

## Chapter 11

Women in Mungoshi's Short Stories  
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In most of Mungoshi's short stories written in English, and in the novel, *Waiting for the Rain*, women are generally portrayed negatively. Women are depicted either as people who abandon their hearth and their families, prostitutes, witches, loud-mouthed, and generally, as people who are lazy and, therefore, who are always harassed. Most of these women are victims of their male counterparts in one way or another, while the men themselves champion negative patriarchal values. Eventually, some of these women respond to these untenable patriarchal values with drastic measures, either through some kind of protest or what we have called *passive resistance*, in order to retain their sanity and survive. Others are simply just helpless. Simone de Beauvoire's words seem appropriate in describing the typical Mungoshi woman: 'Woman has ovaries [and] a uterus; these peculiarities imprison her in her subjectivity, circumscribe her within the limits of her own nature.'<sup>1</sup>

Secondly, there seems to be no cordial reciprocity of good values between the male and the female characters in several of the short stories, and in *Waiting for the rain* the novel written in English by Charles Mungoshi. The relationship between the two sexes is invariably confrontational. A close discussion of selected stories and the novel will illustrate these aspects. Perhaps we can begin by discussing those stories where, we believe, women respond to the oppressive nature of the men in their lives, through passive resistance.

**Women and Passive Resistance**

In 'Shadows on the Wall,'<sup>2</sup> the reader is captivated by an uncomplimentary simile that is used by the boy narrator to describe his father's shadow on the wall. His shadow moves behind sharper, wriggling shadows 'like the presence of a *tired old woman* in a room full of young people' (emphasis mine).<sup>3</sup> It is not clear why the father's shadow should be likened to a tired old woman when a man can just be as tired and old. The reader is, thus, introduced to the negativism that will characterise the description of women throughout this and other stories in Mungoshi's writing in English. Some of these women respond by a passive resistance to bad treatment—*passive* because they do not necessarily attempt to emancipate themselves.

There are two women in 'Shadows on the Wall,' the boy narrator's mother and 'the other woman' who replaces her. Both women respond to the father's ill treatment by simply running away, leaving him and the ten-year old boy to fend for themselves. The boy's mother is not fettered by maternal considerations which would normally tie her down to a bad marriage and urge her to endure the cruel treatment. However, Mungoshi does not *show* us the reasons for her and the other woman's departure, preferring to *tell* us about it, for we simply hear that they quarrelled a lot and the mother left after the 'eternal quarrel' between them, after which the 'other woman' with a squeaky voice came to be the new wife.<sup>4</sup>

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It is this act of running away that constitutes 'passive resistance,' *passive* because the mother or the other woman does not assert her rights vocally and actively. She removes herself from the undesirable conditions in the home. Mungoshi does not give her a voice in the story. Another instance of the mother's passive resistance manifests itself where we hear that the boy's father does not like taking orders from the boy's mother, believing that 'she was there to listen to him always.'<sup>5</sup>

In his story, Mungoshi chooses his adjectives carefully and deliberately to highlight the contrast between the boy's father and the mother. The adjectives that describe the father are hard and brittle while the two that describe the mother are 'soft, warm.' The boy's own response to father is stiff and anxious, and his general response to both parents, eventually, is sullen and uncommunicative throughout the story. The reason for this is that the father does not like him communicating with the mother. That is why the boy now sees shadows on the wall, a kind of escape route for him. The boy's attitude, therefore, emphasises the importance of the mother, in his life. Her absence ruins the boy's life irreparably. The other woman is unable to reach him with her 'shrill strident voice like a cicada's that jarred [his] nerves.'

In 'The Mountain,' the woman is negatively portrayed, and we can agree with de Beauvoire who states that 'woman has no existence in and for herself.'

Humiliation and prejudice are highlighted in 'The Mountain' where Chemai and the boy narrator have to cross a mountain in the night in order to get to the bus stop. Chemai announces: 'That's where my father met witches eating human bones, riding on their husbands.'<sup>6</sup> Even the charmed goat that follows the boys is female. This negative image of the female persists in Mungoshi's story, and is also prominent in another story, 'Who Will Stop the Dark?' In the latter story, Zakeo's mother is rumoured to have caused her husband's paralysis. The boy, Zakeo, believes these rumours, his evidence being that his mother has these 'tight lines round [her] mouth [which] wrinkled tightly and into an obscene little hole that reminded the boy of a cow's behind just after dropping its dung.' His other ridiculous reason for believing the rumours is that his mother has these 'long silences that would erupt into unexpected bursts of red violence.'

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The reader rushes through this story looking for proper, convincing evidence of Zakeo's mother's wickedness, but does not find it. Instead, the reader comes face to face with a determined woman who defends her son's education, is violent at times, perhaps as a result of accumulated frustration, and who 'refuses to be defined as the non-significant other'<sup>8</sup> because she is also the family's bread winner. In fact, she responds to her unfriendly, humiliating home and community environment through passive resistance because she resists being drawn into acrimonious arguments with those who demonise her, preferring to pursue her set objectives concerning her son's future. She is vocal and determined to shape her son's future: her son, who hates school, runs to his grandfather who takes him fishing and teaches him how to trap and dress mice. In spite of the evil things said about her, Zakeo's mother never comments on them. Instead, she insists that her son go to school, in spite of male opposition. In the end she wins.



This is more or less a different kind of woman in Mungoshi. We can describe her in Bressler's terms, as the new Cinderella who refuses 'to be shaped by her society...[who] realises that her culture has all too often presented her with stereotypes that she and many others like her have so blindly accepted; ...that they are victims of the circumstances of life.'<sup>9</sup> Yet at the same time, she is a woman who does not struggle with patriarchy for her personal emancipation.

On the issue of culture, Zhuwarara seems to condemn Zakeo's mother by believing the rumours of her wickedness and her alleged responsibility for her husband's paralysis as he writes: 'Part of the problem is that the father, who is traditionally the figure associated with final authority in the family, has been thoroughly emasculated by the wife as is symbolically underlined by his broken back and his basket weaving which, significantly, is work that is traditionally done by women.'<sup>10</sup> This comment shows how patriarchy assigns subservient roles to women and then condemns them when they rebel against such roles. Zakeo's mother's violence towards her family could be such a rebellion. Patriarchy also assigns dominant roles for men, and when they fail to fulfil these, society, which is also socialised and conditioned to accept these patriarchal roles, blames the woman and complains of emasculation. Thus, basket weaving which is otherwise an innocent craft that both men and women can excel in, is regarded in this short story as woman's work, and it becomes the father's dominant symbol of emasculation lumped together with his broken back. Once again, Mungoshi does not 'show'<sup>11</sup> us how exactly this back got broken, deciding to trust the scandalous rumour to circulate unabated. An example of how society, from children to adults of both sexes, believes in the patriarchal socialised gender roles is when Zakeo is ostracised and mocked by fellow school children about his mother's witchcraft, children who should be sympathetic and empathetic to a fellow child.<sup>12</sup> Zhuwarara explains the source of this community hatred by saying, 'It is this reversal of family roles [where the mother is now fending for the family since the father has been incapacitated] which Zakeo, his grandfather and to a certain extent the community, resents.'<sup>13</sup> Zakeo, the grandfather and the community are all socialised to reject the 'new Cinderella.'

Zakeo's mother wins, however, because she has good, self-confidence and she knows that she is right. Gaidzanwa also asserts that '...the grandfather knows she is right and that in future the boy would go to school possibly with [his] persuasion.'<sup>14</sup>

Besides the negative portrayal of Zakeo's mother, some of the metaphors in this story are tailored to denigrate women. For instance, Zakeo's grandfather describes the two different types of knots that one may tie, as 'woman knots and man knots.' He goes on to define them, saying, '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*' (emphasis, mine). By implication, the 'man' knot, the worthy one. Later on grandfather silences Zakeo when he tries to ask a question at an inconvenient time by saying, 'Mouths are for women.'<sup>15</sup> Evidently there is a certain amount of obsession with negativism towards women in the mind of this old man and in the story generally.

In 'The Hero,'<sup>16</sup> the young boy, Julius, who gets expelled from school for voicing his

opinion on the food issue finds it necessary to put up an act in order to impress Dora, his classmate whom he believes to be in love with him. He feels he is boosting his ego by doing that. Dora herself never says a word throughout the story, but Julius says he knows she loves him. Instead of returning that love affectionately, he prefers to torture her: 'he knew she loved him but he must not be won easily. He must torture her with love.... He was unique. He saw all the girls despising their boyfriends, throwing them away, for him....' <sup>17</sup>

One can interpret this negative, sadistic attitude towards women in two ways: either through the psycho-biographical method, or we can say the author is merely portraying his social observations of human behaviour. The psycho-biographical explanation would require amassing massive amounts of biographical data on Mungoshi himself, and then trying to interpret his obsession with denigrating women by constructing his 'personality with all its idiosyncrasies, internal and external conflicts, and most importantly, neuroses.' <sup>18</sup> If we took this cumbersome route, we might end up concluding that, perhaps, it is Mungoshi himself who has problems relating to women on an equal basis and, therefore, finds it necessary to humiliate them in literature in order to assert his own (battered?) manhood. Then again, we can approach the issue of women in these stories via the second psychoanalytic route—by 'believing that the author had in mind a particular personality for his characters,' <sup>19</sup> and, therefore, that he is merely writing about what he observes in society.

If it is the author's problem, then it would fit into what Freud calls the unconscious ...a dynamic system that not only contains our biographical memories but also stores our suppressed and unresolved conflicts. [These are] disguised truths and desires [that] inevitably make themselves known through our dreams, art, literature, play and accidental slips of the tongue known as *Freudian slips*. <sup>20</sup>

If, on the other hand, Mungoshi writes things that he has observed in society, then his keen senses are peculiar in not seeing anything positive in women. These women are caught up in the oppressive, traditional, patriarchal values of their communities which do not allow them an independent, positive voice. <sup>21</sup> We will illustrate this predicament of women in many more stories and the novel.

In *Mount of Moriah*, <sup>22</sup> the women still have no voice. Some events take place in the mind of the boy narrator, Hama, who is also out of touch with his father. The issue of money separates the father from the boy's mother and every other woman in his life, for he loves money more than the women he socialises with. He abuses his son's mother alleging that she is unable to account for 'his' money correctly. It is not as if he accumulates a lot of this money, though, because when the story opens, he is in his old age, penniless and is seeking a Nganga's charm that could revive his luck with gambling at the horse races. That charm involves murdering his crippled son, which he fails to do at the last minute, hence, the title, a Biblical allusion to Abraham's episode with Isaac on Mt. Moriah. Significantly, the Nganga's comments enlighten us on this man's bad treatment of women. <sup>23</sup>



The condition of women in these stories renders the women incapable of loving their men and their sons (it is always sons, as if to say whether the male is young or old, they are all the same!). Hence, they invariably leave the husband or lover, and the son also, to fend for themselves. While this may appear callous on the part of the women, the trend can be well understood if we make reference to the slavery conditions that distorted an individual's ability to love his/her children properly. Systems of domination such as slavery and patriarchy harness potential sources of power in a subordinated group, so that the subordinated group feels unable to love, as that privilege seems unable to belong to it. <sup>24</sup> Here is a description of the mechanisms used by people suffering under systems of domination to protect their emotions:

...you protected yourself and loved small. Picked the tiniest stars out of the sky to own.... A woman, a child, a brother—a big love like that would split you wide open...to get to a place where you could love anything you chose—not to need permission for desire—well, now, *that* was freedom. <sup>25</sup>

Hama's mother, and Zakeo's mother, seem to be cruel to their sons. Yet they are caught up in a situation where they cannot love their offspring because the fathers control how much they can love. Symbolically, they have not yet got to a place where they can love anything and anybody they choose; where they do not need permission to desire their men even—they have not gained that kind of freedom.

Some of the women in Mungoshi's stories leave the marital home to return to theirs. The setting of the stories does not include information on how things are over there, but the women escape oppression as symbolised by their husbands or lovers. They leave their sons with the fathers and in Hama's case, the father insists on taking him to the city. In patriarchy, after all, children belong to the father and, significantly, as we have said earlier, all the children in the stories discussed are boys.

In 'The Brother,' violence, forced sexual relations and general prostitution characterise the plight of women. Once again, they have no freedom to love freely. A good example of this is when, for no apparent reason, Sam threatens Martha: '...one of these fine lovely days I'll tan your hide so black and ram your teeth right back in your mouth so they will be smiling north when you are going south!' He immediately makes good his threat so that Martha lies back on the sofa, 'her mouth looking as if she was eating raw liver. She looked too surprised to say anything.' Sam then commands her not to 'mess up that seat [and to] go and wash [the blood from her mouth]!' <sup>26</sup>

Meanwhile Magufu, who hosts all these 'friends' at the drinking and prostituting 'party,' forces Sheila to have sex with him in the same room where his younger brother, Tendai, a school boy, is sleeping. Of course, the young student leaves, preferring to walk and sleep on the street. Magufu drugs Sheila's drink, drives her all the way from Hartley (Chegutu) to Harare, and then slaps her when she refuses to comply with the sexual act. Next morning she has to plead with Magufu to take her back home and finally begs for a dollar, literally on her knees, in order for her to find her own transport. <sup>27</sup>

In this story, as in others, the role of women fulfils the male stereotypes—as sex symbols

rather than as useful human beings. For instance, in 'The Brother,' one man is seen urinating against the wall by Magufu's brother, Tendai. A girl watches and the man asks if she wants a 'sausage' while making 'come-here signs with his finger [and] exaggerated motions of opening and closing his fly.' He calls her 'good tail-end' in an aside to Tendai. This is a humiliating scene to the girl, yet she just giggles and stares at him, without anger.<sup>28</sup> Men, in this story, see only the sordid sexual side of women and not even food is served to them.<sup>29</sup> The result is that these women lose the 'Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power.' Patricia Collins quotes Audre Lorde who has argued that women possess 'The Erotic as Power.' Lorde continues:

There are many kinds of power, used and unused, acknowledged or otherwise. The Erotic is a resource within each of us that lies in a deeply female and spiritual plane, firmly rooted in the power of our unexpressed or unrecognized [sic] feeling. In order to perpetuate itself, every oppression must corrupt or distort those various sources of power within the culture of the oppressed that can provide energy for change. For women, this has meant a suppression of the erotic as a considered source of power and information in our lives.<sup>30</sup>

In '*Some Kinds of Wounds*, 'we get a physical description of this disempowered woman: 'There was a certain subtle awkwardness in her that made me feel she wasn't even aware that she was a woman...she was as much at home in [the] chair as on her feet or asleep. Walking, sitting or sleeping, her body had erased all the differences and acquired its own kind of separate peace with her mind.'<sup>31</sup> This particular woman comes to Harare, looking for her boyfriend who said he lived in Highfield. She is picked up by Kute who brings her to his home, hoping to sleep with her. The two seem to disagree and she leaves. So Kute insults her: 'Thinks this is a home for the pregnant destitute and aged...wanted to spend the night here. Wouldn't accept any money. And does she stink! If the old goat [his father] weren't here I would have asked her to have a bath first. If I had known she was pregnant I wouldn't have bothered with her. Silly bitch.'

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It turns out that Kute takes refuge in womanising and abusing these same women as an escape from his own failure to make it in life. He obtained a third class pass in high school, is unable to secure a job or to study, and instead of seeking escapism in alcohol and drugs, he prefers to find it in women!<sup>33</sup> He is a wounded animal trying in vain to massage his ego. De Beauvoire would explain this attitude by saying that taunting women 'is [the] miraculous balm for those afflicted with an inferiority complex, and indeed no one is more arrogant toward women, more aggressive or scornful than the man who is anxious about his virility.'<sup>34</sup> Kute suffers from precisely such a complex, which makes him arrogant, aggressive and scornful towards women. The symptoms for this are womanising to prove his 'absent' manhood, and jealousy towards his former schoolmate and friend, Gatsi. Kute evicts Gatsi from the room that he has been lodging in his home when the latter moralises to him over the issue of his recklessness with women and the need to study in order to improve his social status.<sup>35</sup> Kute himself uses the word 'castrated' to describe how he feels when he tries to unsuccessfully measure up to Gatsi.<sup>36</sup>



Moab Gwati in 'Coming of the Dry Season'<sup>37</sup> faces similar problems. He has no money even though he has been paid at work, yet he needs to visit his 'seriously ill' mother in Rusape: '...as always happened with his money when he had it, it seemed to fly in all directions.' To cover up his inadequacy, he engages in sexual exploits that weekend with Chipo, 'a girl he [picks] up at Mutanga's earlier in the evening [of Friday].' He only finds out the girl's name on Sunday. The girl leaves him on Sunday afternoon and he gives her a shilling for bus fare and a two-shilling gift 'for the fine weekend.' Believing that a genuine relationship had developed, Chipo comes back on Monday to wait for him. He, in turn, abuses and humiliates her, accusing 'her type' of 'always [coming] back for money' which he does not have. Then he yanks the bed sheet that is covering her off, leaving her stark naked.... In reaction, 'she gasped but did not scream. She covered her private parts and hastily put on her dress....'<sup>38</sup> Moabi's behaviour can also be explained and be understood in de Beauvoire's words above (see note 36), because when he cries after Chipo's departure, it is for something that is deeper than his current loss—he cries 'for something that was not the death of his mother.'<sup>39</sup> Sadly, instead of attempting to solve whatever problem he faces alone, Moabi Gwati finds it necessary to use a woman as the butt of this frustrations. That woman, too, loses her dignity through humiliation and throws herself unnecessarily onto a callous man, claiming that 'she had never been so happy in all her life' as she has been this weekend with Moab. The 'wad of pound notes' in Chipo's purse suggests that she may be prostituting herself, yet her 'pitifully thin and starved' body<sup>40</sup> suggests that she is always abused, scorned and exploited. She has not enjoyed the power that her womanhood should wield—she is a victim, even though she tries to salvage a bit of dignity by returning Moab's three shillings and walking away, showing her own passive resistance to male exploitation. At least she has *somewhere* to go.

The women we have discussed so far, therefore, are those that have no say in how they are treated by the men, whether these men are husbands, boyfriends, lovers, or just overnight partners. There is no decency in these relationships, only pain, humiliation, tears, degradation and denigration. Let us turn our attention to the outspoken woman.

### The Outspoken woman

Mrs. Pfende in 'The Day the Bread Van did not Arrive' is much more vocal and outspoken about her unfavourable condition, whether or not we agree with her ways of doing things. She despises her husband for not being as enterprising as Matiure who 'has been only three months in business yet he has got a phone and a radio in his shop.'<sup>41</sup> Pfende is also impotent as the omniscient narrator reveals that he has not been able to give his wife children...'Still,' Pfende believes, 'a man had his rights over a woman he had paid lobola for....' The wife assaults him with verbal abuse, saying that it is 'better [to have] a son of a bitch than a father of nothing.' Even the delivery man insults Pfende using words that indicate his impotence as he says, '...I won't have any castrated thoughtless sonofabitch laugh at him' (meaning Moses, the delivery man who has just been killed in a car accident and who was Mrs. Pfende's lover). Mrs. Pfende immediately courts the new deliveryman, right in front of her husband, promising to give him the jersey that she was knitting for Moses.

This kind of behaviour by Mrs. Pfende is unacceptable. Portraying women in this manner is a form of abuse because it is as if women are not capable of relating to their spouses normally without either being abused themselves or abusing others. The portrayal subscribes to the 'earlier syntheses of Genesis with Greek philosophical concept [that] tended to associate woman's inferior origins and subordination with her lesser rationality.'<sup>42</sup> The thinking was that woman was subordinated to Adam at creation where his rib was used to create her, thereby subordinating her to him and making her inferior with less rational thought than man. Mrs. Pfende's rationality is definitely called into question here, and that is why it is complex to portray a woman in such a vulgar manner. Nevertheless, she belongs to the group of women that does not suffer in silence. She hates her husband, and we all hear her opinion on that subject. We may not like it or we may not agree with her style of protest, but she does protest in the most vulgar way possible.

Mhondiwa's wife, too, in *'The Flood'* despises her 'sleepy husband,' and enjoys picking a quarrel with him in public.<sup>43</sup> She also tells him that their children are not his but Chitauro's. In any case one of the children is born only five months after their marriage, resulting in his being the village's laughing stock. Old Makiwa then analyses women in general, calling them,

Our death. We live because of them and die because of them. It is the woman who wields the whip no matter how we men may fool ourselves into believing we are the masters of our houses.... A woman is what destroys a man...She takes everything and leaves you as empty as a mealie husk after the harvest, as undefended as a snail without its shell, and finally, when you are completely broken and useless she sends you out to face the lion without a spear or a shield to defend yourself.<sup>44</sup>

Makiwa talks as if he lives in a matriarchal situation where women have ruling power in the home and in society. This is the flip side of the power of domination—demonising the oppressed to make them look monstrous. It is as Collins argues, that

...hegemonic ideologies concerning race, class, gender, sexuality, and nation are often so pervasive that it is difficult to conceptualize [sic] alternatives to them, let alone ways of resisting the social practices that they justify. For example, despite scant empirical research, beliefs about Black women's sexuality remain deeply held and widespread. Moreover, the sexual politics of Black womanhood reveals how important the controlling images applied to Black women's sexuality have been to the effective operation of domination overall.<sup>45</sup>

In *'The Day the Bread did not Arrive'* and in *'The Flood,'* Mrs. Pfende's and Mhondiwa's wife's sexuality is paraded in a stereotyped manner where the controlling image is that of prostitutes who emasculate their husbands. This is a well-illustrated feature in another story, *'The Hare,'* where Sara's and Nhongo's marriage is stable as long as Nhongo is the bread winner. When he is laid off and can no longer provide for the family, Sara takes over as she starts a buying-and-selling business, travelling to and from neighbouring countries especially South Africa. Her attitude and personality change as she gains more confidence in herself as well as in her business. Nhongo changes



also—becomes withdrawn, effeminate and analytic about his condition as we are told, ‘The worst of it was that Sara seemed to thrive. And he, Nhongo, felt helpless to do anything about it (Was it because he had no money of his own?).’<sup>46</sup> While ‘as he believes himself to be fair, not jealous and that ‘our love is beyond money,’ he finds himself changing this attitude because SHE is the one earning it: ‘...he belonged to a proud tradition that said the hunting is done by the man of the house.’ The incident where Sara buys him fancy shoes makes him ‘suddenly aware of his helplessness.’<sup>47</sup>

Analysing Mungoshi’s male characters help us to uncover misogyny as Showalter calls it.<sup>48</sup> For instance, even though Mark Maneto in the Empty house has two daughters besides his son, Gwizo, to him each daughter is worth half of his son as we are told: ‘There were two girls—one before and the other after Gwizo—but as Mark Maneto put it, both of them together weigh as much as the boy.’<sup>49</sup> When Synodia, the first daughter proves to be a brilliant, capable academic who graduates with a Civil Engineering degree, Maneto asks her why she does not give the degree to Gwizo: ‘People had laughed but those closest to him knew that Maneto was serious.’<sup>50</sup>

Gwizo is an irresponsible son, yet Maneto would like him to inherit his business. Thus, he worries ceaselessly about ‘what he called his son’s treachery [for] in his world, only sons were entitled to inherit their father’s wealth.’ Synodia is judged by her approximation to men and so her value increases—she might, after all inherit ‘part of the business’ because she proves that ‘she could take on any man by becoming one of the very few—if not the first—women civil engineers in the country.’<sup>51</sup> This is the kind of attitude that makes us conclude that the male characters display misogyny in their dealings with women. The men feel comfortable dealing with ‘truly feminine’ women, women who do not challenge them economically and ideologically. When Sara blossoms economically in ‘The Hare,’ Nhongo feels that his manhood has been challenged, and so he fails to cope with life. From the time he marries her, he takes it for granted that this very bright, ambitious girl whose educational career is cut short by pregnancy by him, ‘had gone about her child-bearing business and her household chores cheerfully and he couldn’t remember that she had ever complained about anything.’ She never even had ‘any real friends, people who would visit them, spend time with them and vice versa.’<sup>52</sup> After Nhongo loses his job, Sara’s business talent blooms and she begins to have friends.

However, instead of Mungoshi portraying her positively working harmoniously with her family, Sara acquires friends who are so loud, ‘talking at the top of their voices and laughing so loudly that they must have heard it at Chikwanha’s, three kilometres away. They were talking of Mozambique, Zambia, Botswana, South Africa. And even Mauritius.’<sup>53</sup> Symbolically, Sara is branching out of her home and her country to horizons beyond her borders and that frightens her husband. In order for us to understand Nhongo’s fear of his wife’s new image, we need to refer to de Beauvoire, who writes: ‘...there are deep similarities between the situation of woman and that of the Negro. Both are being emancipated today from a like paternalism, and the former master class wishes to ‘keep them in their place’—that is, the place chosen for them. In both cases the former masters lavish more or less sincere eulogies, either on the virtues of

'the good Negro' with his dormant, childish, merry soul—the submissive Negro—or on the merits of woman who is 'truly feminine'—that is, frivolous, infantile, irresponsible—the submissive woman. In both cases the dominant class bases its argument on a state of affairs that it has itself created.<sup>54</sup>

Thus, the moment Sara stops fitting into the category of the submissive woman, Nhongo is destabilised emotionally and psychologically. His solution is to rush home to his parents. Their solution is true to patriarchy—they urge their son to replace Sara with Ella, the maid and the woman who still adheres to the qualities of the 'truly feminine.' The end of that story, 'The Hare,' seems to indicate that Nhongo will *go for it*, to use that colloquial expression.

In 'The Empty House' referred to earlier, Gwizo marries a white American woman who helps him to market his art. But then he becomes an alcoholic, a result of fame, success and frustration because he feels he does not really love Agatha, his wife. Thus, she ends up abused in that she loses her fidelity—sleeps with her own father-in-law, becomes pregnant by him and gets strangled by Gwizo as the story ends. This is another lopsided portrayal of woman where family ethics have been sacrificed even though Maneto, the father-in-law and Gwizo's father does not seem to have had any ethics where his 'secretaries' are concerned.<sup>55</sup> The only difference here is that Agatha seems to be free to do what she wants and when asked by Gwizo to confirm that the baby she is carrying is his father Maneto's, she unequivocally announces, 'No, Gwizo. It's mine.'<sup>56</sup> That is a voice of protest in a way, when one denies a man's involvement in the creation of a baby, asserting the supremacy of womanhood; free to love anyone and rejecting the usual compartmentalised, accepted social role that goes with creating a family. The only problem with this sort of 'freedom' is that it is unethical.

So Agatha's form of protest is considered by men to be unacceptable. If she is ready to start a family, either she does so with her alcoholic husband or if she no longer wants him, with a different man all together. Mungoshi has compromised Agatha in this story.

The women in *Walking Still* tend to be more independent, albeit within the confines of patriarchal values which, in turn, demonise them. Examples of such women are found in *The Hare*, *The Empty House*, *Did You Have to go That Far?* and *Of Lovers and Wives*. In *Of Lovers and Wives*, Shamiso shouts at her homosexual husband to her heart's content. As if to crown her with success at denouncing that habit, the homosexual lover, Peter, dies in a car accident that sounds like suicide. Shamiso feels 'a fitting rightness' to that death, and she does not feel grieved by it.<sup>57</sup> Here, Shamiso fights to emancipate herself from the humiliating situation where she must share a husband/lover with his male lover, right under the same roof! It is her protesting voice that rings in our ears; whose crescendo is echoed by the exploding whiskey bottle that is broken by Chegato. But instead of Shamiso leaving Chasi, her husband, it is Chasi who leaves her after Peter's death. In spite of Shamiso's acknowledgement of the 'fitting rightness' to this arrangement where Chasi visits her occasionally, the fact remains that Mungoshi has not granted Shamiso the emancipation that she was seeking



on her own terms, for she is the one who *is left*. With all her protesting, she could have *walked out*, to the thorough satisfaction of the reader. Nevertheless, Shamiso is outspoken against her untenable condition.

In 'Did you have to go that Far?' the community fails to cope with the concept of a single, middle class mother, Mrs. Gwaze, who moves into the neighbourhood and so they scandalise her. The neighbours' children, Pamba and Damba ostracise and persecute Dura, her son, an indication that even the children are socialised into the wrong values where a woman who controls her own socio-economic power is unacceptable. In spite of her good-natured temperament in the face of a hostile reception in the neighbourhood; in spite of her accommodating the neighbours' children, Pamba and Damba, the mothers and their children do not return the good favour. Instead, they imply that she and Dura have AIDS; that the two must be shunned. The children, themselves, continue to sing a humiliating song morning, afternoon and evening, a song which implies that Mrs. Gwaze did something to make Dura's father disappear.<sup>58</sup> The brotherly greeting that Dura proffers to Pamba and Damba is rejected outright.<sup>59</sup> In the end, Dura plays a mean joke on Pamba who ends up drowning himself. It is a way of getting his own back at people who have rejected and humiliated him and his mother, only because Mrs. Gwaze has no husband—Dura's father. Patriarchy, therefore, cannot cope with independent women. Finally, she and her son must leave this neighbourhood to relocate elsewhere.

Except for Damba's mother who seems to live a relatively tranquil life, Pamba's mother suffers from her husband's tyranny together with her son. Zhuwarara rightly attributes the family and street violence in this story to poverty and the alienation of the well-to-do Mrs. Gwaze and her son to the same, compounded by jealousy, for 'her relatively well-off position might destabilise the relationships of neighbours who, in a pervasive sort of way, are both united as well as alienated from each other by their poverty.'<sup>60</sup>

This is precisely the problem—the position of women in Mungoshi's work is not emancipatory. Any male frustrations must be unloaded onto the women folk. Rather than take the opportunity to demonstrate how Mrs. Gwaze, an economically independent female, can change a neighbourhood for the better; can inspire youth to emulate her position, Mungoshi creates a do-her-down attitude in everyone around her. Thus, instead of Mrs. Gwaze feeling emancipated by her education and hard work, she becomes an outcast. Indeed, she is an outcast in the conformist patriarchal atmosphere that surrounds her, which is very unfortunate.

The female characters in the stories discussed in this section try to fight the 'system' in one way or another, but they all fail to win their battles. In the next section, we shall discuss a situation where things become worse. Not only do women fail to achieve some kind of emancipation, but also two of them become physical sacrifices for crimes committed by men in the distant past.

### Women as Sacrificial Lambs

The story of 'Sacrifice'<sup>61</sup> has similarities with some aspects of the novel, *Waiting for*

*the Rain* in that each has a girl who ends up paying the price for a crime committed by men in the distant past. While it is a cultural belief in Shona culture<sup>62</sup> and, indeed, in other African cultures as illustrated by Chinua Achebe in *Things Fall Apart* where Ikemefuna and a *virgin girl* are the fine for a murdered damsel,<sup>63</sup> we must focus specifically on the plight of the girls who are so sacrificed. The cultural, 'traditional belief' seems to take no account of the fact that it is the innocent woman who has to pay the price for a crime she has not committed. Throughout the literature that highlights this issue,<sup>64</sup> none seems to question the justice of the practice; none portrays a new vision where virgin girls can look forward to a time when the practice can stop, even though Zimbabwe has laws enacted against it. The ideology of female conformity to this 'traditional belief' is played out in 'Sacrifice.'

The inevitability of Taveya as the sacrificial lamb to appease the angry ancestral spirit is first hinted at, ironically, by a girl, Nhata's four-year old daughter, who tells Taveya that 'she wouldn't be going back to school: not this term, nor any other term of any year of her life. This was the end of her education,' the four-year old declares.<sup>65</sup> It is not surprising that it is a small girl who seems to gloat over Taveya's fate. Evidently, she hears it from her parents. Taveya's mother tries to fight against her daughter's fate by calling upon Tabitha, the daughter's friend, who, in turn, calls on the Christian pair, Maria and Marita to pray for this situation to pass. The pair's Christian credentials are recited in terms of how powerful their prayer can be. Yet when sitting face-to-face with Taveya, they conform to the African traditional belief and talk the language of surrender: 'We will do a prayer for Yevai [Taveya's other name] so that wherever she is going...she may go well.' In spite of Taveya's protest that she is not going anywhere, they proceed to chant, 'Thy will be done' until the victim joins in the chant hypnotically it seems. She becomes a little hysterical at the end. So the pair's power of prayer is there to reinforce this negative tradition instead of functioning as a liberating force.

After Nhata's cattle graze in Taveya's family field, Ketiwe, her mother attempts to put up a fight when she spits into Nhata's face twice. The reader actually celebrates this act of defiance. Ketiwe appears to be hysterical, too, since she laughs and cries in a distracted manner. Yet in the final analysis she conforms to the crazy tradition: 'Yes, Yevai,' she says with humility, 'You will remain our daughter.' Her voice was very subdued but, in spite of the tears rolling down her cheeks, full of a strange new strength.<sup>66</sup> The reader wonders what has happened to all that earlier hysterical protest. Patriarchy has done its indoctrination long back and now leaves the women themselves, from babes to the old, to carry out the 'tradition' without question. That is why the men who oppose Taveya as sacrifice have no power of resistance. That is why Nhata attacks Ketiwe, Chizema's wife and Taveya's mother (albeit behind her back), in foul language, accusing her of influencing her husband negatively in this case: 'You [Chizema, his half brother] listen too much to your wife, son of my father. When she has got her witch's legs round your waist, her witch's hands cupping your potatoes and her witch's lips whispering in your ear... I hate that coiled witch's tongue which whispers into his ear in bed at midnight....'<sup>67</sup>

Nhata knows that if Ketiwe influences Chizema against carrying out the family sacrifice,



it would fail. So rather than attack Chizema as such, he attacks Ketiwe to bend her to conformity. Everything else falls into place that way. Meanwhile, Taveya makes up her mind to go through with the ordeal, and all the women who could have helped her resist, have, instead, propelled her into getting used to the idea. This 'Shona traditional belief that if an innocent victim is murdered the family of the murderer and his or her offspring will be haunted by the spirit of the dead until a virgin is handed over to the family of the deceased to appease the aggrieved spirit' contributes immensely to man's control of women's sexuality because the virgin girl has no choice in who she would like to marry even if it is from that offended family. It is actually a form of violence perpetrated against women's sexuality similar to rape. As argued by Mohanty et al,

...women's sexuality is controlled as is her reproductive potential. According to Hosken, male sexual politics in Africa and around the world share the same political goal: to assure female dependence and subservience by any and all means. Physical violence against women (rape, sexual assault...) is thus carried out with an astonishing consensus among men in the world.<sup>69</sup>

We witness such physical violence in 'Sacrifice' when Nhata slaps Ketiwe twice to cow her into submission. Fortunately she hits back by spitting into his face, a temporary triumph. We also witness 'astonishing consensus' among men as they all feel relieved that Taveya has 'agreed' to go and be the sacrifice. Finally, we witness another form of violence to Taveya's sexuality when she is to be picked up by '...a frail grey-haired old man almost the same age as Headman Muza.'<sup>74</sup> What a husband for a sixteen-year old virgin!!

#### **Conclusion:**

Throughout the stories that we have discussed in this chapter we have been bombarded by the negative portrayal of women who invariably are victims of their male counterparts in various ways. In most of the short stories Mungoshi portrays: women as objects who are acted upon. Because the bulk of women do not respond in ways that assert their positive identities, the women become passive resisters. In other stories such as the 'sacrifice' women's capacity to decide on her fate is pre-determined by men to settle their past wrongs. But in Mungoshi's stories some women, however, attempt to assert their humanity. They engage in business and this improves their economic power. But, the irony is that these seeming successful women are left castigated and ridiculed by society. By chastising women, it is possible that Mungoshi is criticizing society for alienating more than one half of Zimbabwean humanity. I have argued that the negative images of women in Mungoshi's works are inductive of the author's failure to produce images of alternative womanhood outside those stereotypes that men use to control women.

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*Women and the Politics of Feminism* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991) 314-327.

- 23 *Ibid.* 7-8. The Nganga tells Hama's father, 'You should have stayed married to one woman instead of taking them on and throwing them away the way you did—as if they were worn-out clothes you didn't need anymore....
- That was your trouble—and still is the trouble with you. Money. You didn't care for anything else. Not even for those women.... They saw that much through you. Even the body in there [meaning Hama]—you have called him the result of an accident. No, children isn't what you wanted and [the women] gave you none. That's why none of them stayed for very long with you.... You can't blame them. It's you who has thrown them away. In the same way that you have thrown away some of the best of those women.
- 24 Patricia Hill Collins, 'Black Women's Love Relationships' in *Black Feminist Thought, Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, second edition (New York and London: Routledge, 2000) 149.
- 25 *Ibid.* 149.
- 27 *Ibid.* 56-58; 76-77.
- 28 *Ibid.* 62.
- 29 *Ibid.* 72.
- 30 Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought...* 150.
- 33 *Ibid.* 98.
- 35 'Some Kinds of Wounds' 96-103.
- 36 *Ibid.* 101. Kute complains to Gatsi: 'They have made my old man and all people I know believe it [that he is 'good for nothing'] and now you are pushing it further into my old man's head that I am *completely castrated* with your books and studies' (emphasis mine).
- 40 *Ibid.* 49.
- 43 'The Flood' in *Some Kinds of Wounds* 166.
- 44 *Ibid.* 168-169.
- 45 Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought...* 284.
- 48 Elaine Showalter in Charles E. Bressler, *Literary Criticism* 184.
- 54 Simone De Beauvoire, *The Second Sex* xxix - xxx.
- 52 'The Empty House' in *Walking Still* 102. Gwizo's mother tells him that she too used to be his father's secretary and that before her there were other secretaries. Maneto, therefore, has a nasty habit of sexually abusing his 'secretaries,' with Agatha being his latest victim.
- 57 Charles Mungoshi, 'Of Lovers and Wives' in *Walking Still* 110-111.
- 58 'Did You Have to Go That Far?' in *Walking Still* 55. The song goes:  
 Dura's mother, Dura's mother  
 Bring back Dura's father  
 Dura is crying, Dura is crying



Where did you put Dura's father?

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 55-56.

<sup>60</sup> R. Zhuwarara, *Introduction of Zimbabwe Literature in English* 104.

<sup>62</sup> See discussion on this cultural aspect in R. Zhuwarara, *Introduction...* 116.

<sup>63</sup> Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart* (London: Heinemann, 1952).

<sup>64</sup> R. Zhuwarara, *Introduction...* 116. He highlights several Zimbabwean works which deal with this subject matter.

<sup>65</sup> 'Sacrifice' in *Walking Still* 139.

<sup>69</sup> C. T. Mohanty, et al, *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism* 58.