

**Mass Neurosis, Entrapment, Closure and the Race's Race of Life in *Masango Mavi* (1998) and *Mapenzi* (1999).**

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**Abstract**

**This paper critically analyses the projection of the African image and the condition of the African race as depicted in Emmanuel Chiwome's *Masango Mavi* (1998), and Ignatius Mabasa's *Mapenzi* (1999) in the broad context of popular images in Zimbabwean literature written in Shona and English. The condition is that of a trapped people who are irretrievably wallowing in mass neurosis, closure and entrapment. We praise what is praiseworthy and dispraise what is not praiseworthy. In this connection, we advance the argument that, in as much as these works are concerned with highlighting the problems bedeviling Zimbabwean Africans today, the images they create are simultaneously subversive and disempowering. It is unfair for our writers to institutionalise pessimism and nihilism while condemning philosophies of motivation and futurism to the backseat.**

**Introduction**

The overarching thesis in this paper revolves around the critical study of the condition of the African race as it is depicted in *Masango Mavi* (1998) and *Mapenzi* (1999). The condition is modelled around the reification of mass neurosis, entrapment and closure as unbreakable social ideals. Reference is also made to some of the Zimbabwean novels written in English since they are part of the same experiential trajectory. The paper is largely concerned about the nature of the images that suffuse this literature and their implications on the survival of the melanin race as well as its posterity. We raise the argument that, in as much as these literary creations constitute a reflection of the human condition in the contemporary world, in which mass neurosis, closure and entrapment are said to be central, they also parade an "inverted distortion." This is to say that, distortions about the race have always existed in letters whose constructional material and pedagogical infrastructure is Europe. Consequently, one wonders whether or not we are perpetuating this tradition of letters; unconsciously or subconsciously. It is also argued that the perpetual visualisation of society through the lenses of closure and entrapment is subversive to human development.

We raise this concern through a series of important questions which include: How do we see ourselves and how have others seen us? (Asante, 1999:3). Alternatively, is how we see ourselves different from the manner others see us or have seen us? Haven't others seen us as *Mapenzi*? (Mad/foolish people) In the same vein, haven't others seen Africa as *Masango Mavi* (Hostile Jungle), *House of Hunger*, *Walking Still*, *Shadows*, *Chairman of Fools*, *Without a Name*? In this regard, what are the implications for agency, transcendence, posterity and the race's race of life if we authenticate such discourses that promulgate violently imposed images of ourselves? As indicated before, the discussion

does not run away from the need to acknowledge the profound contributions that the works afford towards an illumination of the problems that contemporary Africa faces. At the same time, it can not afford the luxury of not querying the African image that these works promulgate. For instance, a close exegesis of the titles under discussion and indeed other titles that are part of Zimbabwean literature reveals a creative trend that is informed by social death, entrapment and closure. It is important to analyse the titles as they proffer prima facie evidence of the writers' understanding and vision of the African position in the contemporary world as neurotic and entrapped.

### **An overview of titular discourses in Zimbabwean literature**

This is life's race, but how shall we remind a people hypnotized by death? We have been so long following the falling sun, flowing to the desert, moving to our burial (Armah, 1973: xi).

The African image in quite a number of literary creations in Zimbabwean literature is palpably bedridden in intensive care. This image finds revelation in the titles themselves. The physical wreckage and spiritual paralysis that is by definition an expression of this image, leads to an agonising realisation that, in life's vicissitudes, and life's race of race survival, African people remain undeveloped and fledgling stutters. The images of characters in these novels whose titles are vapid project Africans as victims of collective inertia, wallowing in cultural and historical amnesia and disintegrating in irretrievable mentacide. As a result, in terms of agency and mobility, the African race remains glued on the starting line, quite overwhelmed by the seemingly insurmountable hurdles in the race of life. Through the choice of titles, most of the writers seem to have adopted a modality that inordinately projects social death and a host of other social sicknesses as new forms of social identity in the contemporary dispensation. While their absolutisation of mass neurosis, closure and entrapment might be said to be a reflection of the state of the nation in the post independence period, it is also estimable that such images of social sickness, paralysis and mass neurosis can be manipulated by Africa's anthropological detractors in their justification of a static and back pedalling African race, particularly along the evolutionary spectrum, which is presented as a universal standard of valuation. The paper also puts forth argument that, the adoption of an axiological paradigm that legitimises closure and race entrapment nullifies any prospects towards racial salvation. It is an act of defining the African race as doomed. Such a definition which trivialises the African existential trajectory pays homage to the subversive labels that Europe has generously donated to Africa. Such labels include Third World; Underdeveloped; Dark Continent; Poor majority, cultural other and many more. These are designations that bespeak helplessness and mass neurosis.

The images of a crippled race stuttering in the race of life are elaborately reflected in the titles of Zimbabwean literature in Shona and English. Despite the fact that the novels mentioned above are produced during different historical periods, their titles reflect an underlying continuity in their description of Zimbabwean people's existential situations and their discursive formulation. For instance, a panoramic look at this literature reveals that during the 1970s and 80s; the dominant image as reflected in the choice of titles, was that of drought and hunger, a period summarised by Zimunya (1982)

as, “*Those Years of Drought and Hunger.*” Some of the works that fall into this category include Mungoshi’s *Waiting for the Rain* (1975), *Coming of the Dry Season* (1972), *Kunyarara Hakusi Kutaura?* (1983) and Marechera’s *House of Hunger* (1978). In the late 80s and 90s, the drought seems to have degenerated into real neurosis where the major image is that of a mentally deranged person(s) (*mapenzi*). This comes out through Manyimbiri’s *Mudzimu Wakupe Chironda* (1997), Mabasa’s *Mapenzi* (1999), Chiwome’s *Masango Mavi* (1998), Kanengoni’s *Echoing Silences* (1997), Chinodya’s *Chairman of Fools* (2005) and to some extent *Harvest of Thorns* (1989). In most instances, the mentally traumatised character(s), who is a former combatant, is the author’s mouthpiece. One can estimate that in as much as this creative disposition reflects the failing state of the nation, it is also a manifestation of major literary trends and the direction that creative writing is taking in Zimbabwe.

However, a closer look on this trend also problematises the direction Zimbabweans are taking as a nation/ race. One wonders if there is any future at all for this race. Zimbabwean literature particularly from the 1970s up to this date seems to be wallowing in a scheme where social death is *logos*. While this is a general statement which is largely true of literature written in English, Shona literature also seems to be falling into the same scheme. Conspicuously, the fundamental existential questions that beg to be answered as a matter of urgency are:

How have we come to be mere mirrors to annihilation? For whom do we aspire to reflect our people’s death? For whose entertainment shall we sing our agony? In what hopes? That the destroyers, aspiring to extinguish us, will suffer conciliatory remorse at the sight of their own fantastic success? (Armah: xiii).

For instance, the titles of the novels under exegesis in this paper are massive reflections of a people that have not only reached the ceiling of their existence, but also lead problem riddled lives. The title *Mapenzi*, though a scathing remark on individuals and political leaders, is a universalisation of neurosis in independent Zimbabwe. It underscores the closure, entrapment and mass neurosis that is cast as an assumed national identity. The author puts on creative binoculars that afford him the opportunity to panoramically project contemporary Zimbabwe as an agglomeration of neurotics. The mass neurosis that he diagnoses becomes both a problem and a national identity. He laments that social, political and economic institutions which are the nucleus of the nation are managed by *mapenzi* (mad/foolish people) and run along the principles of *upenzi* (madness/foolishness). In such a context, chances of transcendence are obliterated. Everything is canalised along the path of decadence and neurosis. It is completely impossible to collectively harness the vitalities of *mapenzi* and channel them towards a unitary goal. The absolutisation of *upenzi* is also a conscious subversion of African traditional axiological paradigms where the integrity of a nation is understood as the collective sanity of its people. Such philosophy locates the human factor element at the centre. This is adumbrated in the axiom *nyika vanhu* (a nation is its people). *Mapenzi* is an aversion of this philosophy as it projects the same nation as *nyika mapenzi* (a nation is made up of mad people). Hamundigone, the author’s mouthpiece, underscores the above realisation when he says:

*Mapenzi. Mapenzi vanhu vaye! Tiri mapenzi tese, mazipenzi. Imbwa, hochi... (140).*

*Mad/foolish people. Those people are mad/foolish. We are all mad/foolish. Dogs, pigs...*

The same also obtains in Chinodya's *Chairman of Fools* (2005: 153) where the sister on duty says to Farai, "Who is really OK? ... You are just one among hundreds of millions of so-called 'sick' people." In such a society, chances of survival are remote as Kundai also asks: "Is there any hope for tomorrow, Magi?" Among the Shona people the concept of *benzi* (mad person) is understood in the context of both the absence and the negation of fundamental human factor principles, which are packaged in the philosophical brand of *unhu/untu*. One can be labelled *benzi* irregardless of their mental disposition. As a consequence, when a nation degenerates into a motley aggregate of *mapenzi*, survival tends to be eclipsed and fundamentally outmanoeuvred by death.

The title *Masango Mavi* images society as a hostile and antagonistic jungle. Human existence is threatened and has lost bearing. Human beings themselves become a spineless mass of victims and neurotics. Equating society to a *sango* (jungle) is an acknowledgement by the author of the problematic nature of the mental and physical spaces in society today. The same images are echoed in Mungoshi's *Kunyarara Hakusi Kutaura?* (1983) where the author defines society as, "*mudondo muno tinovatepi?*" (*In this jungle, where do we sleep?*). These images and a host of others exhibit a profound loss of faith in the entire sociological infrastructure.

Chivaura (1998:108) acknowledges the problematic nature of titles of novelistic creations in Zimbabwe. He observes that:

The titles of the imaginative works in which the Zimbabwean fictional characters appear, also sound vapid, with mangled visions celebrating defeat and acquiescence ...and cultural hypnotism.

The above titular discourses engender a liminary perspective. While they are articulating black suffering and the classical encounter with nihilism, that is, the struggle involved in deciding to go on, questions also arise as to the legitimacy of the race's existence. Our philosophy of existence as Africans is unambiguous in the manner it spells out our worth as agency. Shona proverbs like *kufa kwemurume hubuda ura and uswa hwenyati ndehuri pamuromo huri mudumbu inofa nahwo* serve to buttress that defeatism and surrender are not immediate options. We, therefore, do not hesitate to stand up and proclaim with thundering eloquence that we are worth more than being an amorphous mass of lifeless, valueless, visionless, directionless and defeated black bodies.

As natural speakers of African languages, there is need for African people to be careful of not using the natural gift that language is to disempower themselves. When language is recklessly used, it can become one of the subtle forms of ideological and pedagogical disempowerment. Language constitutes one of the oldest and effective forms of technology that humanity has always deployed for the purposes of transcendence. For that reason, the language or discourse that a people adopt and adapt can enhance or

negate survival. Henry Paget (1997: 15) explores the African possibilities of visualising themselves as finite sites of agency. He advises us that:

It is the fate of this capacity for agency that is crucial for our attitudes toward existence. Through its sense of agency, an individual or group makes an estimate of its chances for successful self-assertion or strategic intervention vis-à-vis its environment. Success or failure in such undertakings are [sic] important determinants of our attitudes.

In this regard, our ability as Africans to overcome impersonal forces like sickness, cold, drought, hunger, oppression is intricately related to the discursive economy. Literature is part of this discursive trajectory that not only portrays reality but also decodes reality by giving impetus to the race of life where we strive to confront conditions of possibility and non-possibility. It is a facility for agency or lack of it. History teaches us that, African people, wherever they are, can only survive in the context of a strategic partnership with agency. Therefore, an explicit thematisation of society as *Mapenzi* (mad/foolish people), *Masango Mavi* (hostile jungle), *House of Hunger*, *Waiting for the Rain*, *Walking Still*, *Shadows*, *Coming of the Dry Season*, *Without a Name*, 'Non Believer's [on a] Journey' and many other discourses which are part of Zimbabwean literature entrenches and legitimises closure and entrapment as African people's ensconced philosophy of existence. It is to plunge the race into an unfathomable lapse of vitality and vision while at the same time celebrating conquest of human reason and capitulation into ideological captivity. The above concern is aroused by the realisation that the arts are critical in the formulation and preservation of a people's social theory of existence. In the words of John Henrik Clarke, such a theory is paramount as it functions as the compass that people can use to locate themselves on the map of human geography. It also effectively serves as a clock that they can use to tell the time of the day, particularly what needs to be done (1986:53). Such a theory also determines attitudes towards life, especially choices between life and death.

A people whose social theory is vague and mangled are likely to find it difficult to persevere in the race of life. A closer look at titles that are part of Zimbabwean literature, including the titles of the novels analysed in this paper, testily problematises our social existence. One is left wondering whose social theory informs creativity and indeed the generality of the nation. Evidence from the above titles confirms a bastardised, truncated and self-immolating social theory. Such a theory fixes Zimbabwean people in a context of non possibilities, closure and entrapment. We are forced to write against the popularisation of such a creative disposition which on closer examination turns out to be a darker version of white neurosis and decadence. In the race of life, where the ultimate objective is to claim our share of the trophies of life, the challenge is to constantly engage and re-engage, create and re-create vitalising and nourishing ideals. The situation in Zimbabwe in the 1990s and beyond demands that we not only propose and confirm a social theory that acknowledges the stasis and social death inherent in the country, but more importantly, increase awareness on ability to overcome forces inimical to the realisation of life as a great ceremony. Responsible acts of creation always endeavour to strike a balance between opposites - that is, life and death. Both Mabasa and Chiwome embrace the surreal tradition to parade the entrapped and neurotic condition of the race.

### **The surreal tradition and the race of life**

Dreams in Mabasa's *Mapenzi* are part of the surreal tradition. They resemble western horror movies. In terms of structure, they are cubistic and Dadaistic. The manner in which they are structured qualifies them as theoretical resources that symbolise a fragmented and crippled nation - ideologically, philosophically and politically. They concretise the institutional invisibility of the Shona people and consequently their fragile and victim status in the race of life. The surreal tradition projects life as a Golgotha of frightening, unattainable and fragmented dreams. This disposition as it is used in *Mapenzi* presents life as a formless project and the people as neurotics. The dreamers themselves are traumatised and victimised by their dreams, which are in actual fact, nightmares. Mabasa carefully employs this bewildering array of vapid and sterile dreams whose thrust is absurdity, closure and entrapment. Ultimately, the dreams symbolise a threat to the logic of positive living and positive thinking. When used as a literary technique, surrealism represents the systematic knocking down and dismantling of all forces of rational signification by drawing our attention to the miserability of human life. In this regard, there is a profoundly fundamental sense in which it is connected to other doctrines of nothingness like nihilism and Dadaism. Breton Andre (1978: 1) explains surrealism as a movement that

...aims to reduce, and ultimately to resolve, the contradictions between sleeping and waking, dream and action, reason and madness, the conscious and the unconscious, the individual and society, the subjective and the objective.

The dreams are used to signify and clarify the human condition in Zimbabwe today. The authors' use of dreams is triggered by the realisation that dreaming is an essential component of existence. People who do not dream lack ambition and potential to escalate. On the other hand, a people with dreams indicate their desire to break out of the limiting shell of life. When life becomes dreamlike, the resultant condition is that of victimhood. As indicated before, Mabasa's use of dreams is a deliberate technique to corroborate the problematic nature of life in independent Zimbabwe. The mass madness that characterises Zimbabwe in this novel is invariably expressed through dreams which are conspicuous in the manner they mark the very absence of humanity. Viewed in the context of what we have called a social theory of existence, the dreams stand for irredeemable forms of ideological and philosophical abstractionism. In other words, they can be summed up as theoretical maps that lead the race nowhere. They are an explicit expression of society as *mapenzi* (mad/foolish people).

Mabasa uses Vincent and Bunny's dreams to artistically describe the human condition in Zimbabwe. Bunny's dreams are engendered by the suspicions he has about whether or not he contracted Aids from his ill-fated flirtation with the late Maud. The experience is so powerful that he is psychologically traumatised. He even fails to perform at work such that he has to be rested. Bunny becomes a representation of many people who find themselves entangled in such a situation. The situation is exacerbated by the fact that Bunny is a worker whose contributions to national integrity and the future of the

race can not be underestimated. If the majority of Zimbabweans are in such a situation, then one wonders for how long we can hold on as a race.

In both instances, the dreams are similar. It is the vapidness of the dreams that scares the dreamers because among most African people dreams are revelations. Bunny describes his dreams as:

*Ndiri kurota hope dzisingarevi chinhu, hope dzakangoita zvimamvemvemvemve. Hope dzisingabatanidziki (116).*

*I am having meaningless dreams, dreams that are tattered. Dreams that do not make sense.*

The same also applies to Vincent's dreams which are described as:

*Pakarepo akabva angonyura muzvimadhaka zvehope zvaive zvisina kudzikadzika asi zvichirema semwoyo weafirwa nemudiwa (56)*

*Suddenly, he sank into muddy dreams that were not deep. Yet they were heavy like the heart of person who has lost a loved one.*

As indicated before, the complexity and impenetrability of the dreams signify the vulnerable human condition in independent Zimbabwe, particularly in the 1990s and beyond. As such, they are a metaphorical expression of the condition of the race to date.

These symbol laden dreams are clearly a negation of life and motion. The emphasis is largely on pain, immobility, closure, entrapment and paralysis. Both Bunny and Vincent are overwhelmed by the larger than life forces which deprive them of any vitality. Dangerous and man-eating wild animals like snakes, crocodiles and lions terrorise the two in their dreams. Bunny describes his dream as:

*...ndanga ndichifamba ndichidzedzereka pamwe nekumbokambaira. Bani riya rabva rachinja kuita zidziva rine mvura nhema nhema...Tava pakati pedziva, ndabva ndatsvedza...ndichibva ndanyura mumvura...Pandati nditize...Garwe rabva randibata mumusoro richida kundimedza...Tabva tatanga kunyura munhope tese negarwe riye (116/7).*

*I was staggering and at times crawling. The open pastures suddenly transformed into a big pool with very dark water...When we were in the middle of the pool, I slipped...and capsized...When I tried to run away...a crocodile caught my head and tried to swallow me...We then started to sink together with the crocodile.*

The world that Mabasa creates is a world in which humanity lacks the mechanics and mechanisms to confront existential challenges. In that world, life becomes an overwhelmingly colossal force that threatens to extinguish humanity. This helplessness also finds expression in Vincent's dream where the author tells us that:

*Akada kumuka ndokunzwa zvichirema. Akazama zvekare ndokuwana achiita seakasungwa pamwe nekugarirwa nemunhu anorema chaizvo...Akanzwa achingekachidhanana kawira mumambure ebuwebuwe kana kuti bete rawira mumukaka*

*riri kuedza kushambira kuti riende kumahombekombe kwepoto asi richingoramba riri panzvimbo imwe chete. Simba raakanga ainaro akachirinzwwa zvino rave kupera, iye achiita seonyura muchidziva chine zvimvura zvitema tema...(56).*

*He tried to get up but a certain heaviness burdened him. He tried again but this time felt as if he was tied while a very big person sat on him. He felt like a small lizard trapped in a spider web or a cockroach that has fallen into a pot of milk but finding it difficult to come out. The energy that he had was gradually fading and he felt like he was sinking into a pond with very dark waters.*

Mabasa carefully and deliberately uses these dreams to crystallise *upenzi* (neurosis), closure and entrapment which are cast as a permanent conditions in this novel. A conscious study of the various symbols in these dreams leads us to the realisation that the monster animals which include snakes, lions, crocodiles and frighteningly big fish stand for the various life-threatening problems in society. These problems include disease (HIV/Aids), unemployment, excessive power abuse, excessive economic mismanagement, poverty and others. Again, the fact that all action in these dreams takes place in water, *zvidziva zvine mvura* (ponds with water), means human beings cannot put up a heroic fight. Human beings are by nature not an aquatic or amphibian lot. The message, therefore, is that of a dislocated people whose futile and problematic existence is engendered by lack of space. In the race's race of life, it becomes difficult to triumph, since space is critical for agency. Such space is not only physical, but psychological as well. It ensures centeredness and readiness. It follows, then, that action that results from such centeredness is life-affirming and life-sustaining. Also worth noting is the fact that the water is said to be very dark (*mvura nhema nhema*). Generally speaking, water is synonymous with life and is said to be colourless. However, these particular waters as they appear in the dreams seem to be far from being life-enhancing.

In a separate dream, Bunny engages God in a fight. *Kurota ndichirwa naMwari here vakomana?* (117) (*I had a dream in which I was fighting with God*). In Africa, *Mwari/Musikavanhu/unkulunkulu* is a source for life. African spirituality, which is a source of African people's resilience and survival, revolves around the respect and knowledge of God. Fear and veneration of the spiritual realm guarantees harmony, nobility, morality and at the same times marks the beginning of wisdom. Ani (1980:1&3) acknowledges the centrality of spirit in African existence in the following words:

...Africa survives in our spiritual make-up; that it is the strength and depth of African spirituality and humanism that has allowed the survival of [Africans]...Our spirit symbolizes our uniqueness as a people, or we would say that the African-American ethos is spiritual.

However, the characters in the novel seem to relate to this spiritual reality from a position of nonchalant abandon. Human behaviour in general and the management of national institutions which include the family, politics, economics and others lack recognition of the spiritual realm. It is a people whose behaviour is inspired by the idiom of existentialism and *upenzi*.



In *Masango Mavi*, the dreams are not as horrifying as they are in *Mapenzi*. In the story called “*Masango Mavi*” (hostile jungle), Chiwome uses Tongai, the central character, to show the emptiness of life in independent Zimbabwe. Tongai, a security guard finds life so excruciating and unrewarding that he lives his wishes in dreams. He is an ambitious young man who works hard in order to claim his share of trophies in the race of life. After several years of trying, he goes into horse betting. He is given numbers of winning horses in the dreams but this does not turn out to be true. *Pamwe airota akabata mari chaiyo asi ozo pepuka akanganwa manhamba amupa mari yacho* (54). (Sometimes, he would have a dream where he possessed large sums of money only to wake up having forgotten the numbers that had given him that money). During the days he is posted to guard Automated teller machines, he dreams of large sums of money. *Aizonorara achingorota mazakwatira ...*(48). (He would retire to bed and dream of very large sums of money).

These dreams reflect people’s ambitions and their expectations of independence. Succumbing to dreams in such a manner is an indication of the failure to take life head on. Dreams become an avenue to escape engagement. Since they are escapist, it entails an abandonment of the race. Again, dreams are largely spiritual. However, any meaningful engagement in the race of life should strive on the concatenation of both the physical and the spiritual. To live life in the spiritual alone is purely to disengage from the urge to be immersed in the thick of things. Nonetheless, through the zeal shown by Tongai, Chiwome shows that the African race is a race of ‘runners.’ It is only the hostile environment punctuated with corruption, nepotism and favouritism which subverts people’s ability to finish the race. Life in the city is presented as crippling. There are a number of expenses that thwart investment and personal growth. Tongai can not save any money to accomplish his personal goals. He has to pay for water, electricity food and other expenses that require money. This is the reason why Tongai escapes into the surreal world, the world of dreams. Life becomes indomitable and overwhelming.

### **The idiom of nihility and death**

Stories in *Masango Mavi* as well the general social picture in *Mapenzi* reflect an annihilatory vision. Such a vision centralises closure and entrapment. The story titled “*Mashiriapungana*” (complex/ difficult situation) in *Masango Mavi* presents a people whose future is frighteningly bleak. The characters are so overcome with death to the extent of losing belief in the project of life. A closer examination on their condition shows that they no longer die once but several times because they have adopted a nihilist vision. However, such a social vision is dangerous in that it subverts agency and participation while entrenching surrender and defeatist attitudes as social ideals. James Baldwin (1963:13) comments on the ramifications of embodying such a vision. He observes in the letter to his brother that, “...he... [died] before he died because he really believed what...people said about him.” Death is so prevalent in this story. The author tells us that:

*Vanhu vapabasa pake vaiva vashoma asi painge pagara pachingobatanwa maoko zuva nezuva. Dzimwe nguva aishaya kuti paizopera makore gumi kambani yainge ichiri kushandirwa naiye neshamwari dzake here... (14).*

*Fellow workers were very few yet it had become a norm to exchange condolences almost every day. At times he was not sure if the same company would still have the same workers in ten years time.*

The integrity of a nation revolves around the physical presence of its people. Such physical presence depends on a host of other factors which include the emotional, psychological and spiritual health of a people. When death and other forces of degeneration tend to outmanoeuvre life and forces of regeneration, existence becomes a nullity. Some of the characters even prepare for their death in advance because life is said to have become very short.

Chiwome caricatures such people and presents them as neurotics. However, the neurosis is so prevalent to the extent that chances of survival for the race are questionable. This is the kind of mass neurosis that leads to closure and entrapment. When the race loses faith in both the present and the future, individual and group development becomes a mirage.

*Pane vahu vazhinji vaaiziva vakanga vaedza kubatira makuva...vachiri vapenyu vakataurirwa kuti azara...Imwe yemari yavo yesadza neyokutenga mishonga yava kukamurwa ichienda kugadziriro yezuva rekupedzisira. Tapera aitova nemuzukuru wake akanga azviunganidzira matombo eguva rake aakanga asingadi kuti vahu vabate (21&31).*

*There were a number of people who had tried to book for their graves while they were still alive only to be told that the places had been filled. Part of their money meant for buying food and medicines was being channeled towards preparations for the last day. Tapera had a cousin who had even gone to the extent of gathering stones for his grave.*

The neurosis is so entrenched that the neurotics who book graves and buy coffins in advance consider those who do not do so as the real neurotics. The loss of faith and belief in the project of life is worrying and shocking. Life expectancy is said to have been very high before the coming Europeans.

*...Tapera aiziva vanhu vatatu chete vakanga vafa muruwa rwavo. Wokutanga aiva mucheche, gavamwedzi...Wechipiri ndoumwe murume mubvakure akanga akuvadzwa namatombo...Wechitatu aiva mukomana akanga anyura mumvura (15).*

*Tapera knew of three people who had died. The first one was a premature baby. The second one was a foreigner who had been hit by rocks...The third one was a boy who had capsized.*

In this context, death is so rare. When it happens, it is either justified or is simply a mishap. This longevity and calm is terminated by the war. Unfortunately, even after the

war people continue to die as if the war had not ended. Chiwome is literally blaming colonialism for an overnight life expectancy that now characterises Africa.

While a number of writers focus on the impact of colonialism on the African psychological make-up, which has necessitated titles like “Decolonising the Mind,” Chiwome shifts focus. He focuses on the physical elimination of Africans. The depopulating effect of the war is not different from slavery which deprived Africa of millions of its male and female talent. In the post-independence dispensation, a number of diseases particularly Aids, seem to have affected people’s attitude towards life.

*Varwere vakanga vari vemazera ese...Varwere vakanga vawanda kudarika mibhedha...Chiremba ainyora mishonga, varapi voshaya mishonga iya muchipatara...Zvaireva here kuti ndiko kutanga kokuguma kwenyika? (21&32).*

*There were patients of all age groups...These patients had outnumbered hospital beds...Doctors would prescribe medicines that were not there...Could that be a signal for the end of the world?*

For any conscious African, the picture is really worrying. One wonders what Africa has to do in order to ensure continuity.

While the picture might be said to be generally true, the author’s vision remains nihilist and alarmist. It creates an impression that this is a race that is not synonymous with growth and continuity. Such a picture is spiritually disempowering and energy sapping. It has the capacity to engender life-threatening behaviours as people compete to act out their roles before the ‘fixed’ end. It imposes limits to where we can go as a race. It is fixating. We argue that, whatever the circumstances and however debilitating and menacing, African people should simply reject such asphyxiating images. One might even hazard to say that the same version of our life as portrayed in *Mashiriapungana* pays homage to the efforts of western social scientists on Africa whose statistical data on chances of Africans’ survival is carefully crafted in order to signal disaster for Africa. This is crucial for the titillation of the western progeny.

One only needs to look at the statistics given on HIV/Aids. The statistics are shocking. They are designed in order to make Africans lose hope and embrace fatalist attitudes and other behaviours that lead to the destruction of life. The same statistics are part of the psycho-technological battles that seek to strangulate Africans by burdening them with horrifying and restricting definitions. Such definitions are very dangerous in the sense that they have the potential to condition behaviour and stifle progressive visions as Hudson (1998) teaches us that the problem with being defined is that you are not who you want to be. In the same vein, when all other health services are beyond the reach of ordinary Zimbabweans, it is mind boggling to note that one does not have to pay or pays very little in order to be part of the statistics on Aids in Africa. Europeans are prepared to over-subsidise HIV/Aids testing in order to assess the success of their experiment on African genocide. In our opinion, the so-called counselling is simply an empty gesture and a token for having cooperated with the west in their desperate and pathological need for statistics on African death. As indicated before, western photojournalism abounds with the same images of Africa where “mothers are shown wasting away with their children around them. [Before we even knew it], projections were made of the rapid growth in the number of Aids cases by the year 2000. The number of people already

infected with the Aids virus was estimated to be 10 million! The picture was one of disaster. Why did the future look so bleak for Africa?" (Ani,1994:439). Such shocking statistics are part of the disinformation used to discriminate against Africans in the 'numbers game.' The numbers game is a critical determinant for supremacy, progress and success. A people who are projected as overwhelmed by death obviously stand in contraposition to progress and success. This conceptual modality is paramount in engineering Afropessimism.

Now, Afropessimism is what we visualise as a new philosophy of existence that is popularised in our literatures, especially in contemporary Africa. This philosophy is not different from the conveyor belt of European colonialisms deliberately structured to strangulate African vitality and the creative urge to escalate. The point we are emphasising is that there is no need to be so alarmist considering that the same race has been subjected to a host of depopulating strategies starting with slavery (looting of Africans from Africa), apartheid and colonialism. Surprisingly, we are still there. Such problems only need to be located in the proper context where Europe has a number of strategies for African genocide of which some are yet to be unveiled. (Africa should brace herself for these forthcoming attractions). In the story *Mashiriapungana*, the message can be misinterpreted in that direction. This is the reason why Baldwin (ibid: 16&17) was astute enough to exhort his fellow black brothers that:

Take no one's word, including mine - but trust your experience. Know whence you came, there is really no limit to where you can go. The details and symbols of your life have been deliberately constructed to make you believe what... people say about you... You, don't be afraid. I said that it was intended that you should perish in the ghetto, perish by never being allowed to go beyond the white man's definitions, by never being allowed to spell your proper name.

As an Afrocentered writer and critic, Chiwome is fully aware of this other dimension to reality.

Another story titled *Mwana Wevhu* expresses the painful experiences of deprivation and loss. Among the Shona of Zimbabwe, the title means son of the soil. It is a powerful nationalist statement that spells out the Shona people's attachment to their soil. It is a symbol of identity and rootedness. *Ivhu* (soil) stands for home, peace, development and stability. However, Chiwome critiques the validity of the phrase during the colonial and the post-independence periods. He shows that the Shona people who have lost their land seem to have been plunged into an unfathomable abyss where agency and meaningful survival have been subverted. The rural and urban areas alike no longer symbolise the stability and assurance that is inherent in the ideological statement *Mwana Wevhu* (son of the soil). His vision in this story is revisionist and challenges earlier versions by Katiyo (1976) in his novel called *A Son of the Soil*. While Katiyo is optimistic and nationalistic, Chiwome is pessimistic and suspicious of the concept of *Mwana Wevhu* especially after the tragic misalliance between Africa and Europe.

This story is told through Jeshuwa, the central character. Jeshuwa is one of the temporary urban dwellers who falls victim to the callous machinations of the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme introduced in the early 1990s. After retrenchment, he goes to his rural area to start a new life. However, in the rural area, he finds life very

agonising and fails to cope with the rhythms of rural life in the same manner he fails to live in the urban areas. Through him, Chiwome expresses the knotty nature of survival in rural and urban areas alike. The clarion statement is that people are no longer living in their natural habitats. The tragedy facing the race in this story is what Asante (1998: 8) refers to as:

If we have lost anything, it our cultural centeredness; that is, we have been moved off our own platforms. This means we can not truly be ourselves or know our potential since we exist in a borrowed space.

Colonialism has re-located, re-rooted and re-routed the African in the process subverting agency and ability to act “with will and intent.” This has institutionalised mass neurosis, victimhood, vulnerability and helplessness.

In the case of Jeshuwa, he tries to lead an urbanised life in the rural area without realising that the two are incompatible. Chiwome describes Jeshuwa’s behaviour thusly;

*Mangwanani oga oga aida tii yake ine chingwa nomukaka. Apedzevo aida kugeza mvura ine svoda asati asati atanga tumwe tumabasabasa (1).*

*He wanted to have his tea and bread in the morning. After that, he would expect to bath himself in chlorinated water before venturing into the day’s work.*

Chiwome decries the manner in which urbanisation artificialises the behaviour of Africans. It makes Africans assimilate western behaviours. At the same time, he is also demystifying the myths about urban areas as centres of enlightenment. Rather, they facilitate underdevelopment. In this regard, Jeshuwa is projected as a caricature. For instance, he can neither control the plough nor drive the cattle. His tragedy is presented as *chirungu chakanga charamba, kurima kwaramba (4)*. (*Western life style had failed; farming had failed, as well*). The image that emerges is that of an embattled and entrapped African who belongs neither here nor there. Just like urban areas, the rural areas are characterised by absence of security, peace and harmony. They no longer command the dignity and respect that is synonymous with the ideal *kumusha* (home). They are reserves and tribal trust lands where the black population was forcibly settled by successive colonial regimes. The degradation in these areas reflects the history of colonial impoverishment and disempowerment of blacks. *Vanofirei vanhu vacho murukangarahwe? Kutyokera musana masaga mashomanana echibage chete chete?...Muvhu rakaita seredu iri munzvimbo isinganayi mvura ungabudirira sei? (Why do they toil in these rocky areas? Breaking their backs for a few bags of maize? ...how can one develop on such soils as ours where the rains are erratic?)* Lack of opportunities triggered largely by unfair historical policies which have been widely documented (Land Apportionment Act, Land Husbandry Act, and Land Tenure Act) and ecological degradation render the whole population victims. Characters spend most of their time drinking beer because the ‘reserves’ are unproductive.

*Pataundishipi ndipo paakanopedzera shungu dzose dzokubhowa kunoita ruzevha. Aitenga doru seane shavi redoro nengoma, nedivi achitamba zvimitambo zvese*

*zvinotambwa notumari tushomanene...Chakanyanya kumunakidza chaiva chokuti panaitikirabhu paitombouya mabhendi ane mazita anozivikanwa kuHarare nguva dzakadai ...ndiyo nguva yawaiona varume navakadzi vachinge vambokanganwa kuti kune shuramatongo (6).*

*He let out all his frustrations about boredom in the reserves at the local township. He would buy beer like a possessed person while playing all the games with the little money...What intrigued him most was the fact that the local nightclub hosted prominent bands from Harare. During such times, men and women would forget that there was Aids.*

The same picture is also expressed in the story *Masango Mavi* (Hostile Jungle) where Tongai's ambitions to land a high profile job are dented by the hostile urban environment. The author traces the history of race impoverishment and underdevelopment through Tongai. He uses life at the farm to show how black people have been dehumanised over the years and used as sources of cheap labour. The position of helplessness is carried over from the colonial period into the neo-colonial dispensation. During the colonial period, Africans had been peripherised and made to generate wealth for the white man by working on his farms. After independence, there is really no meaningful transformation for ordinary people. Tongai, who had hoped to secure a high profile job, finds himself working for rich people. Chiwome satirises the failure of independence to improve people's lives. In Matapi, where the majority of low income earners live, conditions are really worrying for the race. The general behaviour in the area expresses mass neurosis, mass vulnerability and mass poverty.

*KuMatapi...Inzvimbo yemashiripiti enhamo...durunhuru rakarasirwa vanhu navanaChigovanyika...Ukasiya musuwo wakashama unowana poto yaenda nomuriwo wayo...Kana pakugeza mushawa ukange waisa sipo kumeso wotogezwa wakaruma sipo yacho...(49).*

*Matapi is a place for miracles of poverty. It is a dumping ground where people were dumped by the powers that be. If you leave your door unsecured, your pot together with its contents will be stolen. When taking a shower, you should put the soap in between your teeth lest it disappears.*

This is where Tongai stays. What is largely discernible in *Mwana Wevhu* and *Masango Mavi* is the race's condition which is expressed through the lenses of victimhood and pessimism. These are articulated with frighteningly predictable consistency and are elevated to race identity. The present and the future are completely unrealisable. Again, the stories are consistent in their reflection of social images of life negation and hope abandonment. Such a position and attitude towards life becomes disarming when cast as a national identity and a symbol of race status.

At this point, it is worrying to note that our literatures preoccupy themselves with images of sickness at a time the nation desperately needs life injectors. This is not to suggest that writers should not reflect social death. We are simply putting forth the proposition that literature is not just a mirror of reality. Considering that these writers are products of a continent where the management of political power is shockingly distorted,

their images help in sustaining dictatorships. Dictatorship thrives on victimhood and the acceptance, for whatever reason, by the people that they are victims and helpless. The African race will do well to transform the vulnerability and lifelessness into a combative and never-say-die psychology. We also make it emphatic that any criticism or scholarship and indeed any literary production that fails to go beyond mere acknowledgement of vulnerability, closure and entrapment is operating in cahoots with forces that deny Africans a heaven on earth. Fanon (1967: 88) makes this responsibility unambiguous.

I can not disassociate myself from the future that is proposed for my brother. Every one of my acts commits me as a man. Every one of my cowardices reveals me as a man....

African people's existence in this world has never been fashioned by persistent negative thoughts and pessimism. As a result, the conceptual modality that presents pessimism and victimhood as logos subverts and undermines the race's potential. Since the arts are crucial in the survival of a people, it becomes dangerous to parade such social sleeping sickness as a universally acclaimed black condition. This is what prompts Asante (1998: 178) to remind contemporary Africans about the never-say-die spirit of the forefathers when he says, "What the enslaved African demonstrated was the courage to choose life so that more abundant life might be possible, tomorrow or when the "strong men keep coming," even in the face of death."

### **A fractured and crippled national psyche**

Mabasa and Chiwome also account for part of the mass neurosis and closure within the context of a de-centred and fractured national consciousness. The absence of a centripetal ideology and philosophy of life deprives the nation of a profoundly fundamental rallying point. History is one such centering force whose mutilation and misappropriation in the post independence dispensation has engendered a splintered national consciousness. This splintering transforms into mass neurosis and entrapment. In Chiwome's *Masango Mavi*, this dimension is articulated in the story *First Street*. First street, the most central street in the capital city, Harare, becomes a perfect theatre for the dramatisation of mass neurosis. In Mabasa's *Mapenzi*, a section entitled *Musika weBindura* (Bindura Terminus) and also the journey from the same town constitute the spatial centres for the exposition of folly and insanity. The same can also be said of Chinodya's *Chairman of Fools* where the hospital annexe or the psychiatric unit is metaphorically used to show the neurotic state of the nation.

History is a powerful re-remembering antidote. It embraces a people's entire existential trajectory - culture and religion. This explains why the subversion of any people begins with the dethronement of their history. Asa Hilliard's acknowledgement of the profundity of culture can slightly be modified to show the importance of history to a people. He says: "Culture [history] is the tie that binds. If there is no shared culture [history], there is no group, no unity, no solidarity. This is why the engine of group oppression is always cultural [historical] genocide" (1995:10). In *Mapenzi* and *First Street*, both authors adopt the image of a former freedom fighter to depict the problematic nature of the national psyche. However, the freedom fighter, far from embodying the

combative and heroic posture is cast as a mentally unstable figure whose neurosis and entrapped condition is a result of being tormented by ghosts from Zimbabwe's war of liberation. He is metaphorically used to symbolise the state of the nation. The message, therefore, is that the whole nation is being pursued and tormented by the very historical process which sought to liberate the people, that is, the war of liberation. The war has a direct bearing on the integrity and sanity of citizens. It created a new brand of problems that need not be packaged in falsities. For the majority, the war was a goal oriented undertaking. The betrayal and abandonment of such goals triggers various psychological and physical reactions.

In *First Street*, Chiwome uses Muchapera, and an unnamed 'mad man' to comment on the existence of mass neurosis in this story. Independence did not bring total freedom. In the case of freedom fighters like Muchapera and the mad man, the dominant trend was to welcome them as war veterans and not war victims. *Taigorapiswa nani aifunga kuti gamba rehondo rakararama nokuraramisa vamwe ringazorwara nepfungwa iyo hondo yapera (39) (It never dawned on anyone that a war hero who had survived the devastating experiences of the war and rescued others also needed treatment)*. The same also applies to the majority of peasants and others who lost their wealth supporting the war. It was a serious conceptual oversight to welcome everyone as a hero without making concerted efforts to analyse how the war had burdened us with the present. However, such a position was convenient for the young Zimbabwean government. It later got popularised in literature and history books where it got entrenched as the official version of national history. Government even sponsored competitions for the canonisation of such a flawed history. Therefore, part of the national neurosis today can not be explained without making reference to the protracted liberation struggle. The misappropriation of national history for nefarious purposes promotes a skewed and jaundiced national consciousness. Kanengoni (1997:87) exposes the distortion of national history when he says:

We deliberately kept silent about some truths, no matter how small, because some of us felt we would compromise our power. This was how the lies began because when we came to tell the history of the country and the history of the struggle, our silences distorted the history and made it defective.

This official embargo on national history engendered a yawning political chasm between agency and national challenges.

Chiwome depicts the ramifications of such distortions through the different manner in which the majority of people in *First Street* interpret the root cause of the former freedom fighters' mental sicknesses. According to the author, the different interpretations are a manifestation of national/mass neurosis. He satirises the guardians of the nation for masking the historical truth and parading a masquerade history as authentic. As a result, he empathises with people like Muchapera and the mad man as well as the misinformed public.

*Vamwe vanhu vakatanga kukwenyana vachiseka, "fodya yokwaMutoko ndozvainiota...Mumwewo akati, "Kwete kazi, handi fodya. Ibotso ranetsa."...Mumwewo mukomana anenge aitsvaka basa akatiwo, "Aiwa, ingozi dzomuhondo...Mumwewo musikana... aitaura nezvechechi akangodzungudza*



*musoro achiti, “Satani zvaanoita navanhu vaMwari! Madhimoni chete aya...Vanhu vakataura zvakasiyana- siyana zvichibva namaonero avo nhamo yorudzi urwu. Vazhinji...vaingoti nechemumwoyo, ‘Mashiripiti omuna First haaiswi mumwoyo.’*

*Some of the people started laughing, “That is exactly what dagga from Mutoko does”...Another one said...No, my friend, it is not dagga, it’s punishment for beating parents.”...Another boy who appeared to have been looking for employment said, “It’s an avenging spirit from the war”...Another girl...who was talking about the church simply shook her head and said, “That is what Satan does with God’s people! These are demons and nothing else...People said different things depending on how they saw this problem. The majority silently dismissed this as part of the miracles in First Street.*

Part of the tragedy of mass neurosis is that the nation lacks a common consciousness. In such a context, national action is paralysed. Such fragmented consciousness affects participation and contribution towards national integrity. The race of life is paralysed by failure to positively identify with history and settle the debts of history as (Baldwin 71&88) correctly observes:

...An invented past can never be used; it cracks and crumbles under the pressures of life like clay in a season of drought...[and]...For the sake of one’s children, in order to minimize the bill that they must pay, one must be careful not to take refuge in any delusion.

The same is also depicted in Mabasa’s *Mapenzi*. Through Hamundigone, a former freedom fighter like Muchapera and the mad man in *First Street*, the author interrogates the notion of independence and freedom in Zimbabwe. His unstable mental disposition betrays the instability within individuals and the nation in general. As shown in *First Street*, his condition is also misinterpreted. Eventually, he is dismissed from work. The proliferation of mentally deranged people in Zimbabwean literature written in Shona and English, whether they are former freedom fighters or not, is a powerfully contrived statement on the nature of governance, economics and sociology in the present era. In the case of former freedom fighters, one can estimate that they are deliberately employed and deployed by creative writers as emblems of the state of Zimbabwe today. The mental degeneration and fragility and neglect that characterises these former combatants translates into the economic and political degeneration in the country. The nurtured individual psychological problems seem to have transformed into mass neurosis. The point that we are emphasising here is that, cases of former combatants must not be conceptualised as individual cases. They ought to be understood within the broader framework of the national edifice, that is, the direction that Zimbabwe is taking as well as the human condition.

It is not enough to contend that these writers are re-presenting the war of liberation. Theirs is a powerful political and existential statement on the economic and political trends in Zimbabwe. Madness in contemporary Zimbabwean literature is a powerful metaphor which concatenates with the drought and hunger of the 1970s and 1980s to mark a history of predictable characterology of a dilapidating physiological,

psychological and sociological infrastructure. Through Hamundigone in *Mapenzi* and Muchapera in *First Street*, madness becomes both an expression and a dramatisation of the complexities of the dialectics between growth and death, visibility and invisibility, presence and absence, authenticity and inauthenticity. The contest between these opposites, which is a contest between going forward and backward, underscores the complexity of race survival. Madness as the absence of human beingness, narrows the conceptual horizons of presence and agency and in the process blights and obliterates posterity. It also marks the absence of location and direction. The writers' unmistakable presentation of the nation as absence of sanity casts the future of the race into a quandary.

Again, Chiwome's presentation of events in Harare's first street reflects mass neurosis. The history of Harare's first street dates back to the colonial period when it was a no go area for blacks. In this regard, one of the goals of the struggle was to restore freedom of movement and association. Most of the people who are in this street are idle. This comes out through the author's description of the nameless madman.

*Parakaona vanhu vaida kuridza nhare vakaita mudungwe uye vamwe vakanga vakasendeka misana yavo pamabhenji ematanda pamwe chete navamwe vaiongorora vapfuuri vachiita sevakamirira munhu anonokesa...(35).*

*When he saw people in a phone queue and others who were simply resting their backs on benches including those observing passers-by...*

The impression created in the above excerpt is that people are patronising this street as a way of asserting their independence. They are fighting back the successive colonial regimes that had outlawed them from walking along First Street. At the same time, it is a powerful satire whereby the gains of independence are limited to the patronage of First Street. The idleness reflects joblessness. Again, the patrons of First Street seem to have fallen victim to a host of subversive and alien tendencies characterised largely by the culture of consumerism and materialism. This coupled with the need to put on artificial images and identities constitutes new forms of social neurosis. The author tells us that:

*Vese vanotevedzera mutemo wapakati peguta reHarare, mutemo wokuchena. Kana usingagoni kuchena nemari chena nechikwereti, unobvumirwa kuripa pashoma nepashoma (34).*

*All follow the law of central Harare, the law of appearance and presentability. If you can't afford to buy using cash, you are allowed to use credit facilities and hire purchase.*

This 'rat race' towards materialism is a subtle yet effective way of pauperising and underdeveloping the race while sustaining capitalism and overdeveloping Europe. People are forced to live outside their means. It is clear that the rate at which the people consume is not commensurate with the rate of production since most of them are idle. Colonialism is not a school that trains people to produce. In the words of Césaire (1959:155), "under good colonialization, the colonizer is the creator...And the colonized is the consumer." However, independence did not subvert this hierarchy. The kind of expenditure triggered

largely by the desire to maintain artificial identities means that black people are always at the service of colonialism. Fashion seems to have become a new form of enslavement for black communities. It reduces an individual to an external person. Dixon (1997: 137&139) spells out how this new culture cripples the race's race of life. He says:

In a totalitarian universe, creditor and debtor have seemingly coalesced into one. Are we being liberated or enslaved by the "kind deliverance" of our creditors?...However, more than ninety- five percent of our dollars are spent outside our communities. As a result, we are committing community suicide. Despite (and because of) our sickness, we feel good.

This behaviour is what we refer to as mass neurosis in this paper. It has profoundly subversive effects on the integrity of the black race. Not only does it dehumanise us, it is also a defiance of the logic of investment. It ensures permanent entrapment and closure. The level of race degeneracy and collapse is also shown in the manner in which individuals relate. The concept of group, which is a fundamental rallying point of African survival, has been abandoned. Individualism reigns supreme. Such a philosophy is subversive to African agency since it is premised on the abandonment of responsibility and participatory attitudes. It becomes a form of mass neurosis since it is not congruous with principles that have sustained the race since its first encounter with a marauding Euro- American dragon.

## **Conclusion**

That there are problems in Africa is a fact that has been extensively documented for various reasons by Africans themselves as well as their oppressors. In this paper, these problems fall within the frame of what has been called mass neurosis, closure and entrapment. Such documentation also becomes the noble duty of writers since it increases awareness about the existence of problems. This is the position in *Mapenzi* and *Masango Mavi*, which chronicle a Golgotha of life-threatening problems in Zimbabwe. These problems have triggered collective neurosis. However, what a number of African writers and scholars seem to have forgotten is to transform these conundrums into a combative and life-furthering philosophy. If the aptitude that some among us have shown in visualising Africa through the lenses of nihilism and victimhood could be applied in terms of agency and transcendence, African people would be greatly empowered. The projection of the African image as hopelessly crippled is subversive to the integrity of the race. It is part and parcel of the subtle cultural politics of disempowerment.

Literature has the potential to direct and mould perception through the images it generates. Positive images are likely to instil hope and a sense of purposefulness among a people. In the same manner, consistently negative images are likely to recruit people to the back seat where they watch with nonchalant abandon the galloping forces of life out-pacing them. This is the reason why Thelwell (1987: 231) dissuades us from embracing a negative perception of ourselves irregardless of the situation. He says:

An honest novel can not proceed out of a glib, fashionable coffee house cynicism and unearned despair in which everything is beyond human effort. It is rather

predicated on the assumption that there is a future for which to struggle, that conditions however grim are not beyond the reach of people's will, intelligence and decency, and that the writing and reading of such novels are not only testament to that faith, but are an integral and effective part of that struggle.

Conditions of life, including those which are perceived as pathologically debilitating, need to be carefully analysed and strategies and mechanisms to overcome them worked out. Stasis and debility need not be acknowledged and popularised as a way of life. Africans require a life-furthering philosophy that can enable them to reclaim their humanity.

Literature which absolutises victimhood, vulnerability and entrapment contributes to human factor underdevelopment. Questions must be asked as to the nature of the human factor principles that we authenticate when, like a dog with two tails, we go ahead to label ourselves as *Mapenzi*, *Masango Mavi*, *House of Hunger*, *Without a Name*, *Walking Sill* and many other titles. These titles are indeed labels for the race. If it is true, for instance, that "the soul of a nation is to be found in the temple of its arts" (P'bitek, 1986: vi), then, we wonder if we still have any soul at all given the vapidness of the labels above. Though the works are satiric, questions must still be asked with regard to what seems to be a predictable history of naming in our literature. Shona nomenclature is quite unambiguous in the manner it spells out the art of naming as inextricably linked with and deeply embedded in Shona people's attitude towards life and prospects for survival. In this regard, there is a fundamental need to go beyond such ontological paradigms that fail to institutionalise a creative modality which enhances the African subject and not African object position. If we are not careful, we might be promulgating the very images and definitions that have been given to us by our oppressors. To promulgate the image of the African race as an existential shallowness, a profound emptiness of being and a callous existence without substance is to be near-sighted and narrow-minded. Literature should heal tormented souls. This function is related to the enhancement of a people's moral character and dignity, which constitute their humanity. Again, it is the race that must be rescued here. Such an undertaking is possible when we begin to appreciate that, this is "a period of major political, economic and social transition where it is time to be vigilant and futuristic in long-term strategic planning" (Harris-Olayinka, 2000: 14). Such changes must not shock us to the extent of transforming us into eloquent masters in the art of pessimism, nihilism and surrender.

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