

# Paradigm shifts in the perceptions of death in Shona literary creations

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## Abstract

This article aims to establish a paradigm shift in the way Shona traditional culture perceives death and funeral proceedings and in the manner that literary creations that were published before Zimbabwe attained political independence in 1980, perceive the same aspects. The article will also establish that there has been a paradigm shift in the manner that literary creations which were published before independence and those that were published after independence treat death and funeral proceedings. Thus, the article will establish that Shona culture perceives death and funeral proceedings as painful but not as monstrous and fearsome. Although that is the case in Shona culture, those Zimbabweans of Shona expression who created literature before independence view death and funeral proceedings as both painful and monstrous. However, some literary creations, which were published after independence, treat death and funeral proceedings as neither painful nor fearsome. In fact, there is a tendency by writers of Shona expression who published literary works after independence, to treat death and funeral proceedings as if they are natural and normal occurrences. They at times depict them as if they are lucrative life experiences and proceedings. The article has been written on the understanding that the paradigm shift in the manner death and funeral proceedings are treated in literary creations is indicative of some metamorphosis that Shona culture is undergoing as politico-economic and socio-cultural conditions and circumstances change in relation to the changing eras of Zimbabwe's history.

## Introduction

In order to establish and discuss the paradigm shift which is occurring in the manner the Shona of Zimbabwe in general and writers of literature of Shona expression in particular perceive death and funeral proceedings, the writer of the article selected poems by Wilson Chivaura (1965), Modikai Hamutyinei (1969, 1972) and Maureen Mataranyika (1994), and a short story by Emmanuel Chiwome (1998). Chivaura and Hamutyinei's poems represent

those literary creations that were published before Zimbabwe attained political independence in 1980; whereas Mataranyika's poem and Chiwome's short story represent literary creations that were published after independence. These literary creations were selected on the understanding that they treat in depth and demonstrate clearly the shift in the manner in which the Shona people of Zimbabwe perceive death and funeral proceedings as Zimbabwe has moved from one era of its history to another. The writer has used comparison in order to establish the paradigm shift in the manner the Shona people and those who produce literary creations perceive death and funeral proceedings. He has established and then compared the way traditional Shona culture views the two aspects in question with the manner in which Chivaura and Hamutyinei treat them. He has also compared the manner in which Chivaura and Hamutyinei view death and funeral proceedings with the manner in which Chiwome and Mataranyika treat the two phenomena in their literary creations. What the writer has established is then discussed using a socio-historical approach to the study of literature.

In the first place, the article discusses the theoretical framework that is used in this discourse. In the second place, it discusses the perception of death and funeral proceedings in Shona culture. In the third place, the article discusses the treatment of death matters in Chivaura's and Hamutyinei's poems; after which it discusses Chiwome and Mataranyika's perception of death and funeral proceedings in their literary creations. The article then discusses why death is perceived as neither painful nor fearsome in Mataranyika and Chiwome's works of literature before it comes to its general conclusion.

## **Theoretical framework**

This discourse is guided by a socio-historical approach. The approach pivots on the understanding that "... human psychology does not exist in a social vacuum" (Chiwome 2002, p. x). This means that the approach holds that individual behaviour and individual views about the world and about their life experiences derive directly from the prevailing social, political, economic and cultural conditions. Therefore, this approach pivots on the idea that the politico-economic interests of a particular period, condition the views of writers of literature (ibid, p. vii). Just because that is interpreted to be the case, every piece of literature, as this approach demands, is perceived to get "... entangled in the various contradictions of its time" (ibid, p. vii). All this indicates that when people are studying the treatment of death and funerary proceedings in poems and other literary creations using a socio-historical approach as the writer does, they should take note of the fact that the manner in which writers perceive the two aspects is directly and indirectly shaped by the history and culture of their society. In other words, that particular individual has to perceive literature as a "language bespeaking society as much as it is spoken by the society" (Zeraffa 1975, p. 10). Writers who produce poems and other literary creations from an understanding of the demands of the tenets of the socio-historical theory, produce literature that is informed by the "trichotomy of society, history and the individual" (ibid, p. 19). This means that a poet or any writer of fiction, who is guided by a socio-historical approach, produces artistic creations from an understanding that "man never lives by himself, and above all that, he has a past, a present and a future" (ibid, p. 11). In other words, he/she writes from an understanding that, "human properties, like the

consciousness of man are generated and determined by social being and are not dependent on the ‘absolute will’ of the individual but rather on the actual conditions in which people live and operate” (Lukin 1988, p. 78). Therefore, in their literary creations, every writer has to understand that they are answerable to their people and not to themselves since the socio-historical approach holds that, “one cannot live in society and be free from [it]” (ibid, p. 79).

This means that when treating issues that pertain to death and burial in their literary creations, writers should always be guided by what is happening in that society and by the contemporary history and culture of that society.

## **Death and funeral proceedings in Shona culture**

In Shona culture and tradition, death is almost always perceived of as quite unnatural, (Bourdillon 1987, p. 206). The Shona perceive death in this way since they believe in the principle of causation, which is rooted in the view that there is a “connection between causality and destiny” (Zeraffa 1975, p. 10). When it relates to death, the principle of causality implies that the act of dying is almost always unnatural for it is caused by an external force, either human or non-human. Following the demands of that principle, the Shona believe that death is always caused by an external force and does not happen naturally (Bourdillon 1987; Gombe 1998; Hodza 1982; Mbiti 1969). Due to the fact that the Shona do not consider death to be natural, they almost always seek for the cause of every incident of death. In their bid to try and establish the cause of death, in most cases, they visit a diviner. Bourdillon (1987, p. 206) says that, “... death is always considered to be unnatural and in most areas every death is considered to demand divination”. In Hodza (1982), a grandfather of the deceased infant has this to say in confirmation of the Shona people’s upholding of the theory of causation, “*Zvino kana iye anondiitirawo marere akadai anorweiwo?*” (Now, what is he/she who has caused this death incident fighting for?). To this grandfather, the incident of death was caused by somebody.

One other thing which needs to be noted is the paradoxical view that in Shona culture and tradition death is considered painful but not fearsome; and this needs to be discussed since it is central to the argument of the article.

## **Death as painful in Shona culture**

Life, conceived of in terms of the community of the agnatic group was the highest value among the [Shona] people (Auret 1990, p. 98).

The Shona suffer a lot of pain when life is lost. In fact, it is usual that when death strikes in a family, in a clan or in the community at large, the Shona people gather and mourn for the deceased as a collective entity. They wail, shake in disbelief and sulk to show how much pain they will be suffering as a result of another person’s loss of life. Thus, Hodza (1982, p. 11) has noted that:

*Kuchema mufi kuri pazhinji. Kunyanya-nyanya kuvarume, vamwe vanoridza mhere, vamwe*

*vanogunguzika, vamwe vanoratidza kuchema nokusuwa kwavo norunamo rwavanenge vakaita. Kudivi ravakadzi tinonyanyoona kuti ruzhinji rwavo runenge ruchiridza mhere* (Paying condolence to the deceased happens in different forms. Some men mourn, some simply shake in disbelief and yet others will simply sulky [sic] to express a mourning mood on one hand. On the other hand, most women will be seen wailing bitterly).

There are many factors that cause death to be painful among the Shona. One of those causes is that the Shona, as Auret (1990) has established, strongly value human life and they feel totally aggrieved when one of the members of their family, their clan or community passes on. Therefore, the Shona do not condone death. That is why Hodza (1982, p. 9) has noted that, “*Rufu vakuru vedu vakamuka vasingarude ...*” (Our forefathers never condoned death ...).

One thing that causes death to be painful to the Shona is their belief in the idea that death is caused by one individual on another individual. That becomes the case since the people always struggle to understand why someone has decided to end the most precious gift which every individual has received from their creator (*Musikavanhu*). Hodza (ibid) records a woman, who is mourning the death of her son, pronouncing these words:

*Ko ivo vanhu vomumusha uno vakandioneiko*

*Kuramba ndichingoti ‘Wandazvara vandidyira?’*

(How do the people of this clan perceive me

For the trend is they kill every child that I give birth to?).

The woman is pained by the death of her son since she considers life to be of special value. She is also suffering untold pain as a result of the death of her son since she knows that it is an individual from among members of her community, who is in the habit of killing her children. Her pain is exacerbated by the fact that she does not know who her enemy really is and she does not know what sort of wrong she has committed against him/her that warrants the death of her children. Therefore, their belief in the principle of causation makes the Shona feel totally pricked when someone dies. In addition to that, the Shona people value children since they believe, “Procreation is the absolute way of insuring that a person is not cut off from personal immortality” (Mbiti 1969, p. 25). The concept of personal immortality to which Mbiti is referring pivots on the understanding that as long as “the departed person is remembered by name, he is not dead: he is alive”. It is such a person who is both dead but living in the minds of his/her people that Mbiti (ibid, p. 35) has called “The living-dead”. In Mbiti’s words, The living-dead “... is a person who is physically dead but alive in the memory of those who knew him in his life as well as being alive in the world of the spirits” (ibid, p. 25). That being the case, a Shona woman who gives birth to children, who are always killed by her enemies, will always feel that she is doing a disservice to her husband since she will be failing to produce children who will ensure the continuity of existence of her husband (their father) after his death. In that sense, the woman in Hodza (1982) suffers extreme pain when her son dies since she feels she is a social misfit and failure. The woman is likely to become gripped with such a feeling since, in Shona culture, “reproduction and production [of food] were intimately intertwined and embodied in the roles of a woman” (Auret 1990, p. 98).

Since the Shona people consider every incident of death to be caused by an enemy, whenever death strikes they almost always visit a diviner to ascertain the cause of death (Bourdillon 1987; Gombe 1998; Hodza 1982). The diviner usually deliberates on the cause of death and may at times inform them of who their enemy is. If they come to know who their enemy is, but discover that they cannot revenge him/her in any way, they will then suffer untold pain. A grandfather who has just lost his grandson says to some mourners that: *“Takafamba kune vanhu vanenge vatatu kana kutoti vana vanokanda makwati avo ... kana nyakuita izvi takabva tamuudzwa nezita kunzi muroyi wenyu ndinzingi”* (We approached three or four different diviners ... we were informed of who our enemy is. In fact we were even told his name) (Hodza 1982, p. 18). What pains this grandfather is the fact that he knows the person who has killed his grandchild, but he can neither confront him in any way nor revenge the death of his grandson by any means. At one time, the grandfather mentions that he cannot do anything to the culprit since he lacks the needed tactics: *“Zvino ko, kana ukamuudzwa munhu wacho, ungamuitei iwe uchingova munhu-munhu asina kana nekanonzi kamuti kese?”* (Even if you know the culprit what can you possibly do to him when you are just an ordinary person who knows not a single type of concoction to cause him suffer the consequence) (ibid).

Furthermore, the grandfather is pained by the death of his grandson since he knows the person who has killed him but comes to realise that his enemy is so devilish that he cannot defeat him in any way. He says that: *“A, saiyeu watichareva akaromba chaizvo. Ungamuitei chaungamuite?”* (Oh, this one whom we are talking about has great know-how in evil concoctions. What then can you do to him?) (ibid). This incident(s) that has been recorded by Hodza indicates that the Shona suffer a lot of pain when a relative dies since they may get to know who has caused his/her death but may at times lack the power to punish him/her for it. They also suffer a lot of pain if they come to know their enemy but realise that they cannot revenge him/her in any way because of his/her advanced skills in using devilish concoctions.

When the British colonised Zimbabwe in the 1890s, the colonialists passed the Witchcraft Suppression Act of 1899. The act forbids an individual from accusing another individual of acts of witchcraft and wizardry even if he/she has been informed of that by diviners. The Act has increased the pain of death among the Shona since they may be in a position to know who their enemy is, but they are disempowered by the Act from pointing a finger at him/her as a witch or wizard. Hodza (ibid) records a grandfather who has lost his grandson saying that, *“Ukati umunange uroyi anobva amhanyira kuna ivo vakare vemhuno refu obva auya akaberekana navo”* (If you dare confront him accusing him of witchcraft, he will rush to those with pointed noses and they will come and arrest you).

In African culture, of which Shona culture is part, there is a belief that every individual is born with a responsibility to perform in his/her family and community at large. p’Bitek (1986) holds that in African culture, no one is born free, but every African is born “in chains”. The chains he is referring to are bundles of responsibilities one has to perform in his/her family, clan and community. Therefore, in that culture, when an individual dies, it is like a vital asset is lost. This view by p’Bitek is referred to by a grandmother in Hodza (1982, p.17) who has just lost her grandson and says that, *“Mwana womwana wanguwo nhai amai we-e! Ko ndichatuma aniko nhai amai we-e?”* (My daughter’s son oh! Whom shall I ask to do different things for me oh?). The death of her grandson means that she will have no one

who is going to serve her in future, and it implies that she suffers a lot of pain since death has robbed her of someone who was going to perform different chores for her own benefit and for the benefit of her family and the clan at large.

Kumbirai (1977, p. 123) notes correctly that the Shona family, “is traditionally conceived as comprising both the living and the spirits of the dead, who are believed to continue to have concern for and influence on the lives of the living”. Having noted this, Kumbirai (ibid, pp. 123–124) has also established that, “When one is cut off from the family by death, he is cut off from both the living and the ancestral spirits. Before the new spirit is formally handed over to its ancestral spirits it is believed to wander about the forests, unable to join the *midzimu* world and to return to its living descendents.” That spirit, which will be wandering in the forests, “assumes a transitional status, between that of a living member of the community and that of *mudzimu* status with spiritual functions” (ibid, p. 124). During this transitional period, the spirit of the dead person is considered to be black (*mutema*) and, therefore, not fit to be admitted into the world of *mudzimu*. It is only by having been admitted into this world that the spirit can return to its living descendents to protect them and thereby receive honour and respect for its services” (ibid). The living facilitates the process of admitting the spirit of the dead person into the world of *mudzimu* through performing a ceremony called “*Kurova guva*” (To beat the grave). The ceremony is usually held not less than 12 months after someone has passed on. Therefore, for a period of about 12 months the spirit of the deceased will wander the forests and will remain “black”. Therefore, when an individual dies, the Shona suffer a lot of pain when they come to realise that the particular individual will wander the forests for a minimum number of 12 months. In the process, the spirit will be suffering a serious identity crisis emanating from the crisis of failing to belong to either the world of the dead or of the living. Therefore, their knowledge of the transitional period which the spirit of the dead person will undergo soon after death causes the Shona to suffer a lot of pain when an individual dies. Therefore, although death is painful to the Shona people, it is not a fearsome phenomenon as the next section will reveal.

## **Death is not fearsome in Shona culture**

Kana munhu achiri kunzwa anofanira kungoshanda samazuva ose asinganyanyofunga nozvarwo, nokuti hapana anoziva musi waanoshanyirwa nerufu kana nenguva yacho

(If an individual is still fit and strong he/she should perform his/her every day chores without thinking about it (death), since there is no one who knows the day or time when death will strike him/her down) (Gombe 1998, p. 169).

The language which the Shona use to describe the act of dying and burial proceedings shows that they do not view death as something that is fearsome. Mbiti (1969, p. 152) holds the view that when one needs to understand the phenomenon of dying in an African culture, he/she should consider the terms that are used to describe the very act of dying. It is those terms that, “show the concepts that people have concerning death”. This article is written on the understanding that, the terms which the Shona use to describe the act of dying and some funerary proceedings help us to understand how much the Shona consider death not to

be fearsome. The Shona perceive the act of dying as embarking on a journey of some sort. Therefore, dying is like departing from one world (the world of the living) and entering another world (the world of the dead). Some two contrasting words are almost always used when talking about death in Shona culture. The words are “*aenda*” (he/she has gone) and “*atisiya*” (he/she has left us behind). When one dies he/she is considered to have left others behind on their journey to the world of the dead. In other words, it appears like, the deceased individual is perceived as if he/she has departed the world of the living before others. In so doing, he/she leaves others behind. Hodza (1982, p. 20) records a young man, who is mourning for his father, pronouncing these words: “*Ko, nhasi zvamazoenda mukandisiya wani ...?*” (How come today you have gone leaving me behind ...?) If the act of dying is like embarking on a journey before others do, that act appears like an activity which someone deliberately takes up.

The other word which likens the act of dying to a journey is “*atungamira*” (he/she has gone ahead of us). In that sense, a person who has died is said to have left the world of the living before others. Therefore, he/she appears like someone who does his/her things earlier than the rest. Hodza (1982, p. 20) depicts one of the village elders saying to a bereaved young man, “*atungamira baba vako, shamwari*” (Your father he has gone far ahead of us, my friend). This act of equating the act of dying to a journey naturalises the seemingly unnatural phenomenon of dying. In that sense, death is made less monstrous and more natural an occurrence. The act of burying the dead is also made natural through the use of verbal acts. The act of burying the dead is at times equated to a journey. After lying someone to rest the Shona can say, “*tamuperekedza*” (We have accompanied him/her to his/her place of rest). Therefore, going to bury an individual is like taking him/her half way on a journey he/she has decided to embark on. The Shona can also say “*tamuradzika*” (We have laid him/her down). In this essence, the act of burying the dead is equated to helping one to get to his/her bed or bedroom. They can also say “*tamuzorodza*” (We have laid him/her to rest). In this sense the act of burying the dead is equated to putting someone to bed for him/her to rest in peace. Therefore, words like, “*tamuperekedza*”, “*tamuradzika*” and “*tamuzorodza*”, make death to appear like an every day activity. In that sense those words serve to make something unnatural appear so usual and natural. It is this language which indicates that, the Shona do not view death as monstrous and fearsome.

One other thing which shows that the Shona (especially elderly ones) do not fear death, is that they approach it with courage. Among the Shona, “The dying man is expected to reveal the whereabouts of any hidden resources, arrange for the settlement of outstanding debts, and to confess any outstanding offences against members of the community in order to avoid recrimination on surviving members of his family” (Bourdillon 1987, p. 199). Therefore, a dying individual approaches his/her death without fear, for he bids good bye to the members of his/her family and clan and is prepared to make amends and arrangements to solve outstanding matters. Gombe (1998) records that a dying man can ask for some food to eat before he/she dies. He says that even though he/she might have been failing to consume food, he/she asks for a particular dish to be prepared for him/her. He/she will eat the food for the very last time before he/she dies. When this happens, the Shona say that: “*anenge ava kutsvaga mbuva yerwendo*” (He/she is looking for food to carry him/her through his/her journey) (Gombe 1998, p. 169). The idea of bidding farewell to the living members of

one's family when one is dying and the idea of looking for food that will help one to embark and complete his/her journey reveal that, death is neither fearsome nor monstrous among the Shona people.

Since death is not fearsome among the Shona, they at times facilitate the process of dying if they discover that an individual is definitely in extreme pain and is definitely going to die. Bourdillon (1987, p. 199) records that a dying individual "... may be given traditional medicine to make his passing easier". What that means is the Shona embrace euthanasia.

In Shona culture, death does not mean total disappearance from among the living, that is, "*kufa hakusi kurova*" (dying is not disappearing forever from the scene). The Shona believe that when a person dies, he/she moves from the world of the living and enters the world of the living-dead. In fact, the Shona hold the *kurova guva* ceremony a year after the death of an individual (Kumbirai 1977). It is the *kurova guva* ceremony that will enable the dead person to join members of the community of his/her ancestors (the living-dead). Once he/she joins them she becomes both living and dead and will be "dead" in the sense that he/she will not be physically present among the living members of his/her family. However, he/she will be "living" since he/she will be spiritually present among the family members. It is only after the *kurova guva* ceremony that the dead person joins his/her ancestors and it is after joining the community of his/her ancestors that, "... the spirit can return to its living descendents to protect them and thereby receive honour and respect in return for his services" (ibid, p. 124). Once the dead person becomes part of the community of the living-dead, the living will make sure death does not cut the ties that bind them to the dead member of their family by approaching him/her, "... through prayer, liberation and offering" (Mbiti 1969, p. 156). The dead member will also mark the continuity of his/her existence among the living members of his/her family through the acts of preserving and saving life among the living and through speaking to them using a spirit medium. Therefore, to the Shona people, death is not something monstrous and fearsome, "... since the hereafter is only a continuation of life more or less as it is in its human form" (ibid, p. 157).

In Shona culture, death brings the person nearer to Mwari (God) because "... the living-dead are in the immediate position between man and God and between man and the spirits" (ibid, p. 158). This means that the act of dying is like a privileging act since it allows someone to be directly in the service of God for the benefit of the living members of his/her family. By virtue of its ability to bring someone closer to God (the holiest supernatural being), death helps to make the person holier than the living members of his/her family. This further demonstrates that death is not a monster to the people.

Among the African people, a person cannot be considered truly dead (to have entered total oblivion when he/she dies) as long as his genes are still found among the living (Mazrui 2002). This means that a person cannot be considered to have disappeared for ever after his/her death as long as he/she has children who survive him/her. Mbiti (1969, p. 25) says that, "Procreation is the absolute way of insuring that a person is not cut off from personal immortality." In fact, "So long as the living dead is thus remembered, he is in the state of personal immortality" (ibid, p. 25). Therefore, as long as the dead person is still remembered among the living, he/she is dead and living at the same time. Therefore, as long as an individual has children, who maintain ties with him/her after his/her death through acts of pouring out libations of beer, milk and water and through giving him portions of food, he/



she remains dead but living. That is the case since, pouring out those liberations and giving him/her food, "... are symbols of communion, fellowship and remembrance. They are the mystical ties that bind the living-dead and their surviving [children]" (ibid). In that sense, an individual who leaves some children behind when he/she dies, does not totally disappear from the scene. That sort of understanding makes the Shona people have a strong desire for children and also makes them perceive death as neither monstrous nor fearsome.

Like most African people, the Shona do not believe in the "... notion of a messianic hope, or a final destruction of the world ..." (ibid, p. 23). Connected to the idea of messianic hope is the idea of a final judgement that will see the rewarding of the "good" people and the punishment of the "bad" people. Christians believe in the final judgement of man and in the rewarding of the good and the punishment of the evil doers. In Africa, the Yoruba of Nigeria and the Lodagaa of Ghana and Burkina Faso also believe in the final judgement of man and in the rewarding and punishment of the good and evil doers respectively (ibid, p. 156). Be that as it may, the Shona do not have the concept of a messianic hope in their philosophy of religion. They do not even believe in the final judgement of all people. In fact the Shona perceive death as having the power to purify an individual of his/her bad practices. They say that, "*wafa Wanaka*" (A dead person is pure) (Hodza 1982, p. 11). This means that even if someone were devilish in his/her daily contact and actions, he/she is forgiven once he/she dies, which makes him/her pure before the living members of his/her community. Since the Shona do not believe in any form of a final judgement that will come after death and since they believe that death purifies the deceased, they do not perceive of death as bizarre despite how they conduct themselves in their communities during their life time.

Unlike the Ga of Ghana, the Lodagaa of Ghana and Burkina Faso, and unlike the Christians, the Shona do not equate dying to crossing a river as one will be moving from one world to the other. In fact the Lodagaa,

... believe that the land of the departed lies to the west. Being separated from this by the river of Death. As soon as the funeral rites are performed, the soul begins to journey...But crossing this river is an ordeal whose hardness depends on the nature of the life that a person has led in this life. Therefore 'good' people get across easily, but 'bad' people fall through the boat and must swim across the river, which may take up to three years to do (Mbiti 1969, p. 155).

The Ga people "... believe that at death the soul must cross a river and on arrival at the other side, the nose is broken so that the departed speak in nasal tones" (ibid). In those cultures that equate death to crossing a river, death is usually perceived of as fearsome especially in cultures such as that of the Lodagaa, in which crossing that river is believed to be an ordeal especially to the "bad" people. In the Christian tradition, equating the act of dying to crossing a river is nowhere more pronounced than in a Shona song with the title "*Baba ndiyambutsei rwizi*" (Lord help me cross the river), in which the river that the deceased has to cross is the river Jordan. This means that without the help of the Christian God, a person cannot manage to cross that river, thereby implying that if someone is "bad" then he/she may not get the help of God to cross the river Jordan. That alone lead Christians to perceive death as fearsome. The Shona do not perceive death as fearsome, since for them the act of dying is not likened to crossing a river but is considered to imply moving from one world as an individual enters the other world, and purification of an individual is considered to occur as soon as he/she dies.

Of course with the coming of Christianity and modernity those beliefs are changing. Their changing results in some pronounced paradigm shift in the manner the Shona perceive the act of dying. That is the subject matter of the current article.

The bereaved among the Shona do not perceive death as fearsome and monstrous although it pains them. That is the case since death and funerary proceedings are not handled by individuals in the culture in question, but by the community at large. The Shona have a saying, “*kufa nokuchemana ijangano*” (Death and funerary proceedings are communal events). This means that whenever an individual passes on, the Shona mourn and bury him/her as a community. Almost all funerary proceedings and provisions are shouldered by the community at large. In that case death does not induce fear into the bereaved although they will feel the pain over the loss of the life of their relative. The Shona people’s system of inheritance does not make death monstrous for the deceased. When a woman’s husband dies, she has a chance of being inherited by one of her husband’s younger brothers and/or by one of her husband’s sisters’ sons. In that way, the inheritance custom helps life to go on. If a man’s wife dies, he has a chance of being inherited by one of her younger sisters and/or one of her brothers’ daughters. When a man dies, his eldest son inherits his name and his position in the family as soon as the “*kurova guva*” ceremony is held. The system of inheritance enforces the continuity of life after someone has died. Therefore, although death is painful among the Shona it is not perceived as fearsome and monstrous. At this point, it is important to study how literary practitioners treat death and funerary proceedings using this dichotomous view that among the Shona, death is painful but is not monstrous and fearsome.

## **Treatment of death issues in Chivaura and Hamutyinei’s poems**

In poems published before independence by both Chivaura and Hamutyinei, death is depicted as painful and frightening. Thus, in most cases, the two poets shift from the Shona concept that death is painful but not frightening, monstrous and fearsome. The two poets maintain a trajectory of thought when they perceive death as painful. However, they demonstrate a shift of thought from Shona tradition when they depict death as frightening and fearsome. Their views need to be discussed in depth.

## **Death as painful in Chivaura and Hamutyinei’s poems**

In their poems, the two poets demonstrate that to the Shona people life is totally valued. Since life is valued, the poets depict its loss causing a lot of pain to the bereaved members of the deceased’s community. Hodza (1982, p. 13) has revealed that the pain of death is evidenced by mourning, shaking and sulking. In his poem “*Kutya kurova*” (The fear of disappearing forever), Chivaura (1965a, p. 13) says, “*Mudenga chembere dzichachema dzakaringa*” (The old women will mourn facing skywards). He also says that, “*Harahwa mumoyo dzochema*

*dzakashinga*” (Old men will sob from within their hearts) (ibid, p. 13). In this case Chivaura captures the idea that once death strikes a family member, the women are expected to mourn bitterly while the men are expected to either mourn or sulk, shaking in disbelief. Thus, sulking and crying mark how much the Shona suffer when a life is lost. In his poem “*Rufu rwechirikadzi*”, Chivaura (1965c, p. 16) says, “*Burukai pasi, imi muri pagomo, muzochema chirikadzi iya yapfuura*” (Come down you who are at the top of a mountain and make sure you join in the mourning of that old woman who has passed on). With these words, Chivaura reiterates how painful death is among the Shona.

Hamutyinei (1972, p. 58) also captures how painful death is when he depicts members of a community that has lost a virgin mourning, sulking and shaking, when he says that:

*Zviso zvavo zvakararwa nemhute namakuti*  
*Mumoyoi mavo mune rima risina chivhenekero*  
(Their faces are wrapped in dark clouds and heavy fog  
In their hearts there is total darkness).

In these lines, Hamutyinei brings forth the idea that when a virgin passes away, the people become heartbroken and they start to mourn bitterly. They also sulk and shake in disbelief. Therefore, he presents the idea that the Shona suffer a lot of pain when someone passes away since they treasure life so much. In his poem “*Runoita wgondo*” (It behaves like an eagle), Hamutyinei (1969b, p. 24) captures the gravity of the pain that grips a certain woman who unceremoniously loses her one and only son Dzingirai, when he says that:

*Amai vakasimuka vakadzana vakabinduka*  
*Vakaungudza vakaridza mapika*  
(The mother stood up, danced without ceasing  
She cried out very loudly).

Dzingirai’s mother cries and dances aimlessly for she is suffering the loss of her son. Therefore, the Shona people defy totally the Shakespearean idea that, “Life’s but a walking shadow, a poor player, that struts and frets his hour upon the stage and then is heard no more, it is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing” (Macbeth Act 5 Scene v). This is definitely the case the Shona value the importance of life.

The Shona consider every individual in their society to have particular responsibilities to perform. As a result, all men and women are highly valued among the Shona. Sofola (1998) has established the existence of a dual-sex system in pre-colonial African societies. The system called for men and women to perform complimentary roles in the society. Therefore, loss of an individual through the act of dying is painful to the African people. Auret (1990) has captured the roles that women are to play among the Shona, which are basically producing food and reproducing offspring. Therefore, the death of a woman is painful for a vital human capital will have been lost. This viewpoint is captured in both Chivaura and Hamutyinei’s poems. In the poem “*Rufu rwechirikadzi*”, Chivaura (1965c, p. 17) captures the loss that is suffered by the society as a result of the death of an old woman, when he says that:

*Chemai waro kuti nhasi watisiya*  
*Munyaradzi wavanosuwa nedambudziko*  
*Mupukuti wavose vanoerera ziya*

(Mourn that the woman has left us  
Comforter of those that are in sorrow because of problems  
The one who swipes away sweat from different people).

These lines indicate that, during her life time, the old woman was good natured and warm hearted. She used to socialise with everyone and help all those who were in need. These values that Chivaura is celebrating are communal. In communalist cultures, self-centredness is subordinated to other-centredness. It is when members of the community uphold the spirit of other-centredness that Sofola's (1998) principles of relatedness and holistic harmony are achieved. Therefore, the passing on of this philanthropist is painful. However, in his eulogy Chivaura seems to be infatuated by the doctrine of a suffering messiah in the book of the Prophet Isaiah. The Messiah is good natured, and is ready to suffer for the good of humankind. The gospel of the suffering messiah should not be interpreted as part of Shona culture. Therefore, there is a paradigm shift in the manner Chivaura understands death as painful for his vision seems to be influenced by Judeo-Christian thought and philosophy of life.

Hamutyinei views death as painful to the community since it brings to a halt the life of women who should indulge in the twin responsibilities of producing food and reproducing children. In his poem "*Kundorasa mhandara*" (Going to bury a virgin), Hamutyinei (1972, p. 58) says that, "*yaenda mhandara isina kusiya mbeu panyika*" (A virgin has gone that has not left any kids on earth). What pains the bereaved in the poem is that the deceased has died without having performed her expected duty of reproducing children.

In the poem "*Takangozowana wava musoro*", Hamutyinei (1969c) indicates that the death of a woman is painful for it robs her community of someone who has the responsibility of producing food and reproducing children for future posterity. The woman in the poem is Zvionei, who is aware of her duties and gets married in the prime of her youth. She then grows a good groundnut crop on a piece of land that lies across a stream by the name *Mupembezi*. Therefore, Zvionei is totally committed to producing food for her family. When she is killed by a crocodile in the process of crossing the stream from her field, Zvionei has firewood and some vegetables that she means to prepare for the family. Thus, Zvionei dies in the process of producing and of gathering food for her family and her death is totally painful to her family. Furthermore, the act of dying cuts short Zvionei's reproductive role. The poet reports that, "*Mwanasikana akanga tsika mwedzi mishanu*" (This maid was five months pregnant) (ibid, p. 22). Her death in the jaws of a crocodile prevents her from delivering a child in the ninth month of her pregnancy. Therefore, her role as a woman is cut short and the community suffers a lot of pain on discovering her unprecedented death. Her death is also extremely painful to her husband for it begrudges him a chance for a child to be born to him because in Shona culture, "procreation is the absolute way of insuring that a person is not cut off from personal immortality" (Mbiti 1969, p. 25).

The Shona suffer pain when someone dies since they will be sure that the death of that particular individual would have been caused by either another individual or an external force. The pain is aggravated by their failure to quickly decipher the agent behind the act of dying. In the poem "*Runoita wegondo*", Hamutyinei depicts how much the belief in the theory of causation can aggravate the pain a person suffers when he/she loses a loved one. In

the poem, Rambisai's son Dzingirai dies. Rambisai fails to establish the actual cause of his death, and as such she suffers untold pain. Hamutyinei (1969b, p. 23) says that,

*Kuda warumwa nechisina moyo, zvimwe waroiwa  
Ko, waitwa Seiko, Dzingirai mwana'ngu?*  
(Probably you have been bitten by a heartless creature or you have been bewitched  
What has happened to you Dzingirai my child?).

Rambisai suffers because she does not get an explanation from Dzingirai on what has caused his death.

Generally speaking, Chivaura and Hamutyinei manage to a very large extent to maintain a trajectory of thought on the view that death is totally painful among the Shona. Be that as it may, they demonstrate a shift of thought when they perceive death as both monstrous and fearsome.

## Death as monstrous and fearsome in Chivaura and Hamutyinei's poems

In both Chivaura and Hamutyinei's poems, death seems to be viewed as quite monstrous and fearsome. Probably their views on death in this respect were affected by some Judeo-Christian philosophy of life and by some realities of colonial Zimbabwe.

Both Chivaura and Hamutyinei view the act of dying as an act of entering the state of oblivion. Both of them refer to the act of dying as "*kurova*" (entering the state of oblivion). In Chivaura's poem "*Kutya kurova*" (To be afraid of entering oblivion), he says that, "*Chii chinodederesa sokutya kurova?*" (What causes instability in one more than the fear of disappearing forever?) (1965a, p. 12). In this sense, Chivaura sees the act of dying as entering oblivion, that is, as an act of disappearing from the world of the living forever. Therefore, he feels people always shudder when they think about death. Hamutyinei (1972, p. 58) holds the same view and in his poem "*Kundorasa mhandara*", he says that:

*Harahwa nechembere vose vari murwendo  
Kundoradzika mhandara pauriri hwokurova*  
(Old men and women are on a journey  
To lie the virgin on the bed that mark disappearing from the world forever).

Therefore, the concept of "*kurova*" is captured by both poets. It seems the poets are parading the view that, among the Shona, death is monstrous and fearsome since it provides an avenue to total disappearance from the world.

One other thing is that the two poets understand the act of dying as embarking on a journey. In the poem "*Rufu rwechirikadzi*", Chivaura (1965c, p. 17) connotes the view that the act of dying is a journey, when he says, "... *chirikadzi iya yapfuura*" (... that old woman has passed on). The verb "*kupfuura*" in Shona means "passing by" in the process of travelling to some place. By saying "*Chirikadzi iya yapfuura*", Chivaura is saying on her journey to somewhere the old woman has passed by a particularly known place. Therefore, for him the act of dying is a journey. In the same poem, Chivaura (ibid) says that, "*Chemai waro kuti*

*nhasi watisiya*” (Cry out that today she has left us behind). Again, the idea of “*watisiya*” equates the act of dying to embarking on a journey. It is like the old woman has outpaced others as they are undertaking a journey. Hamutyinei (1972, p. 58) has the view that the act of dying is like embarking on a journey, and in “*Kundorasa mhandara*”, he says that:

*Harahwa nechembere vose vari murwendo*  
*Kundoradzika mhandara pauriri hwokurova*  
(Old men and women are on a journey  
to go and lie down the virgin on the bed of disappearing from the world forever).

The phrase “*vari murwendo*” (are on a journey) equates the act of dying to embarking on a journey. The idea of “*kuperekedza*” (to accompany) implies that the funeral procession is carried out as a means of taking someone halfway through a journey he/she has decided to embark on. Therefore, the two poets retain the idea that the act of dying is like embarking on a journey. It is important to note a paradigm shift from Shona culture, where the act of dying is like embarking on a journey from the world of the living to the world of the living-dead; whereas in Chivaura and Hamutyinei’s poems, the act of dying is a journey from the world of the living into oblivion. Therefore, in Shona culture death is not monstrous for it connotes moving from one world to another. In the poems under study, however, death is fearsome and monstrous for it implies moving from the world of the living to a non-world.

The view that death is monstrous which is evident in the poems under study comes partly from Judeo-Christian myths and partly from the modern understanding of death. In Christian mythology, those who have died have no part to play among the living, that is, when they die they cease to exist. In fact, in 1 Thessalonians 3, verse 12–13 those who die are considered to enter a deep slumber. They can only rise when the second advent of Christ takes place. Therefore, the hope for the coming of the Messiah in the future makes Christians believe that the act of dying is disappearance from among the living. Chivaura and Hamutyinei, who were both members of the Roman Catholic Church during their life time, might have been influenced by the Bible to perceive death as fearsome and monstrous. The modern scientific understanding of the act of dying is simply the heart-beat coming to a standstill, which implies ceasing to exist in the world. In other world it marks the beginning of “*kurova*”. Probably the modern scientific understanding of death took precedence over the traditional one when Chivaura and Hamutyinei were writing their poems.

Both Chivaura and Hamutyinei view death as totally monstrous to the bereaved and those who take part in the funerary proceedings. In his poem “*Kundorasa mhandara*”, Hamutyinei (1972, p. 58) says that:

Varume vashinga kumukanda ivhu nefoshoro  
*Maoko avo anobvunda, mabvi achidedera*  
(Men have become brave enough to fill up the tomb with sand  
Their hands and knees shake).

With these lines, Hamutyinei implies that the men who will be filling up the tomb with sand will be in real fear of the deceased since their hands and knees will be vigorously shaking.

In the poem “*Kutya kurova*”, Chivaura (1965a, p. 13) connotes the same view when he says that:

*Kupfumbatana maoko hazvichagoneka*  
*Nokuti rudo rwokutya rwave kuoneka*  
(Shaking of hands is no longer possible  
Since fear is replacing love).

With these words Chivaura seems to say once someone is dead, the love which used to exist between him/her and his/her relatives is substituted by fear. The view that love is replaced by fear once someone dies and the view that the Shona people are gripped with fear during funerary proceedings seem to be alien to Shona tradition. The Shona are not afraid of the corpses of their dead relatives. They can only become afraid of them if those relatives die as a result of committing suicide (Gombe 1998). Otherwise everything being equal, the Shona show their last respects and love to the deceased as they will be burying him/her. In Shona culture the corpse is washed and dressed well before it is buried. All the relatives are called upon to pay their last homage to the deceased through throwing a handful of sand in the tomb before men finally fill up the tomb. That serves to mark their love and respect for the deceased. The Shona also consider the dead to have been purified by the act of dying for they say “*wafa wanaka*” (death purifies an individual). As such, they respect and love the dead. It is in the Judean philosophy that the corpse is considered to be dirty to the extent that those who touch it are considered to have become defiled. In the gospel according to St Luke, some people became totally mesmerised when Jesus drew nearer to the bier where the son of the widow of Naini was lying. They felt that he was defiling himself. Therefore, the depiction of the corpse as a cause of worry and fear that is prevalent in Chivaura’s and Hamutyinei’s poems seems to be emanating from imported religions such as Judaism and Christianity. At the end of it all, it marks a paradigm shift from the manner death is perceived in the Shona tradition.

In Chivaura’s poems, the act of dying is equated to crossing a river from one side (the world of the living) to the other side. In the poem “*Kutya kurova*” he says that, “*Pandakanga ndoda kuyambuka rukova*” (When I was about to cross the river) (1965a, p. 12). As a Roman Catholic convert, Chivaura seems to be borrowing this viewpoint from Christianity, which is a colonising religion in Zimbabwe. Christians equate the act of dying to crossing the river Jordan. Once the act of dying is equated to crossing the river which marks the beginning of the final judgement of the deeds of individuals, death automatically becomes monstrous and fearsome. The equation of death to crossing a river is an anachronism in Shona culture. In that culture the act of dying implies moving from the world of the living as one enters the world of the living-dead. In that culture death becomes a mere rite of passage. Therefore, it is not perceived as monstrous and fearsome.

Chivaura parades the concept of a final judgement which will come after death. That judgement will pivot on the sin and retribution motif that has roots in the understanding that the wages of sin is death. Due to the fact that no one can really say he/she is pure and holy before God or the highest deity in a given religion, believers are not always at home with dying especially when it will lead them to face judgement. In his poem “*Kutya kurova*”,

Chivaura (ibid, p. 13) says that:

Zvemberi zvinotyisa kurangarira  
Kufara here uku kwakakugarira  
Zvinozivikanwa bedzi navakatungamira  
*Naivowo vatongi vakakumirira*  
(What will come after death is dreadful to think about)  
is this happiness that awaits you  
It is only known by those who died before us  
And by those judges who will be waiting for you).

Just because Chivaura does not know if he is going to be either rewarded or punished at the time of the last judgement which will only come after death, he becomes very much afraid of death. He depicts death as quite fearsome and monstrous since the destiny of those who die is only known to those who have died before them and to those judges who will determine the destiny of all man on judgement day. Probably Chivaura is influenced in his writing by Jesus Christ's parables of the last judgement. If he was writing from the understanding of Shona religion, that does not believe in the last judgement of humanity but rather believes in the view that the act of dying has a cleansing force, Chivaura could not have painted the act of dying as fearsome and monstrous.

Both Chivaura and Hamutyinei seem to be writing from the view that life is very short and is of no sense and value. Therefore, they seem to be writing from a Shakespearean view that "Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player, that struts and frets his hour upon the stage and then is heard no more, it is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing" (Macbeth Act 5 Scene v). They see no reason why people should reproduce. In his poem "*Panyika tingayemurei?*" (What can we admire on earth?), Chivaura (1965b, p. 6) says that:

*Rufu nesu rwakati tsvemere*  
*Zvarwei nhasi mangwana fei*  
(Death is always with us  
We are born today only to die tomorrow).

Chivaura sees life as meaningless since death will always bring life to a halt. Therefore, for him, there is no sense in reproducing offspring. Hamutyinei (1969a, p. 24) parades the same view in his poem "*Kuzviberekera misodzi*" (To deep oneself in tears), when he says that:

*Zvechokwadi tiri mubasa rokuzvizvarira misodzi*  
*Patinozvara vana muchenje unenge uri mumunyekebvu*  
Truly we are in the habit of reproducing tears.  
When we reproduce children the termites enjoy).

For Chivaura, life is worse than futile since it is too short and for Hamutyinei life is meaningless since human beings reproduce for the benefit of the termites that will feed on their offspring who die shortly after their birth. Therefore, for these two poets death is



fearsome and monstrous since it attacks human beings and their offspring at any time in a very unprecedented manner. The views of these writers are against the Shona philosophy of life. Among the Shona, life is valuable and precious. It is a gift that needs to be treasured. To the Shona, children are a blessing since a man who has children will continue to participate in the affairs of the living members of his/her family and community as a living-dead. Therefore, the Shona celebrate procreation and reproduction. They are not afraid of death since they do not always think about death until it strikes one of them (Gombe 1998, p. 169).

This idea of always thinking that life can come to a halt any time and that it is worse than futile might be coming from the Western traditions which nurtured playwrights such as Shakespeare. It has its roots in the post-modernist view that life is like a dark tunnel in which there is no ray of light. In the post-modernist tradition, human beings are considered to be groping in that darkness and there is no hope of finding light and a way out of it. The post-modernist view emerged after the United States dropped atomic bombs at Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japan in 1945. Some people felt that life was hopeless as they were seeing the world approach its fatal end and the history of mankind coming to a stand still. Probably the post-independence era in Zimbabwe made people believe in post-modernist sensibilities and that is reflected in their literary creations. On 11 November 1965, Ian Smith, the then Prime Minister of Rhodesia, signed and declared the Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) and declared further that there was not going to be black majority rule in Rhodesia in the next one thousand years. The declaration caused mass demonstrations in the big cities which were followed by the massive killing of the demonstrators by the Rhodesian forces. That alone made life to appear quite futile to some Zimbabweans and some started producing literature of hopelessness and despair (Veit-Wild 1993). Bhebhe (1999) has established that the Zimbabwean liberation struggle commenced in 1962. With the commencement of that struggle, the murder and mass killing of people followed. Probably those who wrote poems after the beginning of the liberation struggle and after the signing of the UDI were writing from a point where they could not see any hope of life for most Zimbabweans, especially the young men and women who were forced by events to join the guerrilla training camps which were established outside Zimbabwe. Therefore, poets who wrote poems in 1965 like Chivaura and in 1969 and 1972 like Hamutyinei were pushed by the upheavals of their day to treat death as imminent and, therefore, as monstrous and fearsome.

What emerges from this discussion is that Shona culture perceives death as painful but not as fearsome and monstrous. Chivaura and Hamutyinei, who were writing before Zimbabwe attained independence, treat death as both painful and fearsome. Writers like Chiwome and poets like Mataranyika, who are writing after independence, seem to perceive death as not painful and not fearsome and monstrous among the Zimbabweans.

## **Chiwome and Mataranyika's treatment of death in their literary creations**

Mataranyika (1994) and Chiwome (1998), who are writing in the post-independence era of Zimbabwean history, depict Zimbabweans as considering death to be neither painful nor fearsome. In her poem "*Matsenganzungu*" (The back jaw), Mataranyika (1994) captures

how much Zimbabweans perceive death as neither fearsome nor painful. In the poem, a wife is battered by her husband every time he gets frustrated by what is happening in the family and in the economy of the country. The woman persona mentions that when her husband comes home drunk, he asks for food by striking her with a fatal blow on the jaw (*Chamatsenganzungu*). She also mentions that when her husband is ill-treated at his work place, he does not fight his enemies and all those who ill-treat him. Rather, he comes home in silence and strikes his wife with a killer blow on the jaw. The woman also laments that when the prices of the different commodities go up, making it unaffordable for her husband to purchase the basic needs for his family, he comes home and strikes his wife with a killer blow on the back jaw. The woman really is in pain. She thinks of getting out of the marriage institution unconditionally. However, she mentions that, at one time, she had visited her aunt (*tete*) and delivered to her the bad news of the serious domestic violence. The aunt did not allow her to leave her matrimonial home to rejoin her agnates. Rather, she urged her to stay put and remain in the marriage. Because of their bizarre behaviour, the woman concludes that members of her natal family are encouraging her to remain in the marriage so that they will be able to charge her husband a huge fine when he finally kills her and will be seeking their participation in her burial. She says that:

*Musi wazvichaipa ndiani achada?*

*Anondiviga hapana achada:*

*Vanoda muripo wemombe*

*Nefiro yematsenganzungu*

(When the worst occurs who will accept responsibility?

No one among my agnates will be ready to bury me:

They would want to charge my husband a fine in form of beasts

Over the death that will have occurred as a result of my enduring killer blows) (ibid, p. 83).

From a close reading of the poem, it seems that both the persona's paternal aunt and some other members of her natal family are not afraid of death and do not consider death to be painful. As a paternal aunt in a family, a woman has the power to enforce divorce between the persona and her husband. Again as the aunt, she has the power to intervene and bring to a halt the violence that the persona is suffering. In Shona culture, the paternal aunt is very powerful when it comes to making decisions that pertain to the marriage of her brothers' daughters (Gombe 1998, p. 61). Therefore, by insisting that her brother's daughter should make do with the domestic violence which she has to brave against all odds, the aunt is going against her traditional role for a purpose. She has more respect for *lobola* than for her brother's daughter's life. This indicates that the persona's aunt does not fear death and does not perceive death as painful.

Some members of the persona's natal family have more respect for a fine than for their kin's life. They wish her to stay in the marriage so that her death will serve to improve their economic standing. They feel she should die in the marriage in order for them to benefit economically by charging and receiving a huge fine from her abuser. In Shona culture, an individual cannot be buried in the absence of the members of her natal family. If he/she is buried in their absence, the deceased will come back as an angry and avenging spirit (*ngozi*).

*Ngozi* is the spirit of a dead person that comes back to wreak revenge on those who wronged him/her before and even after he/she has died. Therefore, for fear of *ngozi*, a man will be ready to pay a fine in order to allow her agnates to bury his wife. Knowing very well that the man cannot brave the act of burying the woman in their absence for fear of *ngozi*, members of the persona's natal family encourage her to stay in the marriage so that they will be able to enjoy a big fine when she dies. In that sense, they are not afraid of death and they do not feel death is painful. To them, the act of dying is lucrative for it brings with it some economic benefits.

In Chiwome's short story "*Mashiri apungana*", death is neither painful nor fearsome. In order to try and demonstrate that death is neither painful nor fearsome in post-independence Zimbabwe, Chiwome deals with five groups of people. The first group is that of the educated and well to do among the people. They are the new elite of Africa. The second group is that of local politicians. The third group is that of parish priests and curates. The fourth group is the group of ordinary Zimbabweans citizens who are mostly found in the rural areas. The fifth and final group is that of business people who deal in funeral issues. When death strikes, the five groups behave differently, but in ways which indicate that death is no longer painful and fearsome among the Shona of Zimbabwe. Chiwome reports that, in urban areas, the rich Zimbabweans consider death and funerary proceedings to be events that give them a chance to brag about themselves in front of the poor. For instance, they will be immaculately dressed (*vanenge vakachena sembwa*) (Chiwome 1998) with the men wearing black suits. Chiwome (ibid, p. 23) describes how elitist women dress for funeral in this way:

Mashefufufu anenge akapfekawo zvitema zvinodana mari yakawanda kuzvitenga, notuheti twawo twunenge twamamisisi akare kare nevhori inenge yakavhara kumeso kuti misodzi isaonekwe

(The well-to-do women, will be putting on expensive black funeral regalia which include some small hats that appear like those that used to be put on by female white bosses and veils which will be covering the face and that will be meant to hide tears).

Tapera, who is the main character in Chiwome's short story, puts on a black suit when he attends his brother Taruberekera's funeral. That alone indicates that the black Zimbabwean elite are acculturated to the extent that they dress like the former colonial masters when they attend funerals. Since they will not be dressing according to the culture of their people, they seem to dress to parade their riches and not to mourn the deceased. Therefore, to these elites, the act of dying is neither painful nor fearsome.

It is customary among the Shona to show their condolences through availing some material or financial resources to the bereaved. That being the case, the well-to-do Zimbabweans issue a lot of money – not as means of showing their grief and mourning for the deceased, but rather as a means of bragging about their riches. Chiwome (ibid, p. 25) records that:

Akavhundusa vanhu vose aburitsa muhomwe chema yamadhora makumi mashanu...Mari yakanga yawandisa iyi saka vanhu vakarohwa nehana. Chema yokumusha raive shreni kana chishanu kana dhora

(He shocked the majority of the people present, when he produced condolence of fifty dollars ... that was too much money for paying condolence that is why it shocked the majority of the

people. In fact the usual condolence paid by members of his rural community was either ten cents, fifty cents or a single dollar).

What that means is Tapera is handing a lot of money to the bereaved not as a sign of sympathy or compassion. Rather he does that in order to show off among poor members of the rural community. Therefore, for the educated and well-to-do Zimbabweans, death is neither painful nor monstrous. Rather, the death of an individual such as Taruberekera gives them a chance to parade their riches. Tapera also uses the funeral platform to brag about himself and to show off his riches when he brings a very expensive type of whisky to the funeral. He shares the whisky with his friends and the kraal-head. They enjoy the beverage whilst the funeral proceedings are in progress.

Politicians consider funeral gatherings to be pertinent for they give them a chance to campaign and parade their political credentials. The chairperson of the ruling party in that area has a chance at one of the funerals which Tapera attended to parade his own and the deceased's political background and credentials. He mentions that the deceased and he were ex-combatants who had fought for the freedom of Zimbabweans from colonialism. He praises the deceased for working together with him to suppress opposition politics in that area. He also has a chance of glorifying the new government for giving food to the people during times of drought and famine. He praises the new government for initiating development programmes in the area. He ends up by encouraging people to attend without ceasing all political gatherings that are meant to discuss development issues. Therefore, for the politician the act of denying gives him the chance to win the souls of the people to support the ruling party. In that sense, the funerary proceedings are opportune moments for politicians to campaign for their parties and against opposition parties.

Parish priests seem to consider funerary proceedings to be extensions of their weekly church services. In fact Chiwome (ibid, p. 28) says that:

Tapera akanga ava kungonzwira nziyo dzesvondo panenge pafiwa sezvo ndufu dzakanga dzawanda kudarika mazuva okuenda kusvondo. Kana vaparidzi vakanga vorerukirwa nebasa ravo nokuti zvidhakwa zvose vaizvibatira panhamo

(The only chance Tapera had to listen to gospel music was at funeral gatherings since death occurrences and funeral gatherings had increased in numbers and had overcome moments of church gatherings and proceedings. This helped to ease the duties of the parish priests since they had the chance of meeting even the notorious drunkards at funeral gatherings).

Therefore, to parish priests and curates, the act of dying is now a blessing in disguise since it gives them a chance to meet the people and to preach to them the gospel of repentance. In this particular instance at Taruberekera's funeral, the priest has a chance of attacking who he believes are evil doers, including those who indulge in adultery and fornication, notorious drunkards, thieves and robbers, those who smoke cigars and marijuana, traditional healers and unscrupulous politicians. He calls upon all these groups of people to turn to God and be saved if they are to avoid spending their eternity after death in hell. Therefore, for the priest and those who follow his lessons, death is not painful and fearsome since it creates a very good platform for them to call on people to repent and join the church.

The ordinary rural dwellers seem also to consider death as neither painful nor fearsome. Although Tapera's wife is not smartly dressed like the modern elitist woman and her

husband, still she aborts the demands of tradition in her own way. When Tapera and his wife arrive at Taruberekera's homestead, Tapera's wife cries out and that leaves Tapera totally embarrassed. Although Tapera's wife mourns bitterly, her mourning does not signal the pain of death. Rather, she mourns in order to keep up the appearance which tradition demands of her. Tradition, as Hodza (1982) indicates, expects women to cry bitterly when someone dies; their mourning should come directly from their heart. It is not expected to happen on a superficial level. That being the case, Chiwome (1998, p. 24) reports that, "*Iye namamwe madzimai omumusha mavo vaitoita majanha okutanga kuchema kana vasvika panhamo*" (She (Tapera's wife) and the other women in Tapera's community would take turns to start mourning when they will be arriving at a funeral gathering). This means that Tapera's wife and the other women from her community do not mourn the dead out of real pain and compassion. Rather they mourn at funeral gatherings for the mere purpose of fulfilling the demands of tradition. Therefore, Tapera's wife and the women from Tapera's community, who still attend funeral gatherings and at times mourn the deceased as tradition demands, are de-traditionalised and not detribalised.

According to Mazrui (1978, p. 271), detribalisation is "... a process by which a person loses not only the customary mode of behaviour of the tribe but also any compelling loyalty towards it". Tapera, his wife and the other women are not totally detribalised since they still adhere to some aspects of group loyalty. Tapera leaves his urban work place for his rural home to take part in his brother's funerary proceedings. The women attend funerary gatherings and even mourn for the deceased as per the demands of tradition, yet what they do is simply keep up traditional appearances when in actual fact they will not be seriously and emotionally involved in the funerary proceedings as tradition demands of them. Therefore, they are not detribalised but are de-traditionalised. De-traditionalisation "... may only mean that a person has lost the sense of conforming to tribal ritual and tribal custom, but still retains an active or potentially active loyalty to his tribe" (ibid). If it is judged against the demands of tradition, Tapera's dressing style is bizarre for a funeral. The way the women mourn for the dead, is found wanting if it is judged against traditional funeral rites. Despite their behaving in "atraditional" ways, they remain involved and active in ethnic and traditional proceedings. Therefore, they are not detribalised but are de-traditionalised. It seems independence enforced the process of detribalisation of black Zimbabweans. Hence, it is clear that the educated and well-to-do among the Zimbabwean people such as Tapera are more de-traditionalised than the rural folk.

The other rural folk present at Taruberekera's burial seem also to be de-traditionalised. The kraal-head, Tapera's elder brother and younger brother are enjoying whisky at a funeral gathering. After he has had enough whisky, the kraal-head promises to extend Tapera's field. Therefore, it seems that people are merry-making during the funeral proceedings. In that sense, the act of dying and the funerary proceedings which follow it, are no longer sources of pain and fear to the people as is the case in Chivaura and Hamutyinei's poems.

One other aspect which indicates that the act of dying is neither fearsome nor painful is the fact that people gauge the funerary proceedings and brand them as either "good" or "bad" depending on whether or not they enjoyed *sadza* and meat during the proceedings. Tapera learns with shock that when people ask those that will be coming from a funeral, "*kwakanga kwakanaka here kunhamo kwavaibva*" (is it all well from the funeral where you are coming

from?) (Chiwome 1998, p. 30), they will be inquiring whether or not a beast was killed for people to consume meat during funeral proceedings. If the answer is “*kwakanaka*” (it is well) (ibid), they will be implying that a beast was slaughtered for the benefit of those who attended the funeral. If the answer is “*hakuna kunyanya kunaka*” (it is not well) (ibid), they will be implying that a beast was not killed for the mourners to enjoy the meat during funeral proceedings. This means that the act of dying is no longer perceived as painful and monstrous by the mourners. Rather it is a moment where those who gather to bury the deceased enjoy meat and other types of food.

Chiwome also says that the act of dying gives business opportunities to those who offer life assurance and funeral policies and those companies that offer funeral services. Chiwome (ibid) says that those companies that offer life assurance policies approach different individuals with the message “*Tipe mari tichengetere vana vako nokuti uchafa mangwana*” (Give us money and we will keep it for the benefit of your children for you shall die tomorrow). This means that those who offer life assurance policies are not afraid of death, and they believe once a person has life assurance, he/she has no need to live in fear of death since the future of his/her children is assured after his/her death. Those who offer funeral services at hospitals fight for clients. They struggle to get corpses to clean, dress and ferry to their burial places for a payment. So, because some people make money out of the act of dying, death is no longer painful and monstrous to them.

Up to this point, the discussion has established that in Shona culture and tradition, death is painful but not fearsome. In poems by Chivaura and Hamutyinei, that were published before Zimbabwe attained political independence in 1980, death is both painful and monstrous. By treating death as monstrous and fearsome, Chivaura and Hamutyinei shifted from the traditional Shona culture understanding of death and funerary proceedings. In Mataranyika and Chiwome’s literary creations, death is not painful and fearsome. Therefore, Chiwome and Mataranyika shifted from the traditional view that death is painful but not fearsome. They also shifted from Chivaura and Hamutyinei’s view that death is both painful and fearsome. But what is causing Chiwome, Mataranyika and the Zimbabwean people to shift from the notion that death is painful but not fearsome to the notion that death is both painful and fearsome?

## **Why death is neither painful nor fearsome in Chiwome and Mataranyika’s poems**

Chiwome (1998) is a fiction writer-cum-critic. As a fiction writer, he portrays characters that are involved in funeral proceedings. He also captures their views. As a critic, he establishes certain conditions and circumstances which cause people to perceive death as neither painful nor fearsome. Those conditions need to be exposed and analysed before the writer presents his own views on the matter. For Chiwome, death was painful among the Shona before the commencement of the liberation struggle since very few people died in any given month. Chiwome (1998, p. 15) says that, “*Hondo yechimurenga isati yauya zvaive nani nokuti vanhu vakanga vasingawanzofa*” (Before the liberation struggle it was better since people did not

always die). With the commencement of the liberation struggle, the death rate increased, as Chiwome (ibid, p. 16) notes:

*Pakasvika hondo mudunhu ravo vanhu vakanga vava kufa vhiki nevhiki. Vamwe vaiurawa vachinzi vakabikira varwi vorusununguko, vamwe vainzi vatengesi, vamwe vachinzi varoyi, vamwe vachinzi vakabereka magandanga*

(When the liberation struggle came to their village, people started dying every week. Some were killed on the pretext that they fed the freedom fighters some were killed because they were considered sellouts, others were considered to be witches and yet others were killed on the understanding that they gave birth to terrorists).

What Chiwome claims is genuine, because readers meet different people who die in war fiction. In Chinodya's *Harvest of thorns* (1989), a woman, who is only identified as Mai Tawanda, is suspected of being a sellout and is killed in cold blood by Mabunu Muchapera and Pasi Namasellout. In Kanengoni's *Echoing silences* (1997), an old man by the name of Kachidza, who is believed to be a sellout, is set alight by a freedom fighter called Sly. In Choto's (1989) *Vavariro*, Charira and his wife are killed by some Rhodesian forces for supporting the freedom fighters. In almost all war novels a lot of Rhodesian Front forces die during contacts. Therefore, the war taught people to accept death as just an ordinary rather than a painful or monstrous event. Chiwome (1998, p. 16) believes that it was during the liberation struggle that people were taught not to mourn for the dead, and he says that, "*Vaiurairwa kufungidzira kuti vatengesi vainzi vasachemwa nokuti vavengi*" (Those who were killed under the pretext that they were sellouts were not to be mourned). In *Harvest of thorns*, headman Sachikonye is chided for pleading with the freedom fighters to stop murdering Mai Tawanda in cold blood. When Sachikonye says, "have mercy on her *anangu* (my children)" (Chinodya 1989, p. 206), Baas Die the platoon commander of the freedom fighters replies, "There is no mercy for those who sympathise with traitors, either. You should be rejoicing" (ibid, p. 207). This means that the war taught people not to mourn for the dead. That trend subverted the Shona culture of mourning for the dead. Having failed to attain a cultural revolution after the political one, Zimbabweans continued to avoid mourning for the dead in some cases.

After the war, as Chiwome (1998) has established, people continued to die in great numbers. That trend made people continue viewing the act of dying as usual and normal. At the end of it all, death continued to be perceived as neither painful nor monstrous. According to Chiwome (ibid, p. 19) one factor that caused death to be rampant after the war was witchcraft. During the war, the freedom fighters would kill all those who were considered to be witches and wizards, (ibid, p. 16). After the war, the legal system began to be respected, and the Witchcraft Suppression Act of 1899 began to be implemented. Therefore, no one was allowed to punish another person for being either a witch or a wizard. That scenario gave people a chance to practise bad acts of witchcraft and wizardry without limits. The same scenario led to the increase in the mortality rate. In fact Tapera's brother Tarubekera dies because he was bewitched. When the mortality rate remained high after the war, people continued to view death as neither painful nor fearsome.

Just like wa Thiongo (1986, p. 7), Chiwome (1998, p. 21) views political independence as "independence with a question mark", as an independence with a ruler holding a begging bowl and the ruled a shrinking belly". Thus, he views political independence as an independence

that perpetuates people's hunger and thirst for basic resources. For him, death continues to occur in great numbers since the new government has failed to make drugs available in hospitals. This means that all those people who contracted terminal and other diseases, would die. Chiwome (ibid) says that, "*Varwere vakanga vawanda kudarika mibhedha ... mishonga yakanga yava kutaira*" (In hospitals, patients were more in numbers than the available beds in the wards ... drugs were in scarce supply). In addition to the scarcity of beds and drugs in hospitals, Chiwome sees another problem – that of scarcity of food in the hospitals. He says that, "*nzara ikatiwo ndiri pano*" (hunger was also the order of the day in hospitals) (ibid, p. ??). The scarcity of basic medical resources caused an increase in the rate at which people were dying after the war especially given that the end of the year witnessed an outbreak of multifarious diseases.

Another thing that hindered people from accessing basic medical care after the war was an increase in medical fees. The rich among the population would acquire health care resources whilst the poor would die in large numbers. The rich could also afford to subscribe to different medical schemes which would allow them to get medical attention whenever the need would arise (ibid, p. 22). Fewer of the well-to-do Zimbabweans died than the poor and the poor learnt to accept death as usual and even the norm. At the end of it all, they learnt to accept that death was neither painful nor fearsome.

After independence, as Chiwome views it, the act of dying created business opportunities for different people. Those who build coffins made business, media houses made money as people would use the media to parade death notices and to write condolence messages to both the deceased and the deceased's family members (Chiwome ibid, p. 32). Flower sellers made money by selling those flowers that were meant to be laid on graves (ibid). Insurance companies made a lot of money through issuing funeral policies and life assurance policies (ibid, p. 30). Those who had cars would make money when they were hired to ferry corpses to different places. At the end of it all that increase in the mortality rate gave some people business. As such, the act of dying became a lucrative activity for some.

Chiwome further views the practice of assimilating Western cultural practices as leading Zimbabweans to perceive death as neither painful nor monstrous. Zimbabweans are borrowing Western traits during funeral proceedings, for example, the dress code that the well-to-do favour during funeral proceedings. The men, just like the acculturated Tapera, put on expensive black suits and shoes, and shun mourning. Tapera feels embarrassed when his wife mourns for his dead brother, (ibid, p. 24). Christianity is also an instrument of acculturation. People live by Christian doctrines to the level where they learn to shun traditional norms and values. Therefore, Christianity and some Western customs are teaching Zimbabweans to perceive death as neither painful nor monstrous.

What Chiwome, who is a social historian in his own right, has observed is true and is relevant to the current article. However, it does not particularly serve to explain in detail the events in Mataranyika's poem. Therefore, it is necessary to introduce a new critical dimension in order to account for why the aunt in Mataranyika's poem and the members of the persona's natal family do not care if she dies.

Scholz (2004, p. 23) has established that the Zimbabwean liberation struggle was more of a rebellion than a revolution, and for him:



A rebellion is the overthrow of a government whereas a revolution is the overthrow of a social order in favour of a new system of social structures and values. A rebellion replaces one set of individuals with another, while a revolution brings about a fundamental change in the social, political and economic conditions of society. Rebels want to take the place of the rulers they displace while revolutionaries want to build a new social order.

Scholz (ibid) proceeds to assert that the Zimbabwean liberation struggle was a rebellion since it enabled a set of individuals to replace another set in government without enforcing revolutionary change:

In Zimbabwe, despite the rhetoric brought about by the armed struggle the colonial structures and Rhodesian way of life persist. Arguably at independence, black Zimbabweans had better access to education, health services and social welfare. But the improvements were quantitative rather than qualitative, peripheral rather than central. They did not lead to the emergence of a new society built on the vision of justice for all.

Just because most African states failed to revolutionise their economies after they attained independence from Western colonists, wa Thiong'o (1986) views the political independence in Africa as mere flag independence which opened an era of hungering and thirsting for basic needs. Mazrui (1993, 2004) believes that Africa is suffering on the level of economics since African governments have failed to come up with viable economies based on a sound means of production. Those African states that struggled to enforce a socialist mode of production failed and ended up glorifying a retarded form of socialism. Those African states that struggled to establish a capitalist mode of production failed in their endeavours and ended up experiencing effects of a lop-sided type of capitalism. Mazrui (1993, p. 922) says of a lop-sided capitalism, "The continent had received Western consumption patterns without Western productive techniques, Western tastes without Western performance, urbanization without industrialization, capitalist greed without capitalist discipline".

It seems the characters in Mataranyika's poem and Chiwome's short story are behaving in the manner they do since they are victims of a lop-sided capitalism. In Mataranyika's poem, the persona's aunt and members of her natal family seem to be driven by capitalist greed more than they are driven by Shona tradition to behave. They have the zeal to acquire capital, yet they cannot acquire that capital in a virtuous manner in that economy which is quasi-colonial and quasi-capitalist. Therefore, they subvert Shona cultural values in order to satisfy their greed for capital goods. They have commercialised *lobola* in order to benefit in material gains from the persona's husband. Therefore, they sacrifice her life in order to keep hold of what they have gained upon her marriage. That is why the aunt advises her niece to brave the killer blows she is receiving from her husband since that is the only means by which members of her family can hold on to the benefits they enjoyed on the day she was married. Furthermore, some members of the persona's natal family do not care if she dies since they know that her death will bring even more capital goods to their family as her husband will be fined when he finally kills her. Therefore, in order to fulfil their capitalist greed, their newly acquired Western tastes and consumption patterns, members of the persona's family sacrifice life as a value of Shona culture in order for them to benefit in material terms. Therefore, the lop-sided capitalism Zimbabweans are braving every day causes them to view the act of dying as enriching and as neither painful nor fearsome.

In Chiwome's short story, acculturation seems to emerge from the need to fulfil Western tastes and capitalist greed. Tapera and some members of his class put on black shoes and black suits when they attend the funeral. They admire Western dressing styles, therefore, they dress in the Western way when they attend funerals. In that sense, they subvert Shona customs and values. In fact, that desire to live a Western lifestyle in a country that is not Western and in conditions that do not match those of the Western countries is causing Zimbabweans to move away from the traditional understanding of death as painful and not fearsome. Writers of fiction have no option but to capture the new realities in Zimbabwe when they treat death and funerary proceedings in their literary creations. Therefore, literature is somehow conditioned by the events and contradictions of its time. The paradigm shift in the treatment of death and funerary proceedings in Zimbabwean literature published before and after independence has mainly resulted from changes in Zimbabwe's politico-economic and socio-cultural environments.

## **Conclusion**

The article has been able to establish that there has been a paradigm shift in the manner Zimbabwean poets and some writers of fiction perceive death and funerary proceedings. Chivaura and Hamutyinei, who are pre-independence poets, portray Zimbabweans' understanding of death and funerary proceedings as both painful and fearsome. In doing so, they indicate that there has been a paradigm shift in the manner Zimbabweans perceive death and funerary proceedings. That is the case since in Shona culture, death is perceived as painful but as neither fearsome nor monstrous. That being the case, Mataranyika and Chiwome, who are writing fiction after Zimbabwe attained political independence from Britain in 1980, indicate that there has been a paradigm shift in the manner Zimbabweans perceive death before and after independence. They depict Zimbabweans as accepting death as a usual and normal event that is neither painful nor fearsome. Therefore, there has been a paradigm shift in the manner Zimbabweans perceive death after independence and how they perceived it before independence. Before independence, as Chivaura (1965) and Hamutyinei (1969, 1972) have established, death was perceived as both painful and monstrous among the Shona. However, Chiwome (1998) and Mataranyika (1994) have demonstrated that after independence, the Shona started to perceive death and funerary proceedings as neither painful nor monstrous; thus, they have shifted from the demands of their tradition. In Shona traditional culture, death is considered to be neither painful nor fearsome. Rather, it is perceived as painful but not fearsome. This means that Shona traditional culture is almost always affected by changes that take place in the society at the levels of politics, economics and culture. Therefore, paradigm shifts in the manner the Shona perceive death and funerary proceedings are inevitable when conditions in the society change. The literature should reflect the changing conditions and the paradigm shifts which result from those changes in the manner members of society perceive reality of life.

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