied socio-economic help by her husband. Thus, without an education, women's sphere of operation is the home, with their staging arena being the kitchen (Furusa 2006). With an education, Chipso is prepared to conquer the world. She completes an engineering programme that opens up avenues for a bright future. Educated women are capable of looking after themselves without needing to go down on their knees seeking favours from their husbands or from their mothers-in-law (Kahari 1997, 93). The only thing the writers do not hazard is that "producing an educated supply of labour will not solve unemployment unless, concomitantly, the demand for labour is increased" (Carnoy 1980, 157). This is because

“there is no education system that produces graduates only enough to fill the job opportunities” (Blaug 1980, 147). However, by seeing women’s salvation as lying in being single and being educated, Himunyanga-Phiri reconnects with perceptions espoused by earlier writers.

As a point of departure from earlier African women writers, Himunyanga-Phiri sees the solution to women’s problems as also lying in the promulgation of legislation that empowers them. She conveys this through Moya who fights the gruesome grip of patriarchy in the Supreme Court and receives a favourable hearing. The Supreme Court allows her to inherit her husband’s property and enables her to recover her home and business, which had been wrestled away by her deceased husband’s greedy relatives. Thus, legislation presents hope to women. What the writer presents has been a source of empowerment to women in many African states. In many such countries, legislative measures have been put in place to save women from the pains of gender inequality. Such laws as found in Zimbabwe, Zambia and some Southern African countries include the Legal Age of Majority Act, the Inheritance Act, the Equal Rights Act and the Domestic Violence Act. These pieces of legislation have brought relief, independence and empowerment to African women. This solution suggested by Himunyanga-Phiri was a first, as it was a new literary addition to the various ways societies could use to empower women. The positive side of legislation is that it is normally a very peaceful way of solving problems inherent in society. However, its major challenge is that legislation seeks to solve African women’s problems outside the context of African culture and the people’s historical experiences. Such legislation ends up outlawing African practices or inflicting purportedly befitting punishments on men, reverting to the assumption that they are the root and sole causes of women’s suffering or are incapable of change. This is because most pieces of legislation are promulgated with the belief that African men, patriarchy and African culture are the chief causes of women’s suffering. Nevertheless, by regarding legislation as one of the possible solutions to women’s problems, the writer adds a new perspective to the ones formerly held by her predecessors.

Conclusion

The article analysed and sought to establish whether Himunyanga-Phiri’s *The Legacy* continues or discontinues with the tradition set by earlier female writers on women’s issues. It observed that the author upholds “tradition” by exposing women as facing a plethora of problems in life. She then departs from the common practice of wholly blaming African men, patriarchy and traditional culture as the causes of such problems and makes an informed effort to differentiate genuine African practice from the colonial hangover, which seems to be the chief architect of most of the problems in question. She mildly blames African culture for failing to empower women against imperial subjugation and marginalisation. Most of the solutions she propagates to empower women, such as single motherhood, rebellion against culture, as well as according women an education, see her reverting to the sentiments held by earlier female writers,

while her presentation of the courts as avenues for the empowerment of women sees her breaking new ground. Overall, the writer conforms as well as deviates from the literary tradition set by earlier female writers. These observations have a strong bearing on literary analysis, the portrayal of women and future research. They show that a work of art can be appreciated in the context of other related works. Also, while writers may have common themes, their perception and presentation of such may not always be the same. Issues affecting today's women need to be recontextualised to provide a more complete understanding of the underlying causes. Admittedly, there is still need for further research on literary representations of gender inequalities and the various solutions to such issues.

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