

Empowerment or Delusion?: The Shona Novel and Women Emancipation

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Summary

One of the topical debates in Zimbabwe today has been how to extricate and raise women from the disparaged image and marginalised position they have held and continue to hold in society. Women, church organisations, legislators and writers continue to push for the emancipation of the female gender. Using the Africana Womanist literary theory, this article examines Shona writers' contribution to the efforts by analysing what they perceive as women's problems, the underlying causes and the possible solutions. It focuses on Makayi's *Makudo Ndomamwe* (2004) and Mutasa's *Sekai: Minda Tave Nayo* (2005). The article observes that whereas the writers identify the nature of women's problems, they unfortunately fail to examine the real underlying causes to those problems and hence, the solutions they suggest do not satisfactorily tally with reality. In light of this, the hoped-for emancipation largely remains a pipe-dream.

Opsomming

Een van die aktuele debatte wat in Zimbabwe gevoer word, is hoe om vroue op te hef en te bevry van aftakeling en die gemarginaliseerde posisie wat hulle in die samelewing beklee. Vroue, kerkorganisasies, wetgewers en skrywers beywer hulle steeds vir die emansipasie van die vroulike geslag. Hierdie artikel ondersoek Shona-skrywers se bydrae tot emansipasiepogings aan die hand van die Africana Womanist literêre teorie, en ontleed die probleme wat hulle as vroueprobleme beskou, die onderliggende oorsake van dié probleme en moontlike oplossings. Dit fokus op Makayi se *Makudo Ndomamwe* (2004) en Mutasa se *Sekai: Minda Tave Nayo* (2005). Die artikel merk op dat skrywers wel die aard van vroueprobleme identifiseer, maar dat hulle ongelukkig nie daarin slaag om die ware onderliggende oorsake van dié probleme te ondersoek nie. Die oplossings waarmee hulle vorendag kom, hou dus nie voldoende verband met die werklikheid nie. In die lig hiervan is die emansipasie waarop daar gehoop word steeds 'n hersenskim.

Introduction

Post-independent Zimbabwe has witnessed the promulgation of legislative measures that are women-friendly, the mushrooming of pro-women organisations and a steady rise in pro-women writing. The article examines the contribution of pro-women Shona writers, examining their perception of women's problems, underlying causes and possible solutions. It does so focusing on Makayi's *Makudo Ndomamwe* (2004) and Mutasa's *Sekai: Minda Tave Nayo* (2005).

Makudo Ndomamwe (2004), told largely from a third person narrative style, centres on Revai, a teenager whose desire for education and emancipation is militated against by patriarchal society and only extricates herself from such disempowerment with the help of fellow women. *Sekai: Minda Tave Nayo* (2005) centres mainly on Sekai, her relatives and schoolmates. Sekai also battles the gruesome grip of tradition, defies all odds to reach dizzy heights in school (she even goes overseas for her university education) and then uses her education to uplift not only the welfare of her family, but that of her community too. Through the epistolary technique, she and others share important information on men and the oppressive nature of patriarchy. They then discuss how education can ultimately bail women out of the oppressive grip.

Thus, the two novels centre on the problems and disadvantages of one's life as a female being and how such problems can be solved in a bid to bring total empowerment to her. The writers identify men and patriarchy as the chief enemies of women and their quest to raise their status in life, at the same time showing education and unity among women as key solutions. In both novels, like in other feminist novels, "higher education offers women new possibilities of earning a living, bringing them autonomy and independence from men" (Arndt 2002: 78). This way, the two novels tackle issues similar to those dealt with by women writers such as Emecheta (*The Joys of Motherhood* 1979), Tsitsi Dangarembga (*Nervous Conditions* 1988) and Himunyanga-Phiri (*The Legacy* 1992) where the girl child is denied the right to acquire formal education. The writers thus fall into the category of what Arndt regards as African feminists. Arndt (2002: 78) says these regard most of all, education and solidarity among women as well as women's economic and social independence from men as important means towards their emancipation.

Theoretical Framework

The article is informed by, and is rooted in the theory of Africana Womanism propounded by Hudson-Weems (1993, 2004). The theory is premised on the view that western feminists' understanding of the nature,

scope and solutions to women's problems does not apply to women of African descent. She argues that feminism was conceptualised and adopted by White women, reflecting an agenda which was designed to meet their particular needs (Hudson-Weems 1993: 18). Mainstream feminism asserts for equal and individual rights for White women in a patriarchy where White men had monopolised power (Hudson-Weems 1993: 18). The Africana woman on the other hand has a different attitude and approach to the man in her world (Hudson-Weems 1993: 7). Awa Thiam emphasises:

Some women tend to equate man with society and by inference see men as their enemy. We do not feel that, as far as Black Africa is concerned, men are the enemies.

(cited by Hudson-Weems 1993: 7)

Africana women do not see black men and their culture as enemies because the men have never had the same power as the White men. Africana women have never been, until colonialism, considered the property of their male counterparts. In this article, Africana Womanism helps examine if Shona writers do not see and blame African men and patriarchy as the chief enemies of women emancipation and whether they see the need for the two sexes to join hands in the emancipation of the female gender. Thus it helps demythologise African women's problems, the underlying causes and even suggested ways of solving the problems. What makes Africana Womanism the ideal theory in this regard is that it is premised and rooted in African culture, history and worldview.

Patriarchy and the Marginalisation of Shona Women

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

... vakatanga kuseka vachiti VaRunyararo waitongwa nemukadzi uyo ainge ovafurira kudzidzisa mwanasikana zvavaisaita ivo. Kwaitoti anenge asvika rugwaro rwechinomwe aitoti midzimu yainge yatomuona.

(p. 6)

... people from the village laughed saying VaRunyararo was under petticoat government from his wife who was now influencing him to send the girl

child to school something which they themselves did not do. Any girl child who had gone as far as Grade seven would really thank her ancestral spirits.

(p. 6)

What comes out is that it was common practice for Shona patriarchal society not to accord the girl child the chance to acquire post-primary education. On the other hand, the boy child went not only beyond higher primary level, but also as far as his intelligence and the fees could allow. Society also perceives and disapproves VaRunyararo's wife as a bad influence to her husband for making him allow Revai, the girl child, to go to school. To them, she acts in violation of the norm. In other words, it was unheard of for a woman to control and influence her husband. It was expected that "men should always control, rule their households and keep women in subservient positions" (May 1983: 61). Men's deeds, opinions and world-view were deemed final. Even when Revai opts to go back to school after her failed attempt to marry Gutsa, men (her maternal uncles) are shown disapproving of the idea (Makayi 2004: 52). In men, the writer sees a people who have the same attitude and approach to women. Men label women negatively and close doors for women who want to emancipate themselves in life.

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

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

(p. 13)

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

(p. 13)

The writer successfully brings out the myths peddled about the Shona concerning the girl child's education. They thought to educate her was to pledge her to teachers (Mai Guchu quoted in Barnes & Win 1992: 63). They saw teachers as suspicious beings who took advantage of the girl child. For the girl child, her arena was limited to agricultural tasks like farming, and domestic ones like child rearing, sweeping, cooking and scrubbing; tasks that they argued, did not warrant women to go to school (Mai Kanogoiwa in Barnes & Win 1992: 64). The same reality and concerns are raised in Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988) where Nyasha testifies that she only got the chance to learn after the death of her brother, Nhamo. When he was still alive, she was sidelined to domestic chores whilst he went to school. Again, in Himunyanganga-Phiri's *The Legacy* (1992) the narrator finds herself out of school and made to marry early so as to raise fees for her brothers who are considered fit and ideal for education. By denying the girl child education, "patriarchy seeks to keep her in an inferior position to men, a position where women were men's slaves" (African Weekly 1946 in Barnes & Win 1992: 65). Whilst education allows men to be adventurous, keeping women to tasks limited to farming, child minding and cooking, patriarchy not only enslaves them, it also denies them the freedom and equality with men that women deserve. Women are excluded from the socio-economic elevation and development that are brought about with education. This way, both male and female writers are successful and at par in showing the incapacitation of women.

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

Education and Women Empowerment

The writers proceed to show that women can be empowered through acquiring formal education. In *Sekai: Minda Tave Nayo* (2005), Kasirai indicates the indispensability of education by stating that even women's traditional roles like farming now call for educated people (p.3). In this case, education enables women to efficiently and effectively carry out their tasks, something they could not do without it. In their justification of women's education, the authors show that the girl child is quite determined, hardworking and intelligent. In *Makudo Ndomamwe*, despite learning at a day secondary school, Revai passes all the eight subjects she had registered for and later obtains a nursing certificate (2004: 56). In her nursing programme, she is so intelligent as to silence student doctors from the University of Zimbabwe. She is eloquent and has great mastery of her stuff (Makayi 2004: 62). She succeeds in life, living an admirable life, driving her own car, looking after her family very well.

Similarly, in *Sekai: Minda Tave Nayo*, Sekai is quite outstanding not only in behaviour, but also in performance. She holds several leadership positions through her secondary education. In the debates about land and the economy that they hold, she proves to be well read, knowledgeable, confident and quite eloquent (2005: 18-20). She ultimately goes overseas to further her education and again passes very well. Even in her execution of duty in the Ministry of Lands and Agriculture, she explains many concepts on how farmers can improve production, including how land has to be distributed, used and maintained. She also helps village communities get rid of their negative perception of the girl child and her capabilities, leaving everyone geared to educate their girl children. Through her, both her immediate family and community witness positive development. She builds a very beautiful house for her parents and promises to build a bigger one for her aunt. Even in Himunyanga-Phiri's *The Legacy* (1992), the girl child is shown as very capable; she registers in Science Subjects and goes on to do a Degree in Engineering where she performs even better than her male counterparts. Thus education levels the playing field for men and women, enabling women to demonstrate their potentials, earn money and raise their socio-economic standing. In some cases, it removes women's economic dependence on men, something they could not have done without acquiring an education.

That education is indispensable to development is captured through the Shona adage "*Kusaziva kufa*" (Ignorance is the same as death). Such a position stems from the view that education provides people with manual or mechanical skills (Blaug 1980: 146) and that it works to eliminate poverty (Blaug 1980: 146). In modern Zimbabwe, educated women have assumed various positions as ministers, nurses, teachers, engineers, doctors, pharmacists and lecturers. These positions have also accorded some of these

women a very good life style, of good accommodation, cars and good remuneration. It has empowered them socially, intellectually, economically, materially and politically.

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

Single Motherhood and Women Solidarity as Empowerment

In addition to education, the authors also see single motherhood and unity among women as important in uplifting their socio-economic standing. In *Makudo Ndomamwe* (2004), after enduring the pains of an unsuccessful marriage with Gutsa, Revai vows, "*Handichadizye kuona munhurume pedyo neni panyaya dzerudo* (p. 60)." (I no longer want to have anything to do with men in love matters). The solution here lies in avoiding men in one's life. It is believed that since men are the cause of trouble, the way out is having nothing to do with them at all (Interview with Makayi, 17 July 2008). This saves women from all the problems caused by their associations with men. This therefore gives them the platform and freedom to advance and enjoy life.

Joined to this, the author suggests that women must join hands and fight to remove men's chauvinistic tendencies. Although her uncle tries to block Revai's comeback to school, her grandmother fights hard on her side. Her mother and aunt too offer her emotional and moral support (2004: 53). Again, when Nyengerai comes back from overseas with another fiancé, his new fiancé is not cross with Revai. She abandons Nyengerai and tasks him to organise his affairs (Makayi 2004: 85). When he tries to reconcile with

Revai, Revai too turns down his request and he is left stranded and baffled, with no one to establish a family.

That single motherhood is seen as the solution is in line with radical feminists' stance that men are never allies in the struggle against oppression of women (Arndt 2002: 86). This view is an echo of Nwapa's point in *Efuru* (1966), which encourages women to terminate marriages once they are unable to find what they expected from them. It also happens in "Bedzafuma" in *Masimba* (2004: 37-42), where separation is viewed as the solution to women's hardships and socio-economic disempowerment in marriage. Women writers thus condemn marriage as riddled by oppressive values. It is viewed as an institution, which militates against their emancipation. This is explained by the generation to which the Makayi belongs; she is amongst the young and modernised authors who move with the times. In an interview, she testified that it is retrogressive to bind oneself to a marriage that seems not to work. In the spirit of oneness, in *Sekai: Minda Tave Nayo* (2005), Sekai's aunt takes a bold stance and sends her niece to her son so that she can acquire an education. She argues that it will never happen that all generations of women fail to acquire an education. Ultimately, everyone admires what Sekai has done to both the family and community and they feel challenged to send their girl children to school. Thus as a woman, Sekai's successful story helps bring empowerment to her fellow kindred for whom society had not aspired to emancipate. However, Mutasa's vision of women solidarity is different from that of women writers who often advocate for divorce and separation from men as solutions.

By joining hands, the women succeed in dealing a blow to men and their attitude towards women's empowerment. They refuse being taken for a ride. At this level, the writers see the salvation of women as lying in their own hands. Unless they take it upon themselves jointly to resist male domination, they will always be under the grip of men. Freedom is worked for, and not just given (Ngugi 1972: x). This also gets authenticity from history where women have joined hands to form their own organisations meant to fight for their space in life. Through these organisations, women have managed not only to have their voices heard and listened to, but also to have their emancipation come to reality. These organisations include Musasa Project, the Zimbabwe Women Writers Association, and Women in Action Group and Women in Politics Support Unit. Some of these agitate against all forms of violence experienced by women while others are concerned about increasing women's quantitative and qualitative participation in policy and decision-making (Women in Politics Support Unit 2003/2004: 5). Some scholarships are only meant to finance the girl child's education, such as the Women in Management of Business Organisation (WIMBO) scholarship, whilst some universities are specifically for the female being, for example Women's University in Africa, in Marondera. All these are successful efforts by women to uplift their socio-economic status. However, whereas

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

Critiquing Authorial Visions

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

It is the coming of the Whites and the western form of education that made the Shona unwillingly alienate the girl child from the new form of education. As Barnes and Win rightly observe, education was one of the things which colonial society denied African children, especially girls (1992: 61). Colonialism had no place for the girl child; and women in general. No jobs were meant for the African woman because most African women were supposed to stay in the reserves (Barnes & Win 1992: 7). The foreigners employed males to do what was prior to this, female jobs like cooking, sweeping, making beds (Barnes & Win 1992: 84) and hence there were laws to forbid women from entering and staying in the cities (Barnes & Win 1992: 140). Ogot, the Kenyan novelist makes a scathing attack on

colonialism when she remarks that when the coloniser wanted helpers, he built schools for men away from women, creating a big rift between brother and sister, husband and wife, girl and lover, and a saying soon evolved, that a woman's place was in the home; in the kitchen (in Arndt 2002: 96). Chakaipa in *Rudo Ibofu* (1966) captures such a scenario, where Zingizi was employed as a cook despite being male. Seeing that there was no place for women in the new society, African society was forced to revisit and adjust its position and perception about women's education that had, prior to this placed women at the same footing as men.

Hence, whilst Makayi and Mutasa expose patriarchy denying girl children the platform to learn, they sadly do not look into the causes of such a stance. Yet, African culture was merely reacting to the dictates of the more powerful colonial system. Under colonialism, educating the boy child was just a survival strategy by the victims of a new system, and to blame patriarchy and men is to absolve colonialism of its ills. To blame tradition is to fail to contextualise the problem. It is to address the symptoms of an unjust system without getting to the root cause. Such would be a case of misdirected anger.

In *Makudo Ndomamwe*, Revai believes that all men are the same (2004: 66); they are against women's emancipation. As such, Makayi's novel fits into the category of radical feminists who argue that men (as a social group) inevitably and in principle discriminate against, oppress and mistreat women, and that they are by nature, hopelessly sexist and usually deeply immoral, with no one departing from this pattern (Arndt 2002: 85). Whilst there are cases of men who are this bad, Revai's statement and stance seem grossly generalised and fail to get to the root cause of women's unfortunate status in life. If all men are the same, it means it is the socialisation process, which is to blame and has to be examined and rectified for the good of humanity. Failure to do so would see more men of a similar type coming out of the same socialisation plants. It is as if to say men come into this world as finished products and therefore as unchangeable (Kandawasvika-Chivandikwa 2006: 187). It would appear as if the traits are inherent or inborn in men. If this were so, then women would have lost their struggles for liberation before they have even started waging them. It would be to accept that efforts to change men's behaviour and attitude would be a futile exercise (Kandawasvika-Chivandikwa 2006: 187-188).

Yet, a look at our yesterday helps to show that Shona men and patriarchy were not always hostile and insensitive to women's problems, potentials and emancipation. Rather, tradition has shown that women have been a much-respected sector of society who wielded great influence in both private and public spheres of life (Auret 1990: 98). Hence Makayi's male characters are not typical characters under typical circumstances. The writer's stance is evidence of Africans who have imbibed the colonial myth that men and patriarchy have always worked to the disadvantage of women. Failure to

identify the root cause makes people fight a wrong cause. As such, women spend much of their time, resources and efforts fighting men and abolishing the so-called patriarchal attitudes instead of joining hands with men to work for the re-socialisation of humanity.

Although the solution for women to join hands and fight men seems plausible, it is based on two assumptions; that women can do without men and that they (women) have similar problems, backgrounds, wishes and aspirations such that they can easily come together and successfully fight men for their empowerment. This is not always the case. Unlike what Makayi presents, in reality, women cannot successfully do away with men. They can hardly ignore, suppress or overcome biological desires that need to be fulfilled. Hudson-Weems (1993: 61) writes that unlike the mainstream feminist, whose struggle is characteristically independent of and often times adverse to male participation, the Africana womanist invites her male counterpart into her struggle for liberation and parity in society. Africana men and women need each other emotionally, and of course, for survival and neither gender was irredeemable and therefore undesirable (Hudson-Weems 1993: 67). As testified by some women interviewed by Barnes and Win, "When you used to be married...life needs a man. Life needs a woman. So you find it's better to have somebody to kiss you" (1992: 133). It means either sex has emotions that badly need to be satisfied.

Hence, although women may help one another, there is a limit as to the extent their help can go. Beyond this, men become indispensable beings. Again, Shona society does not have a place for single women whom Weinrich says risk losing their self-respect (1982: 35). Worse, the novel celebrates single motherhood, showing it as a solution when in fact it symbolises the beginning of a new life with even worse challenges especially in the current harsh socio-economic environment. Hence, the writer places hope where in reality there seems to be no hope.

It is also hardly believable that women have similar problems and aspirations that can easily call for their unified efforts for their emancipation. They belong to different groups and sectors in society, which have very different backgrounds and interests. The unemployed and traditional women treasure salvaging and safeguarding marriage more than anything, including having many children. Again, some churches celebrate polygamous marriages where women are urged to co-exist under one man without joining hands to unsettle him. To them, it is natural and expected of a man to have more than one wife. Other women are sex workers, not by choice. This group of women cannot join hands with others to fight men when men are these women's source of living. If prostitutes would be happy with men being divorced, it would be for the sole reason that the unattached men become easier to lure than those in steady and happy marriages. In real life, "a married woman would never like a whore" (Barnes & Win 1992: 120). Other women are gainfully employed and so do not really look up to

men for support in life. Still among the educated are those who badly need men for emotional satisfaction. It is therefore clear that in Africa, women cannot easily and successfully join hands against men. Whilst some are against men, others are for the same men. Worse, today, feminist ideals appeal to women of the intellectual and middle class, permitting the conclusion that feminism has no relevance for Africa and that it is “non-African” (Arndt 2002: 33).

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

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

Conclusion

The article focused on Shona writers’ perceptions on female empowerment. It emerged that the male and female writers have similar visions with regards the causes and solutions to women’s incapacitation. Overall, it was noted that female writers give a wider exposition of their problems when compared to their male counterparts, presumably because they are the recipients of the problems. Both authors view education and unity among women as key in liberating women from the grip of patriarchy. Although the suggested solutions are noble, it has been noted that they do not totally address women’s problems especially in an environment where even the educated are failing to acquire employment and are losing their jobs without meaningful benefits and where same sex marriages are a taboo. Thus, looked at more closely, Shona writers are deluded into believing that education, single motherhood and solidarity among women are the keys to women empowerment, especially in African milieu.

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