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Gendering roles, masculinities and spaces: negotiating transgression in Charles Mungoshi's and other writings

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Abstract

This article discusses perceptions of Shona dominant masculinities in Charles Mungoshi's and other writings. The texts analysed in this article are set in different socio-historical contexts—during the colonial and stretching to the contemporary times; in rural, urban and diaspora spaces. Collectively, the texts offer the reader textual spaces to trace the strategies used by heteropatriarchal dominant masculinities to maintain dominance within families. The article demonstrates that the selected texts call attention to how Shona women have always challenged patriarchal hegemony—subversion that has resulted in the formulation of social discourses, especially within men circles that some men are dominated by women (*anotongwa nemukadzi*). I read Mungoshi's selected texts alongside Kabwato's 'The breadwinner' and Sigauke's 'African wife' to think through how discourses such as *anotongwa nemukadzi*, are persistently invoked in contexts where anti-patriarchal successes might have provoked significant shifts in gender roles. Such power-based masculinities, in the modern contexts, provoke dramas that play out when husbands lose the breadwinner status, that happens simultaneously with wives becoming sole breadwinners in their families. This article draws from Ratele's thoughts on toxic masculinities, Adichie and Enloe's feminist perspectives to show how gendering of roles ties seamlessly with gender stratification and inequalities.

Keywords

Zimbabwe, Shona, 'real men', masculinities, patriarchy

Introduction, background and theoretical underpinnings

Traditional practices and beliefs continue to construct the way people, especially men, negotiate their social identities in today's Shona¹ communities in Zimbabwe. In particular, questions of gender and manhood shape men and women's behaviours in everyday contexts. So, it is not a surprise that gender and manhood are recurrent tropes in the Zimbabwean literary canon. In novels and short stories that represent the 1970s rural Shona communities, especially in Charles Mungoshi's *Waiting for the rain* (1975) and the short story 'Who will stop the dark' taken from the anthology *Some kinds of wounds and other short stories* (1980), one reads about fathers and grandfathers, Shona patriarchs who socialise boys into becoming *varume chaivo*, 'real men,' as part of what Dlamini, speaking in the context of Xhosa cultures, terms 'men making processes' (2020, p. 178). Mungoshi's 'The hare', taken from the short story anthology *Walking still* (1997), Ethel Kabwato's 'The breadwinner', from the short story anthology *Writing now: More stories from Zimbabwe* (2005) edited by Irene Staunton and 'The African wife' by Emmanuel Sigauke, taken from the short story anthology *Writing free* (2011) edited by Irene Staunton, are all set in modern urban contexts. These works show that 'real manhood', in particular 'power-based masculinities' are difficult to sustain especially during national economic crises and in detraditionalised diaspora contexts. The choice of texts for this article is thus not arbitrary. The selected texts invoke different time and space contexts. That allows one to make the point that temporality is important in how different gender relations are framed. Texts which call attention to periods and social contexts that span from traditional to contemporary times offer textual spaces to explore how patriarchy is threatened by, and adapts itself in the face of anti-patriarchal struggles to emancipate women (Enloe, 2017). This argument makes a lot of sense, since, as Massey notes, 'space and place are important in the construction of gender relations and in struggles to change them' (Massey, 1994, p. 179).

Mungoshi is a well-known writer with an extensive oeuvre, but his works alone cannot sustain the arguments that I want to make in this article, hence the inclusion of Kabwato and Sigauke's two short stories. None of Mungoshi's works engages with the question of gender and masculinities in a detraditionalised context such as the space of the diaspora as does Sigauke's 'African wife.' So, discussing a text like 'African wife' alongside his works enriches any discussion of Shona masculinities and transgression of gender roles. Mungoshi has also not written anything on the post-2000 Zimbabwean crisis that one can use to discuss questions addressed in this article. Post-2000 Zimbabwean literature can be loosely defined as texts that engage or reflect (on) the Zimbabwean crisis that followed the controversial land reallocation of the 2000s (see Nyambi & Mangena, 2020). So, the choice of a text like Kabwato's 'The breadwinner' makes a good addition to Mungoshi's writing in the sense that it enables entry of the discourse on masculinities into a territory that he has not contributed to. In this case Kabwato's short story engages with the subject of 'the calamity of endangered and endangering masculinities' in the context of the Zimbabwean crisis (Nyambi & Mangena, 2020, p. 383).

It is important to note from the outset that the concept of 'real manhood' among the Shona is fluid. Its basic meaning is negotiated depending on context. Considering the fluidity of the concept of 'real manhood', I mark the phrase throughout the article to show that the concept is unstable. As Shire (1994, p. 156) shows, masculine identities of Shona men are not homogenous, but are negotiated as per particular gendered terrains. The focus of this article is mainly on the identities of 'real men' in Shona heterosexual families as is imagined in selected works by Mungoshi, Kabwato and Sigauke. In view of this, the definition of 'real men' relevant

to this article is man ‘as protector and head of the family ... married to submissive domesticated women’ (Zenenga, 2007, p. 133).

The concerted effort to raise boys into ‘real men’ includes, among other strategies, guarding against the boys’ ‘feminisation,’ hence the prevalence of the refrain ‘he is a man and not a woman’ that the reader encounters many times in Mungoshi’s novel *Waiting for the rain* and short stories, ‘Who will stop the dark?’ and ‘The hare’. Words such as ‘you are not a woman and you are a man’ feature prominently in advices that are given to boys and men, especially in contexts where they would have acted in ways that are traditionally perceived as ‘unmanly’. To mothers or wives, the statements ‘he is a man and not a woman’ or ‘he is a man, you want to turn him into a woman’ are restraining orders against what the patriarchs interpret as ‘feminisation’ of boys which is believed to happen through training in the so-called unmanly (often read womanly) roles and activities.

The statement ‘you are a man and not a woman,’ is not only intended to articulate presumed differences between men and women but through it, Shona patriarchy creates and sustains hierarchies between men and women (Dlamini, 2020). Unwittingly, it labels womanhood as a ‘figure of the dreaded other’ that men are expected to abhor (Kortenaar 2007, p. 43). It also gives a false impression that men have certain excellences that boys ought to attain, and at the same time implies that women have inadequacies that boys should despise. ‘You are a man and not a woman’ thus doubles to establish men’s superiority over women. Such social discourses constitute what Helman and Ratele (2016) call problematic constructions of gender that are (re)produced in everyday contexts and sustain gender inequalities and injustices. Dominant constructions of masculinity that centre on men’s power, and control over others (Helman & Ratele, 2016), define others, especially women, as perpetual dependents, so much so that when they become sole breadwinners within their families, such developments are interpreted as ‘usurpation of male power.’ The figure of a man who provides for, and controls his family is still very much revered within Shona communities, to the extent that any family man who fails in this regard and finds himself spending most of his time at home, while the wife goes to work is said to be dominated by his wife, in Shona, *anotongwa nomukadzi*. The phrase *kutongwa nomukadzi* is conveniently used to express discomfort with the shifting of gender roles and boundaries especially where the changes threaten dominant, particularly power-based perceptions of manhood. Traditional Shona society refuses to interpret the shift in gender roles as a transformative moment where women have attained economic independence, it conflates that with women usurping power from their husbands. Calling the shifting of gender roles within heterosexual families *kutongwa nomukadzi* is thus a strategy used by patriarchy to reinforce or naturalise traditional gender stereotypes.

In view of this background, the main focus of this article is to discuss problematic dominant perceptions of manhood in Shona cultures as depicted in Charles Mungoshi’s, Ethel Kabwato’s and Emmanuel Sigauke’s writings. To explore literary and cultural representations of the various strategies that Shona patriarchy uses to maintain its hegemony within heterosexual families in a changing social environment, I divide the article into three main sections. In the first section, I analyse ‘Who will stop the dark’ and *Waiting for the rain* by Mungoshi, texts that narrativise Shona patriarchs’ (fathers and grandfathers) commitment to socialising boys into becoming ‘real men’ and their fear that boys might be turned into ‘women.’ This socialisation takes place in traditional rural contexts and otherwise invoke pre-colonial cultural and social norms. In the section that follows, I use the short stories ‘The hare’ by Mungoshi and ‘The breadwinner’ by Kabwato to discuss how social discourses of ‘being dominated by one’s

wife' are invoked in 'modern' contexts where anti-patriarchal successes have provoked significant shifts of gender roles. These social discourses shape the dramas that follow when husbands fail to live up to the patriarchal expectations of being the centre of power in their families. In the last section, I analyse 'African wife' by Sigauke, a short story about Zimbabwean migrants based in the United States of America. I discuss in this section how patriarchal dominant constructions of gender persist in the contemporary times, albeit in transformed forms, and shape the characters' social identities.

While much of what is known about gender in Zimbabwe has come through social science research, creative cultures are known as sites to encounter narratives about masculinities and gender. In view of this, the overarching argument made in this article is that Zimbabwean literature offers a textual space not only to cast light on the gendered injustices characteristic of dominant perceptions of manhood, but represents the ways in which women subvert patriarchal structures that are propped up by especially problematic constructions of masculinity. Theoretically, the article is framed within the discourse of masculinities and it specifically engages the subject within the frames of Ratele's (2013) thoughts on toxic masculinities. Ratele's ideas are engaged further from feminist perspectives to show how gendering of roles ties seamlessly with gender stratification and inequalities. For instance, Adichie's thoughts on socialisation of boys and girls as patriarchy's strategy of sustaining its survival are found useful to a reading of 'Who will stop the dark', 'The hare' and 'The breadwinner.'

Previous researches like Gaidzanwa's (1985) and Muchemwa and Muponde's (2007) deal with the same subject of gender, and largely complement each other. Gaidzanwa's book focuses on the portrayal of women as mothers, wives, without husbands, rural and urban in Zimbabwean literatures. Muchemwa and Muponde's work in a sense fills in the gap that is created by, and reconfigures Gaidzanwa's work and thrives to show how debates about gender 'can only be complete and meaningful when masculinity is brought under close scrutiny'. The present article further complements such researches but also differs from them in the sense that it uses texts that represent different temporalities, and thus particularly traces Shona patriarchy's adaptability (Enloe, 2017) that should force a reinvention of strategies of challenging it.

'You are a man and not a woman,' educating boys to grow into 'real men'

In 'Who will stop the dark', Charles Mungoshi grapples with problematic constructions of manhood as the opposite of womanhood in Shona. The short story is narrated by a boy called Zakeo. Zakeo is troubled to see his crippled father spend his days weaving baskets. His father has a broken back. Men use their bodies to mediate not just the world but their gendered identities (Drummond, 2005). The penis is particularly the very embodiment of the phallus and patriarchy, which is metonymic of this mediation. Through his depiction of Zakeo's father, Mungoshi shows in his short story that the back of a man embodies critical features of manhood within Shona communities—as is implied in the statement 'a man's back is the man' (p. 26). A man's back is presumed to be the basis of sexuality, so a man without a back, in heteropatriarchal thinking, is one who functions without the most important part that makes a man. This is why, among the Shona people, men who have erectile problems use aphrodisiacs to strengthen the back (*kusimbisa musana*). Nonetheless, a man's back as a symbol of masculinity is much bigger than sexuality. It is also about agency and defines man as the backbone or template, and in a sense, the back of a man becomes a corporeal metaphor of

patriarchy. Zakeo's father does not have erectile problems, but a broken back literally disempowers him from performing his manly duties. Significantly, while Zakeo's father's mobility is limited, his wife, Zakeo's mother, in Zakeo's words, 'could go wherever she wanted to go' (p. 25). Here Mungoshi creates an independent female character who is no longer a victim of patriarchy, but one who has strategically turned the tables, as is symbolically shown through how she domineers and beats the husband (Stratton, 1986). Zakeo's mother has learnt how to control her husband, as is dramatised in a scene where Zakeo's father tries to initiate a conversation about his condition with her in the presence of their son. He says: 'a man's back is the man. Once his back is broken—' another flash of his mother's eye silenced him' (p. 26). The wife's ability to silence her husband subverts patriarchy's dominance in families.

For acquiring the power to dominate her husband, Zakeo's mother is called a witch by people in her community. In other words, power to control family, which is perceived as exclusively male power, is said, to use Ncube's words, to be 'in the wrong hands of the wife' (Ncube, 2020, p. 6). One could use feminist re-definition of a 'witch' to describe Zakeo's mother as 'a woman...*who has* challenged patriarchal control and *claimed* independent knowledge and power' (Rountree, 1997, p. 222). The other way of pushing back against women's encroachment into the so-called male space, besides calling them witches, is to masculinise them. In interpreting the character of Zakeo's mother, Ndlovu says 'the boy's mother has a potent presence that can be equated to symbolic masculinity' (Ndlovu, 2011, p. 159). His description evokes Zenenga's argument in which he deploys the Shona saying, '*mukadzi uyu murume pachake,*' (2007, p. 139) '*this woman is a man*', that is often used to describe women who would have trespassed into what society perceives as men's territory. Masculinising strong women is one way that patriarchy uses to sustain the myth that women have no good qualities; as good as what men have. The myth of course rests on an unstable or problematic notion that men are the 'best' gender.

Zakeo's father weaves baskets, which, in his community, is a feminised occupation. His mother taught him this when he was a boy. This is revealed in a conversation between Zakeo and grandfather: "didn't you ever teach father to hunt, Sekuru?"... I taught him everything a man ought to know'... basket weaving too? ... that was his mother' (p. 28). Becoming a basket weaver happened against his father's wish for him to become a hunter. Mungoshi here represents how what is often represented as socialisation that has gone wrong, as in the case of Zakeo's father, is actually an extended metaphor of the success of women's struggles against patriarchy's dominance. Later in this discussion, I speak about the concept of 'hard' and 'soft' labor and how the 'soft' and largely emotional labor done by women is often downplayed. In the case of Zakeo's family in which the father does 'soft' labor in weaving baskets and the mother is virtually the man of the house, one reads a situation that patriarchy really abhors—a situation that however represents what one could call a feminist subversion of gendering of roles within families.

Having a dysfunctional back and basket weaving as a speciality means Zakeo's father does not fit into the category of 'real man' within his culture. Men are socialised not to do activities that are deemed feminine such as basket weaving within traditional Shona cultures on the premise that, as Ratele et al note in the context of South African masculinities, 'activity *is taken to be central* ... in the meaning made of being a boy/man' (2010, p. 563). Zakeo strongly hates basket weaving that he has come to associate with his 'weak' father. When his grandfather (Sekuru)

asks him ‘you like basket weaving?’ his response is ‘I hate it’ (p. 38). His hatred of basket weaving is intimately connected to his desire to become a man, different from his father. The grandfather plays the role of a custodian of traditional hegemonic masculine practices and customs. He particularly socialises Zakeo to grow into a man different from his father. Zakeo says this to his grandfather, ‘I want to learn mouse trapping Sekuru, at school they don’t teach us that’ (p. 26), as if to suggest that formal schooling did not teach him to become a man. Sekuru teaches the boy about mouse trapping and fishing. The tutorials also turn out to be lessons about the qualities of ‘real manhood’ as is exemplified in the lesson about fishing where the old man makes use of the anecdote of knots:

In my day, ... there were women knots and men knots. A woman knot is the kind that comes apart when you tug the line. A knot worth the name of whoever makes it shouldn’t fall apart. ... a knot, a real man’s knot, should stay’ (p. 34).

This lesson is about learning a trade as much as it is about gender. The old man uses this anecdote about fishing to teach the boy that to be a man means not to be a woman and how (k)not to tie like a woman. The same statement shows how labour is gendered in traditional Shona communities. Women’s labour, that largely falls into the category of emotional labour, in the sense of daily responsibilities, is not valued. It is considered to be what women are supposed to do. Men’s labour, often understood as ‘hard labour’, is said to be important for the survival of families. The ‘knot’ as an extended metaphor of work and labour suggests that women’s labour is useless because the knots fall apart easily. The knots made by men are strong purporting that their labour is worthwhile. The ideas about gender that Sekuru presents to the boy bring to mind an ideal past that he wishes survives into the future. However, I want to think about what these lessons do to Zakeo; besides teaching him about the ‘strong men knots’ that stay, for instance, what would be the effects of the lesson about ‘women’s knots’ that fall apart especially on his perception of women? Arguably, such lessons are toxic yet common. I want to draw a comparison with a similar scene in Lawrence Hoba’s short story ‘The trek’ (2007, p. 118), in which the writer presents a boy, who utters the statement ‘I know I don’t cry because I am a man. Baba said only women and girls should cry. One day he beat me up for crying when I fell off the scotch cart’. The boy’s father, who, in the short story, is simply referred to as ‘baba’ to emphasise his grounding in patriarchy and how he personifies it, represents girls as inherently different from boys, regurgitating the gender stereotype of fearless men/fearful women. The scene in Hoba’s short story engages with the conflation of manliness with toughness, ‘that masculinity means playing it cool, ignoring pain’ (Ratele 2013, p. 8). The boy is taught to pretend that he is not in pain, to conceal his real experiences of the fall. Such lessons, imagined in Mungoshi and Hoba’s short stories, in Adichie’s words, do a ‘disservice to boys’ (Adichie, 2013). Specifically, the teaching given to Zakeo by his grandfather potentially stifles his humanity, in that it plants a bad seed in him, that can lead him to despise women. Baba in Hoba’s short story teaches his son ‘to be afraid of fear, weakness and vulnerability’ (Adichie, 2013). For both boys, growing up then involves being put, to use Adichie’s (2013) words, ‘in a hard, small cage’ with limited space for creativity.

The struggle by fathers to raise boys to become ‘real men’ is also a central feature in *Waiting for the rain*. Tongoona, insists that his wife Raina should not treat their son Lucifer like he is a woman. Ironically Tongoona’s own so-called manhood is already compromised. For instance, for showing coward-like characteristics, in a culture where ‘courage, guts, or fearlessness is a common and compelling stereotype definitive of dominant masculinity’ (Ratele, 2013, p. 8), Tongoona is called ‘weak.’ He is asked to choose a virgin girl in the village who could be

sacrificed in a ritual to carry the burdens of his own family. When he shows reservations, he is called ‘weak’, one without ‘a stone heart’ (p.149). Matandangoma, a traditional healer, who should preside over the ritual mocks his ‘cowardice’ by saying: ‘a woman should have been given what you carry between your legs instead’ (p. 150). The thing that Tongoona carries between his legs, the penis, loses its gendered value and symbolic power in that the ‘owner’ does not act like ‘a man.’ Mungoshi here grapples with the idea that masculinity is not simply given with men’s possession of the penis. He uses Tongoona’s experiences to reflect (on) the thinking among the Shona that in addition to possessing a penis, a man is expected to shy away from everything that taints his manhood, in this case he should not be a coward. Masculinity tainting is, as in Tongoona’s case, as a result of the feminisation of masculinity. He is dismissed as ‘unmanly’ for donning cowardice, which, in most patriarchal communities a feminine trait.

Tongoona watches over Raina’s relationship with their son Lucifer, this he does, and has been doing since Lucifer was a boy, in order to protect him from ‘women softies.’ Tongoona utters the statement ‘he is not a woman you know’ even in conversations about very mundane everyday issues. For instance, Raina’s comment that Lucifer looks starved provokes the following response from Tongoona, ‘he is alright. He is growing up. He is not a woman you know’ (p. 45). Mungoshi trivialises such perceptions of manhood and depicts them as empty. A related subversion can be also be found in Raina’s response to Tongoona’s statement about Lucifer being a man. Although she seems subservient, Raina has a way of mocking Tongoona’s authority. She does this through what Lucifer describes as ‘wearing a face that is akin to her laughing against’ Tongoona, and elsewhere, ‘displaying a kind of female resentment or malice—just a slight hint of scornful laughter mixed with anxiety and fear, against men in her voice’ (p. 46). Raina is ‘silently’ subversive of patriarchy’s domination. After all, ‘not having a mouth’ as Old Mandisa (Raina’s mother) says about Raina, ‘is not always merely a helpless gesture or a capitulation, but can also be a resource’ (Weiss 2004, pp. 14-15). Raina here uses her silence to subvert the power of patriarchy.

Tongoona’s inclination to control how Raina relates to Lucifer grossly affects the relationship she has with her son. She develops a hesitation to speak to Lucifer. Raina is very much estranged from her son to the extent that she views and treats him as if he were some man. She kneels before him ‘in the gritty biting sand, as tradition demands women should whenever addressing their menfolk’ (p. 173). She is not even permitted to have a say in what happens to Lucifer. This is revealed in her conversation with her mother,

‘you know, mother, I don’t want the boy to go overseas. ... the mother says: ‘what does his father say?’, he wants him to go’. Then you are only a woman. You have no mouth. Let it be as his father wishes’ (p. 16).

What does it mean to say Raina has ‘no mouth’? Conflating womanhood with silence is patriarchy’s strategy of maintaining its hegemony through muting women’s voices.² The strategies of enforcing women’s silence, in traditional Shona communities, involves, among other ways, excluding them from important decision-making platforms, such as ‘dare’ (a place of administration of justice (Chimuka, 2001, p. 28), which is then labelled ‘a men’s place.’ Old Mandisa’s advice to Raina, that she is a woman without a mouth, supports patriarchal structures and enforces her silence. In privileging the father’s voice as the only that matters, Old Mandisa is complicit in maintaining Tongoona’s dominance. That is one way of reading the phrase ‘you are only a woman. You have no mouth.’ The other is to say that silence is not only about obscurity, muteness and quietness, but it can be instrumentalised to maintain peace. In this sense, Old Mandisa realises that Raina’s silence would bring peace into her family hence her

advice. Keeping quiet for the sake of maintaining peace then becomes a survival strategy deployed by women and an indicator of how women subvert the very site of domination (silenc(e)ing) to exercise agency.

‘Why should a woman’s success be a threat to a man?’ *Kudyiswa* as negotiation of transgression of gender boundaries

In this section of the article, I analyse ‘The hare’ by Mungoshi and ‘The breadwinner’ by Kabwato and I am concerned with the ways in which the social discourses of *kudyiswa* or *kutongwa nomukadzi* might be useful in interpreting representations of the dramas that are provoked by reversal of gender roles within heteropatriarchal families. The desire by Shona conservatives to keep the gendered boundaries in the domestic space revered is discernible in the conversation that Old Mandisa has with Tongoona in *Waiting for the rain*. Old Mandisa refuses Tongoona’s offer to help her with removing ashes from the hearth because apparently, in most rural communities in Zimbabwe, this is a woman’s duty. Old Mandisa is very much comfortable when Raina takes over the making of fire from her. She subscribes to the traditional notion of gender roles where domestic work is posited as a reserve of women to the extent that she sees any failure to follow the prescribed script on this matter as ‘decadent’ (p. 12) behaviour and a transgression. However, in the real modern world, a lot of traditional gender boundaries are transgressed. In particular, women, through different anti-patriarchal struggles have managed to transgress most of the gendered boundaries that patriarchy uses to subordinate and oppress women.

In a socially changing world, and in spite of the patriarchs’ concerted efforts to raise boys into ‘real men’, men’s positions as centres of power within their families are inevitably threatened. There is a category of writings in the Zimbabwean literary canon that grapples with such disruptions of gender boundaries. Most of these texts narrativise the dramas that follow when heterosexual family men lose their jobs, apparently this happens simultaneously with wives becoming sole breadwinners, meaning husbands become dependents of their wives. When this happens, people are quick to say *akadyiswa*. Mararike defines *kudyiswa* as follows:

The term ‘*kudyiswa*’ in Shona language; ‘*ukudliswa*’ in Ndebele; ‘*guthaiga*’ in Gikuyu, or ‘*miti*’ in Kikamba, refers to a practice by some women in Africa who use a concoction of bad medicinal herbs to exert control over their husbands and takeover the affairs of the home. ... (1998, p. 89).

After *kudyiswa*, the Shona believe that a man loses some of the qualities of a ‘real man.’ He loses the power to control his household, starts listening to his wife, which is described as *kutongwa nomukadzi*. In Shire’s words, *kudyisa* is regarded as a weapon that women use to seduce men away from ‘a power-based masculinity’ (1994, p. 153). It is important to note that in Shona communities it is believed that *musha mukadzi*, literally meaning that the wife is the centre of a household, in the sense of one who takes on the daily responsibility of running a home. Women may be the pillars of Shona families in that manner, but the real power and authority remain with the husband, that is why *kudyiswa* is posited as a threat to men’s status within heteropatriarchal families.

In ‘The hare’, Mungoshi represents Nhongo’s nuclear family as stable until Nhongo, whose name is adapted from the Shona word for a male goat, loses his job. After Nhongo loses his job, Sara, his wife, exits the domestic space for the first time and becomes a ‘cross border’ trader. These concurrent developments, the husband’s loss of job and wife’s transformation into a

breadwinner, strain the relationship between the couple so much that the husband initiates the replacement of Sara with the housemaid, Ella. Nhongo's desire to transform the housemaid into his wife reflects his preference for what Ncube terms a 'subordinate "other" whose relevance is limited solely to the domestic space of the home' (Ncube, 2020, p. 2)—suffice to note that the house is an ambivalent space for Ella; it is as much her work world. Nhongo's marriage to a maid can be read as an attempt to recover 'power-based masculinity', a will to power-based masculinity so to speak. In the same action, Nhongo aims to eliminate Sara, whom he perceives as a threat to his masculinity. Nhongo, visits his parents in their rural home, and this trip affords them an opportunity to simultaneously accept, Ella, as Nhongo's new wife and in turn reject Sara. During the visit, Nhongo's father tries to put into perspective Sara's new status. He does this by making reference to his own days in Johannesburg: 'it was only men ... not just any man with nothing between his legs, who dared to go to *Tanana*' (p. 17). The old man implicitly states that, during his days, crossing borders in search of opportunities, was reserved for dominant masculinities, an undertaking that 'those with nothing between their legs'—men who did not embody 'the culturally most valued way of being a man' (Ratele et al., 2010, p. 558)—and women were excluded. By crossing the border, Sara has metaphorically acquired features reserved for dominant masculinities. As a result, she no longer fits into the category of wife. But from a feminist perspective, Sara's ability to 'cross the border' is a success story that destabilises patriarchy's dominance in the roles of breadwinning.

In 'The breadwinner', Kabwato imagines what happens in a household where a wife, Rudo, has become the sole breadwinner in her family. The husband, Ted, becomes a stay-at-home husband doing roles, that, in heteropatriarchal families, are reserved for stay-at-home-wives. Alongside becoming a breadwinner, Rudo determines how the family affairs are run. A typical conversation between her and Ted goes like: 'Ted this meal is awful. Ted, you did not change the sheets. Ted where is my book? Ted why aren't you man enough to put your undies in your own locker and not mine?' (p. 137). She also maintains him, to help him 'keep up appearances' (p. 138). She pays for his membership at the local sports club. He literally becomes 'a kept man'. The wife however refuses to have sex with him: 'soon after he lost his job (she) began carrying a book to bed' (p. 138). Without a job that he can use to control his wife, sex remains the only space in which Ted could dominate Rudo. Sex is about power, and in refusing to have sex with Ted, Rudo desires to deny him any chance of exerting power over her.

The short story does not only document what critics have called Ted's *emasculation* (see Nyambi & Mlambo, 2010). Its focus extends into how he achieves his *independence*. One day, Ted remembers Steve Makoni's song *Handiende* (I will never leave the family home) (p. 138). Makoni's song is about a 'rejected wife (also a victim of her husband's lascivious behaviour) who is adamant that she will stay in the family home for the sake of her children, regardless of the consequences' (Nyambi, 2014, p. 44). While the woman in Makoni's song is 'militantly feministic' (Nyambi, 2014, p. 44), most women in traditional Shona families who heed the advice on the need to *kugarira vana* (staying in abusive and often loveless marriages for the sake of one's kids) are said to passively accept their husbands' abuse. Nyambi's statement relates to Martin's argument that 'sacrifice on behalf of others ... as normative femininity ... is frequently burdensome to women and girls' (1998, p. 474). I however want to read the discourse of *kugarira vana* differently, and argue that it shows how mothers who heed the call are selfless in the sense that, because of their 'situation', they sacrifice their own happiness to secure the futures of the children they brought into the world. Aunties and mothers who encourage women to remain in abusive marriages for other reasons besides the protection of innocent children do

a great disservice to survivors of abusive marriages. As Kabwato imagines in 'The breadwinner', fathers of sons who are married to women who dominate them would offer a different set of advice. In the case of Ted, his father, whom he does not even know, and in a dream, helps him to cross a river. He admonishes him for being afraid or rather exorcises his demon of fear: 'if you are a man, you can cross this river' (p. 138). The following morning, instead of running errands for his wife, Ted leaves forever. The appeal to cross the river, reads as an appeal to reclaim his 'manhood,' and he achieves this by leaving the marriage that had become a place of subjugation for him. His father helps him to get his freedom. One could ask, wouldn't it make a huge difference if mothers could do the same and encourage their daughters to leave violent and loveless marriages? An attempt at an answer to this question means we must interpret the assistance offered to Ted by his father as an urgent call for mothers to help their battered daughters exit violent marriages. It is an urgent call to women to vigilantly invest positive qualities into womanhood, and to be able to say, 'if you are woman, you can leave this abusive and loveless marriage.'

Kabwato, in my reading, problematises a key concept about interpretation and representation of narratives of transformation of gender boundaries. The narrative voice in 'The breadwinner' is patriarchal, and some of the readings of the story also deploy the patriarchal language of the narrative. For example, Nyambi and Mlambo (2010, pp. 199-200), in reading the short story, describe the new role that Rudo plays in her family in a problematically patriarchal voice. They take Rudo to have taken over Ted's breadwinning role; to have assumed Ted's 'masculine' duties; to be dominating Ted in decision making; and to have muscled Ted out of his concubial favours. Nyambi and Mlambo (2010) attest that Rudo refuses to have sex with Ted as an effective way of castrating what remains of Ted's manhood. On the other hand, they describe Ted as one who feels a certain inadequacy, where Rudo's new roles are said to have encroached into his manhood, Ted is tagged with a dependency status and as one who has been dethroned. The problem that I see in Nyambi and Mlambo's discourse attests to a bigger problem where there is a lack of positive cultural practices in Shona communities that embrace different femininities and masculinities that fall away from the heteropatriarchal scripts and grammars. This then means there is no language within these communities that people can readily use to positively interpret situations where women become breadwinners within their families, save to do it within the frame of patriarchy. The problem is related to what Musila (2007) terms illiteracy in the grammars of perceived male subordination. The lack of positive language emanates from what Sideris (2000) notes as dominant gender discourses' failure 'to provide men with alternative symbols of masculinity other than the necessity of control' (as cited in Musila, 2007, p. 148). The emasculation thesis is particularly problematic, and in Musila's words 'has its roots in heteronormative constructions of manhood in African societies along lines of dominance, control, and provision or responsibility for the 'weaker' members of the society, chiefly women and children' (Musila, 2007, p. 144). As Kabwato shows through Rudo's depiction, the heteronormative perceptions of manhood do not lie on solid ground. For instance, in the case of Rudo and Ted's relationship, the perceptions become shaky because Rudo is not weak in the sense that would make her depend on her husband for sustenance.

Some of the questions posed in 'The hare' and 'The breadwinner' are answered in Adichie's proposal that a plan to have a fairer world should start with a change in how boys and girls are raised and how we interpret relations between men and women:

What if both boys and girls were raised not to link masculinity with money? What if the attitude was not the boy has to pay but rather whoever has more should pay? You should aim to be

successful, but not too successful, otherwise you would threaten the man. If you are the breadwinner in your relationship with a man, you have to pretend that you're not, especially in public, otherwise you will emasculate him. But what if we question the premise itself? Why should a woman's success be a threat to a man? What if we decide to simply dispose of that word? (Adichie, 2013)

In this statement Adichie argues for a detoxication of masculinity as a possible pathway to gender equality and justice.

Old patriarchies updated

Mungoshi's works discussed in the first section of this article were set during the colonial period in Zimbabwe and some of the issues they raised concerning notions and perceptions of gender could be taken to be typically ancient in a sense. Significantly also, the short stories take place in rural areas, which critics of Zimbabwean literature often consider as closely associated with Shona traditional social norms and customs. The short stories analysed in the previous section are set in the modern urban context and registered some of what Enloe notes as 'anti-patriarchal successes' (2017, p. 21). Women protagonists presented in these short stories become breadwinners within their families. This development upsets the traditional gender roles, and largely attracts push backs from men and women. The story that I read in this section of the article, 'African wife' by Emmanuel Sigauke, is about a group of Zimbabwean and migrants from other African countries who are based in Sacramento in the United States of America. 'African wife' enables one to think through patriarchy's stubborn survival, its remarkable adaptability (Enloe, 2017). About the persistency of patriarchy, Enloe, in her book *The big push: Exposing the persistence of patriarchy* (2017) notes that

Patriarchy is a system—a dynamic web-of particular ideas and relationships. That system is not brittle, it is not static. Patriarchy can be updated and modernised. It is stunningly adaptable. ... to say that patriarchy is adaptable is not to argue that there have been no significant successes in challenging it. Patriarchy would not need to constantly adapt if those anti-patriarchal successes had not been achieved (pp. 16 & 21).

'African wife' shows how the concept of Shona patriarchy thrives in the modern space of the 'diaspora.'

The short story is narrated by Fati, a Zimbabwean unemployed new migrant who is married to a white American woman. He narrates what happens during a social gathering of African migrants at Sisi Saru, a Zimbabwean who has been staying in Sacramento for fifteen years. The short story, in my reading, articulates how traditional notions of gender continue to fundamentally shape the daily lives of individuals albeit in a largely detraditionalised and otherwise 'foreign' context. Fati begins his narration by noting that as soon as they get to Sisi Saru's place, they 'immediately form two groups' (p. 126), one group of men, the other of women. This grouping happens again when it is time to eat. They eat from inside the house, 'the men to one side of the room, the women the other, it never fails' (p. 126). Men sit outside or recline on couches in the living room arguing about African politics. On the other hand, women, who are also professionals, 'enter the kitchen and begin to cook while they talk about hairstyles or earrings recently received from Africa, occasionally the older women mentor the younger on relationships, work or education' (p. 126).

These spatio-social arrangements are emblematic of a persistency of gendering of roles and spaces in the contemporary contexts. The narrative demonstrates how gendering of space perpetuates the exclusion of women from certain influential public spaces. For instance, a

gendered discourse that assumes that women talk about earrings and hairstyles when they meet, while men discuss politics can be manipulated to dismiss women who show interest in politics as unruly (*see* Ncube, 2020).

In 'African wife', Sigauke presents modern women who go beyond the kitchen to shape their identities as professional women. But in a bid to sustain its hegemony, patriarchy has a tendency to use various means to pull down such women. One way is to undermine their professional spaces. Enloe calls this strategy 'an alternative process of perpetuating patriarchal beliefs, values and relationships, *which turns* what used to be a site of masculinised privilege into a site of feminised marginalisation' (2017, p. 21). She gives an example of the army where, using the gender logic, female army officers are routinely turned into secretaries for male officers (Enloe, 2017). In the context of Sigauke's short story, Fati is given advice on which jobs to try and which ones to ignore:

concentrate on applying for vacancies in warehouses and construction sites. You are a young man you can do hard labour-let our friends, meaning the women, start in the softer more comfortable fields (p. 127).

Fati is advised to evade 'softer, more comfortable fields' (p. 127) like retail and customer service, these, as it were, to use Ratele et al's words are "colonised" by girls and those boys/men who do not fit hegemonic standards of masculinity' (Ratele et al., 2010, p. 560).

Men either sit or stand around the barbecue, 'the younger ones watching the meat, while the older keep the debates raging' (p. 128). The narrator, the newest and youngest migrant in Sacramento 'watches the grill'. Fati interprets this arrangement as something that is part of his culture: 'I don't have to do this, but it's our tradition from the village: the younger men roasted meat while elders discussed serious matters' (p. 128). Fati mentions here the exclusion of the youth, yet as highlighted earlier, women too were excluded from the Shona dare where men are said to discuss serious matters. Men who make useless contributions to the discussions that take place at the men's place are sent out to slaughter goats (*kuvhiyiswa mbudzi*) during proceedings (an embarrassing errand for any Shona man). Describing errands run by some men as embarrassing, is Shona patriarchy's way of maintaining the hegemony of dominant masculinities and at the same time dismissing other masculinities that fall away from the heteropatriarchal scripts and grammars.

Elders reprimand Fati for 'improperly handling' his white pregnant wife, and Fati actually confesses that he has not figured out how to control her. In his view, she is already trying to control him. What he perceives as *kutongwa nomukadzi*, in this case, is simply a scenario where he literally depends on his wife, for the green book and financial support. The wife's position challenges his dominance in the marriage. Relying on her for everything, means Fati has no means to 'control' her. The very sites of domination are deployed by Fati's wife to create a space in which the husband finds it difficult to dominate. The 'elderly men' in the story are a Zimbabwean and a Kenyan, who have been in the USA for ten years now, they are the elders who 'lecture [Fati] on how to survive in the USA.' Their advice is reminiscent of the advice given to Zakeo by his grandfather in 'Who will stop the dark' discussed earlier. 'African wife' exposes men's fear of being perceived as not a *real man*, and this keeps them, using Ratele et al's words, 'exaggerating all the traditional rules of masculinity (Kimmel 1994 as cited in Ratele 2013, p. 133).

Conclusion

A discussion of men and masculinities is certainly also one about women (Ratele et al 2010). For instance, boys are taught to ‘eschew everything associated with femininity’ (Ndlovu, 2011, p. 121) in a bid to become real men. This is apt in the teachings given to boys by traditional Shona patriarchies as represented in Mungoshi’s texts discussed in this article. Therefore, any reflection about Shona manhood, reveals a lot about the Shona society’s perceptions of women. In concluding this discussion, I want to locate women’s agency in men’s struggles about attaining ‘real manhood.’ I noted that the ‘feminisation’ of sons by their mothers happens even in the presence of fathers, like what Mungoshi shows in ‘Who will stop the dark’. In a sense, this is symbolic of how women have the power to subvert patriarchy. Most men enjoy the benefits of ‘patriarchal culture’s male privilege [which is] steeped in difference and the creation of hierarchies within men and women’ (Dlamini 2020, p. 146). As shown in the Shona discourse of *kudyiswa* or *kutongwa nomukadzi*, they distress when such hierarchies are upset. In shame, those around them (men and women) make efforts to initiate the process of *kurutsisa* (undoing the effects of the love potion that puts men in positions of subservience). In some cases, patriarchy pushes back against the pressure for gender justice through what Zenenga (2007) calls masculinisation of women. This is an indicator that women who unsettle the narrative of masculine power especially in heterosexual families very much exist.

Notes

1. I use the term Shona to describe a group of people known as such in Zimbabwe. However, I am quite aware that the Shona are diverse and that their cultural practices are not necessarily uniform, yet there are significant commonalities among the subethnicities concerning concepts of dominant masculinities that makes the use of the term possible.

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